

LESSONS 8: Gideon

JUDGES 6

Because of the amount of detail in this narrative, we will go through it in the following blocks:

Lesson 8:

- Judges 6:1-10 Oppression #4
- Judges 6:11-24 Gideon and the Angel of the LORD
- Judges 6:25-32 Gideon Destroys the Baals in His Father's House

Lesson 9:

- Judges 6:33-7:8 Gideon Prepares for War
- Judges 7:9-25 Gideon Goes to War
- Judges 8:1-17 Gideon Confronts the Men of Israel
- Judges 8:18-35 Gideon's Conclusion

OPPRESSION #4 Read Judges 6:1-10.

What do we know about this oppression?

1. Who are the key players, where do they come from, and what is their history with Israel?

This time there is no defined leader, but an onslaught of invaders. The **Midianites** are the ringleaders of the group, but they bring with them the Amalekites and "people of the East."

According to Genesis 25:1-6, the **Midianites** are descendants of Abraham and Keturah who Abraham sent to "the east," away from Isaac's inheritance. **Amalek** was the grandson of Esau, and his people settled in southern Canaan (Genesis 36:12). So, the "**people of the East**" in this case denote the desert tribes ranging south-southeast of Israel.

The Midianites were the people with whom Moses stayed after he fled Egypt. Moses married Zipporah, a Midianite woman, and even invited her family (the Kenite clan) to come with them to the Land. In contrast to the Kenites, the rest of the Midianites are treacherous in their dealings with Israel. During Israel's wilderness journey, Balak king of Moab told the elders of Midian that Israel was so numerous that they would ". . . *lick up everything around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field . . .*" (Numbers 22:4). Midian conspired with Moab to take Israel captive and exploit them. (Midian now does to Israel as they once falsely accused Israel of doing to them.)

Midian helped Moab lead Israel into idolatry, and ended up in a battle with Phinehas. Phinehas wiped out five princes of Midian who were vassals of King Sihon of the Amorites living in what became the territory of Reuben (Numbers 31, Joshua 13:21).

2. How do they oppress Israel?

The invading hordes come up from the southern deserts and crossed Israel's borders in caravans with the intent of taking Israel's produce and destroying whatever was left. They enter Israel from the east, traveling up along the trade route called the King's Highway which runs from the gulf of Aqaba (Midianite land) through Edom, Moab, and onto the Plains of Moab which is Reuben and Gad's territory. From there they crossed the Jordan into Israel's rich interior. The text says that they fanned out and destroyed the land as far as Gaza in Judah and the Jezreel Valley where Gideon is located.

3. How does Israel cope with the physical oppression?

Israel goes underground. Instead of living in ease, they succumb to hunger and reduced circumstances. Instead of living openly, they withdraw into hiding. In the days of Deborah, village life ceased as the people sought the protection of the cities. Now, not even the cities are safe. The people are being driven into the mountain strongholds.

Dens, caves, and mountain strongholds are all natural fortifications and hiding places, often with underground water sources. But they are also dark and deserted places, dwellings for base creatures, and used as places to bury the dead. For Israel to seek refuge in such places is a reflection of their having returned to a base, wilderness lifestyle.

There are legitimate enemies, physical and spiritual, in this world that can drive God's people underground so that they no longer practice their faith openly.

It is one of the **enemy's tactics** to weaken your resistance by systematically removing vital resources from your life – the right to meet and worship, the right to basic needs such as food, housing, medicine, and employment. Life for believers in these circumstances is oppressive, but remember that God is with you even in your wilderness.

But there is an oppression that a society can inflict on itself, and its roots can trace back over several generations. Remember, Israel has had forty years of rest and another generation has now risen. Over those forty years of ease, God's people became immersed in a godless society that began to erode God's truth, His vision, and His presence in their lives. Over time they came to accept and assimilate worldly beliefs and values, and succumb to the world's oppression. **That is the effect of the Canaanites, not Midianites.**

4. **The pattern: When the people cry out, what is God's response?** The Lord sends a message by a prophet (similar to last time).

5. Compare this prophet with Deborah:

Deborah is identified by name. This prophet is unnamed.

Deborah is a prophetess and a judge. This prophet is only a prophet.

Deborah's message is for Barak specifically. This prophet's message is for all Israel.

Deborah's message spurs the hope of an imminent salvation for Israel. This prophet's message is a rebuke and holds out no hope of deliverance. Don't you remember Egypt? Don't you remember who I am? Don't you remember what I told you? What did you expect when you started down this path?

Notice the Exodus theme. When the people begin to do what is right in their own eyes, they slip back into that wilderness lifestyle. God brings on them the locust plague of Midianites, their enemies from that journey, who now oppress them in this cyclical pattern which robs them of fruitfulness. They may as well be walking in circles in the wilderness. The resounding message is "Don't you remember Egypt?" The Exodus theme will continue through the narrative of Gideon.

THE PICTURE OF THIS OPPRESSION:

Migrant caravans come up from the southern deserts in cyclical waves to enter Israel and rob her of her resources. They are not interested in remaining in the land or even ruling the land. They come only for what they can take from the land, with the goal of destroying the land.

THE PROFILE OF THIS OPPRESSION:

A people invade a land for the purpose of exploiting the benefits meant for its citizens. They have no wish to be citizens or contribute to the welfare of the land. They come to take as much as they can, and when the resources are exhausted, they leave. They devastate entire communities, and the result affects the entire nation.

Question for Reflection: Two examples of Midianites in America

Model #1: Migrant caravans come in waves out of the Mexican desert seeking to cross the American border.

- Are they interested in becoming permanent citizens or contributing to American communities?
- What are they hoping to get from the United States?
- What do you think they would do if the U.S. suddenly had no more resources to offer?
- We live with a wide variety of nationalities who do not embrace our belief in God, our worldview, or even our national identity. Do you think they influence our response when we are faced with migrant caravans amassed on our border demanding entry into our land?
- After years of being constantly raided, why didn't Israel make an effort to secure its borders against the raiders?

Model #2: In 2020, rioters swept through America's communities. They looted and burned community businesses and homes and then left the communities devastated. Small businesses closed permanently. Grocery stores closed. People were left homeless. Police protection and medical services became almost non-existent. The community was left without resources—especially food—protection, shelter, and jobs.

- Why were rioters allowed to sweep through communities with impunity?
- How did rioting become an acceptable act in our society?

GIDEON AND THE ANGEL OF THE LORD Read Judges 6:11-24.**6. Who is Gideon?**

Gideon is the son of Joash the Abiezerite.

The name, **Gideon**, means "hewer" or "one who cuts down or chops off."

Joash means "given by the Lord."

Abiezer means "father of help."

If we put the meanings of the names together, we have "the hewer, given by the Lord, the father of help," whom God uses to cut down an enemy who has been mowing down Israel for years.

7. Where is Gideon from?

Gideon comes from Ophrah in the territory of West Manasseh, somewhere between Shechem and the Jezreel Valley.

The name, Ophrah, comes from the common word opher meaning “young stag” which is only used in the Song of Solomon as a description of the Beloved who pursues the Shulamite girl (a picture of God married to His people).

The name, Manasseh, is also a curious addition to the picture. Joseph gave this name to his son, saying “for God has made me forget all my toil and all my father’s house.” (Genesis 41:51)

Together, a subtle picture is painted in the mixing of these names. One is an echo of Egypt and a man being separated from his toil and his father’s house for the purpose of saving his people. The other is a picture of the ideal relationship between God and His people, depicted in the setting of a lush and fruitful land.

Israel’s relationship to God is anything but ideal, and the land is anything but lush now that the Midianites have eaten every leaf in sight. But that is the picture God wants it to be. Out of this place, God calls Gideon from his toil in the field (threshing grain in a winepress) to be deliverer of his people and return Israel to their relationship with God and the Land to its lush fruitfulness.

8. What time of year is it, and why is that significant?

Gideon is threshing wheat in a winepress. If there is any kind of a wheat harvest happening, that indicates a time of year roughly around May to June. The winepress is not needed until the grape harvest in August-October, so Gideon is harvesting in a place where the enemy wouldn’t suspect.

The wheat harvest officially begins on the Feast of Weeks, aka Pentecost. Interestingly, Pentecost is also the feast that marks the giving of the Holy Spirit to God’s people in New Testament times. We noted in Lesson 2 that the judges were likened to the Holy Spirit in their purpose. Gideon is the second judge upon whom the Holy Spirit comes, given by God, the great Father of Help, and he begins his work in the days of harvest.

Gideon is raised up as both judge and deliverer (*moshia*), so there is in his narrative a picture of Christ as well, as we will see.

9. Who initiates the conversation between Gideon and the Angel of the LORD?

The Angel of the LORD initiates it. God always initiates the relationship and the calling of His people. The main thrust of this conversation is to establish who God is in Gideon’s life.

The Angel opens with “The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor!” This might pass as a common greeting.

10. Based on his response in verse 13, what is Gideon’s relationship with the LORD like?

“O my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?’ But now the LORD has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.” – (v13)

Gideon is a product of his generation. He has heard the stories all his life but has never personally witnessed God’s power in action. He is victimized, cynical, despairing, and removed from a personal relationship with the Lord.

The lack of experiential knowledge of God is one of the consequences of doing what is right in your own eyes. God keeps to the path He has established. When you walk the path with Him, you will see Him in action and see how He works things out. When you leave His path, you lose the experience that comes with walking with the Lord.

11. How has Gideon stumbled in his thinking?

He has failed to grasp God's power and sovereignty, and despairs of God's love. His words are an echo of Isaiah 49:14 *"But Zion said, 'The LORD has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me.'"*

He is suffering from feelings of powerlessness. The Angel of the LORD's words about being a *"mighty man of valor"* must have seemed like a cruel joke, seeing as Gideon was hiding in a winepress just to thresh a pathetically small amount of wheat.

12. Gideon thinks God has abandoned Israel. Where is the LORD really?

Standing right beside him.

13. When does Gideon realize he is speaking to the LORD?

"Then the LORD turned to him . . ." - Judges 6:14a

There is a literal turning point in conversation. The turning implies that maybe the Angel of the LORD hadn't been looking at Gideon directly before, but now He does. The Angel of the LORD brings Himself face-to-face with Gideon and says:

". . . Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites . . ."

The rioters are in the street. The nomad caravans are getting ready to stream across the border. Go, do something about it.

". . . Have I not sent you?"

Who is the "I" to Gideon? Who is the Angel of the Lord identifying himself with? God.

14. What reasons does Gideon give for not doing what the Angel of the LORD is telling him to do?

Gideon says, I am one man. I am weak. My father's clan is the least in the tribe and I have little support, even in my father's house. Such self-deprecating language is common in Middle Eastern conversations, but it is nevertheless a way of saying, as politely as possible, that what is being asked is impossible.

15. How does the Angel of the LORD counter Gideon's objections?

The Angel of the LORD tells Gideon: *"Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one [echad] man."*

We should note the Hebrew word used here for "one" because there are two words in Hebrew that are translated as "one."

Yachid means "one" in the singular sense—one and one alone.

Echad means "one" in the corporate sense—as being one of a group or first, with the understanding that there is a second, third, etc.

- *Echad* is used in Genesis 2:24 where man and wife becoming one flesh. They are two individuals, and yet they are one (*echad*).

- *Echad* also describes the first Day (Genesis 1:5). Day and night combine into one day, and that day is *echad*, the first of a group of days comprised of both a day and night (a week).
- Deuteronomy 6:4 declares that the Lord is *echad*—He is one, and yet He has a corporate oneness in the expression of His being.

The Angel tells Gideon *“I will be with you”* and that Gideon will defeat the Midianites as *“one man.”* Gideon is not as alone as he thinks he is, nor is God asking him to tackle this national problem on his own. Even so, if it was just you and the Angel of the LORD against the locust hordes, would you feel confident of victory? Maybe if you were sure the Angel really was the LORD . . .

16. How does Gideon respond to the Angel’s command to go?

Gideon asks for a sign. He seeks an experiential validation of this growing conviction that maybe he is speaking with the LORD. And the LORD grants Gideon the sign. Gideon brings an offering and the LORD accepts it.

Angels don’t accept worship in this manner. Only the LORD accepts offerings, and then, only when they are made on approved altars and done according to His direction. Gideon offers the broth-soaked bread and meat on the rock as directed, and the Angel of the LORD sets them on fire. When they are consumed, the Angel of the LORD departs.

Gideon’s conviction is confirmed. Verse 22 says that he perceives that he has been talking to the Angel of the LORD, and is horrified. (Note: he treats the Angel of the LORD as if He is on equal standing with God Himself). But God reassures him with the statement, *“Peace be with you; do not fear, you shall not die.”*

17. What does Gideon do when he realizes it really is the LORD?

After nearly having a heart attack, Gideon steps into the relationship with God instead of fleeing from it. He builds an altar which he names *“YHWH Shalom”* or *“God-is-peace.”* Is Gideon’s life overall at peace? Not by a long stretch. But in his spiritual relationship with God, he finds a moment of peace.

Questions for Reflection:

When our lives become embroiled in oppressive circumstances—whether from our own choices in life or another person’s choices that have sucked us into oppression—we can be tempted to ask the questions Gideon asked:

If God is with us, then why is all this happening to us? Where are all His miracles? Why has He not kept His promises?

And we, too, can come to the false conclusion that He has forsaken us. But those are the words of a person who does not see God sitting right next to him/her in the middle of their oppression.

Frustration may come from wrong expectations of God. We may not be seeing the situation from His perspective or what He is trying to accomplish. If you are feeling frustrated with God, consider:

- What is your expectation of life as a child of God?

- When you fall into oppression, what do you expect God to do?
- What does God expect you to do?

The Angel of the LORD's model of Encouragement

Encouragement is a vital first step in helping someone prepare to battle an oppression in their life. The Angel of the LORD makes a series of statements to Gideon that are a good model for us to follow in giving encouragement. Consider the basic psychology behind these statements:

"The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor!" (Judges 6:12)

Reassure your Gideon that God is with them. Reestablish how God sees them. They might respond with cynicism as Gideon did, but then they are seeing themselves from their own eyes and not God's eyes.

"Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?" (Judges 6:14)

Reestablish the commission—God's expectation of them.

"Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man." (Judges 6:16)

Isolation is a stumbling block in dealing with oppression. It can make a person feel powerless, fearful, despairing, and rob them of sound thinking. Address the feelings of isolation. Establish that the enemy can be defeated, and with God's help, they have the strength to overcome the enemy. Offer help.

GIDEON DESTROYS BAAL IN HIS FATHER'S HOUSE **Read Judges 6:25–32.**

God establishes who He is in Gideon's understanding, then commands him to reestablish God in his father's house. God gives Gideon some very strong commands in Judges 6:25-26:

*". . . tear down [**haras**] the altar of Baal that your father has . . ."*

Haras: throw down, tear down a thing or overthrow a people

*". . . and cut down [**karath**] the wooden image that is beside it."*

Karath: to cut down, cut off as a garment; cut covenant with

*"and build an altar to the LORD your God on top of this rock [**ma'oz**] . . ."*

Ma'oz: stronghold, place of strength, place from which you draw strength

Idol worship had established a rock—a stronghold—in Joash's house. God tells Gideon to make a public statement of faith by overthrowing the stronghold, cutting covenant with Baal, and erecting an altar and worship of God in its place. Gideon takes ten men of his own household and does the deed by night because he is afraid having a battle with 1) his father and 2) the men of the city.

18. What is the reaction from the men in the city?

They come out in the morning and find the deed done. An investigation ensues. When they discover that it is Gideon, they demand that Joash had him over to be killed.

19. How did the men of the city come to have any authority over Gideon's father and his house?

They shouldn't have had any authority, and yet they are bold enough to demand that Joash turn over his son to be put to death. Joash must have given them that authority, or at least, he did not challenge them when they assumed the authority.

At the beginning of Judges 6, it says that the children of Israel had gone underground, and yet there are some like Joash still living out in the open. They contend not just with the foreign invaders, but with these Canaanites who demand the right of rulership over them.

Where the battle was at the city gates in Deborah and Barak's day, the battle is now brought to the very door of Israelite homes.

While men like Joash bow to the Canaanite ways, it only takes a flashpoint for peaceful relations to burst into a fiery confrontation. When this happens, Israel ends up fighting a battle in multiple arenas. You can't fight a war abroad and on the home front at the same time. God initiates this confrontation by using Gideon as the flashpoint to settle the battle on the home front before tackling the greater threat.

20. What is Joash's reaction?

Oddly, Joash isn't the first to react. He doesn't seem overly affected by the loss of his household idols, nor does he say anything until the men of the city come for Gideon. He seems more affected by the demand that his son be put to death than the supposed crime against Baal. He does not defend Baal. He actually challenges Baal's godship by demanding he plead for himself. *But never does Joash affirm his loyalty toward God.*

21. Why does Joash give Gideon the name Jerubbaal?

Joash clearly has no intention of handing over his own son to be put to death. So, he defends his son to the men of the city in a way that allows him to sidestep the fight by pushing his son out front. Instead of showing his loyalty to God and making this a fight between God and Baal (or himself and the men of the city), Joash makes it a powerplay between Gideon and Baal. Instead of glorifying God, Joash glorifies his son in the eyes of the Canaanites and gives him a new name—Jerubbaal. **Jerubbaal** means "Let Baal plead."

What Joash has done is to make an idol of his son. He has lifted Gideon up to be a contender on par with the Canaanite gods. Gideon may as well be a Canaanite god in his father's eyes. Joash is idolatrous at heart, and now his loyalties have switched from Baal to his son, but for the wrong reason.

Gideon is the man that God sees face to face. He is the struggling believer, newly reestablished in his faith and uncertain of what he is doing. He is feeling his way through this new mission the Lord has given him and is weak in his own assessment of himself.

Jerubbaal is the idolized hero in people's eyes. Jerubbaal is the man who dared take down Baal, the untouchable, the great man of God who stood up to the Canaanites, and the epic hero who takes on the Midianite oppressor and prevails.

From this point on, the author will use the names interchangeably, but with a purpose. Whenever the focus and glory is on God, he will be called Gideon in the narrative. Whenever Gideon is

exalted as the idolized hero in the eyes of the people, the author will refer to him by the name Jerubbaal.

Questions for Reflection:

In an effort to live at peace with the world around us, we may bow to some of the secular world's demands, but at what point do we as Christians draw the line? When they try to dictate how we live our faith in our own houses or deal with sin in our family? When they demand we sacrifice our children?

- In what ways has the secular world demanded a right to our children?
- What other ways does the secular world seek entry into our homes, and how do we battle it?
- What happens when extended family comes to live in our house with us and brings their Canaanite ways with them? How do we deal with the Canaanite influence within our own homes?
 - What if they are our grown children who are returning?
 - What if they are our elderly parents who need our care?
 - What if they are step-children, or other step-relations?

We as Christians can idolize men and women who God raises up for Himself to contend for the faith, just as Joash did to Gideon. We laud them as the great warriors, but what we end up doing is pushing them out in front of us to fight the fight we should be fighting ourselves. We support them, extol them, rally behind them—but always behind them—and let them contend for God.

- Who do we consider as great contenders for the faith in our generation?
- Have we idolized them to the point that we let them fight while we ourselves remain silent?
- What keeps us from stepping forward the way they stepped forward?

God's three-step model in dealing with Israel's oppression:

Step 1: The person: Bring the individual into right understanding and relationship with God

Step 2: The person's house: Ideally, the individual brings their house into a right understanding/relationship with God. (This is not always possible. Even so, when a person enters battle and is under spiritual attack, his house should be with him so that he isn't fighting a battle on a second front.)

Step 3: The congregation/community/nation: The individual goes out to deal with the issues of the greater body and return it to a right relationship with God

- Why is it necessary to deal with your own sin before you start hacking away the Asherah poles in other people's lives?
- Why is it necessary to deal with sin in your own house before tackling the greater threat?
- What happens when a leader whose own life and family are out of control tries to deal with sin in the greater congregation?
- What happens when you try to end oppression by passing reforms on a national scale without addressing the condition of the man and his house?
- How does this model work out in the church? (Titus 1:5-9)