

Lesson 6

Gideon's Call and Commission

Judges 6

Introduction

The early period of the judges featured unique individuals (an old man, a left-handed man, a Gentile, and a woman) used by God to deliver Israel from its oppression. Now, with Gideon's story, we learn how God can provide using human weakness. *God delights in using the weak things of this world to confound the wise.*¹⁰

The story of Gideon unfolds in Judges 6-8, who lived during a time when the Israelites were dealing with seven years of occupation by the Midianites. Heavily oppressed, the Israelites pray to the Lord for assistance, prompting God to remind them of His past deeds on their behalf, Judges 6.1-10. Gideon's story teaches valuable lessons about obedience to God, even in moments of doubt.

6:1-10 – Midian Oppresses Israel

After 40 years of peace following their liberation from Jabin, the Israelites again disobeyed God. Around 1221 BC, they were subjected to seven years of oppression by the Midianites, descendants of Abraham through his concubine Keturah, making them distant relatives of the Israelites. This connection made their domination especially harsh. Annually, the Midianites and their allies would invade from the desert, crossing the Jordan into the Esdraelon valley—Canaan's fertile region—before moving south along the coastal plain, seizing all the grain they could transport. Accompanied by innumerable camels, their raids resembled a locust swarm, leaving the Israelites and their livestock without food. The Israelites were forced to hide whatever they could in mountain caves and dens to survive.

The Israelites, brought low by yearly raids from the Midianites, sought help from the Lord, who responded not with immediate rescue but with guidance through a prophet (6:6-8a). This approach emphasized the importance of understanding their plight over quick liberation, teaching that comprehension of a problem can be crucial to its resolution. The unnamed prophet delivered God's message, reminding the Israelites of His past acts of kindness, including their liberation from Egyptian slavery and victory over other adversaries on their journey to Canaan. This recounting aimed to remind them of their special covenant with God, highlighting that they were chosen as His people and were bound to Him by a sacred agreement.

The prophet reiterated God's key covenant demand that the Israelites not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land they resided. Despite these reminders, the prophet also conveyed God's rebuke for their disobedience. The overarching message was exposure and correction of the Israelites' failings, demonstrating God's grace in guiding them back to the right path.

While the immediate impact of the prophet's message across the land is not detailed, the purpose was clear: to lead the nation to repentance and prepare them for eventual deliverance from the Midianite

oppression. Following the prophet's mission, the Angel of Yahweh appeared in the land, marking the next phase of Israel's journey toward redemption.

6:11-40 – Gideon's Journey of Faith and Doubt

Gideon's divine calling is the most detailed among the Judges, featuring three distinct forms of divine revelation. Initially, the Lord appeared directly to him. Following this, God communicated with Gideon through spoken words. Lastly, Gideon witnessed supernatural acts performed by God. These revelations served a dual purpose: they prepared Gideon spiritually and psychologically for the significant task he was chosen to undertake.

6:11-24 – God appears to Gideon in Human Form

Gideon's story opens in Judges 6:11. He is threshing wheat inside a winepress to hide it from the Midianites. A winepress is typically used for crushing grapes, not for threshing wheat. Threshing wheat is generally done on an open hilltop, where the wind can separate the chaff from the grain. So, why was Gideon attempting to thresh wheat in a winepress? He wanted to protect his wheat from the constant threat of the Midianites. They were a constant menace, and Gideon was so concerned about their potential raids that he chose to work in a concealed winepress rather than in the open, where he could be easily spotted and his wheat stolen. He fears the looming presence of these enemy raiders who are always on the lookout, ready to seize his wheat and even pose a danger to his life.

Suddenly and without warning, the angel of the Lord appears with him inside the winepress. *The Lord is with you, valiant warrior*, 6:12. Gideon probably wasn't feeling much like a warrior. In your mind, you can see him looking around and saying, "Who, me?" In the next verse, he gathers the courage to ask why God allowed the Midianites to overtake Israel. To this, the angel of the Lord replied:

"Go in the strength you have and deliver Israel from the grasp of Midian. I am sending you!"

Then Gideon says,

"Please, Lord, how can I deliver Israel? Look, my family is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's family," Judges 6:15.

At this point in his life, Gideon has no great faith, noble warrior spirit, or valiant courage. His is a natural human response. He was not part of an influential family. He was the youngest in the family. Indeed, there were many others with far superior qualifications. What could he possibly do against the powerful Midianite army? His response is much like Moses' in Exodus 3:11. He was a weak man, but the angel called him a man of courage, not for what he was, but for what he would become. God saw his potential. He looks beyond our sins and weaknesses and sees what He will do with our lives if we yield it entirely to Him. See how God graciously reassures Gideon:

"But I will be with you," the Lord said to him. "You will strike Midian down as if it were one man," Judges 6:16.

He would overcome them all together as one.

6:17-24 – Gideon Wants Proof

Gideon still needs to be convinced. He asks for a sign, 6:17. Gideon offers meat and bread to the angel of the Lord, consumed with fire. Then the angel vanished, 6:19-21. This was the sign that Gideon needed, and he finally *got it*. In 6:22 He says:

“Oh no, Lord God! I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face!”

The Lord assures him he will not die. Gideon built an altar and named it Yahweh-Shalom, signifying "The Lord is peace," 6:23-24.

Over the following few verses, we learn how God prepared Gideon to be a leader through a series of tests.

6:25-32 - Tearing down the altar of Baal

That night, through a verbal revelation, God tasked Gideon with proving his dedication by commanding him to dismantle his father's altar to Baal and the adjacent Asherah pole. This act demonstrates a vital principle: leaders of God's people must first bring their familial and personal spiritual commitments into order. Gideon was instructed to replace the pagan altar with one dedicated to God, symbolizing the exclusivity of worship He demands; worship of God and Baal could not coexist. The Asherah pole's wood was to be used for kindling, and Gideon sacrificed a seven-year-old bull on the new altar, possibly reflecting the seven years of Midianite oppression, signifying a national rededication.

Gideon, anticipating opposition from his family and the townspeople, completed this task under the cover of night with the help of ten servants. The following day, the community was in uproar upon discovering the destruction of the Baal altar and the construction of a new altar for Yahweh worship. Their investigation pointed to Gideon, leading to demands for his execution for desecrating the Baal worship site.

However, Gideon's father, Joash, defended him by challenging Baal's power and authority—if Baal were an actual deity, he could protect himself. This defense marked a decisive stance against Baal worship, earning Gideon the nickname Jerubbaal, meaning “Let Baal Contend Against Him.” Here, we see what Gideon was up against: a dual battle against foreign oppression and idolatry, demonstrating the massive shift necessary for genuine dedication to God.

6:33-40 - The Wool Fleece Sign

Soon afterward, the Midianites, Amalekites, and other eastern warriors gathered against Israel. Gideon summoned the men of Israel to fight. Thirty-two thousand men responded. Gideon is still afraid. He placed a wool fleece on the threshing floor and said if the dew was on the fleece only and the floor was dry, he would know the Lord was with him, 6:37. God answers his request. *When he got up early in the morning, he squeezed the fleece and wrung dew out of it, filling a bowl with water*, 6:38. This still wasn't good enough for Gideon. He requested that God do the opposite the next night by allowing the dew all over the ground but leaving the fleece dry, 6:39. God did as Gideon requested that night: *only the fleece was dry, and dew was all over the ground*, 6:40. God's patience is a fantastic thing.

This is not noble; this is doubt. Gideon's action is not what believers should do. We don't put the Lord to the test. We don't ask Him for miraculous signs to prove His Word. We trust His Word. We live by faith and obedience to His Word.

But it also must be said that Gideon sought these signs as reassurance, not from a place of arrogance, but because he was facing a significant test of his faith that would come in two parts. God appreciates the opportunity to bolster a tentative faith; acknowledging our uncertainties and seeking strength is far preferable to entering challenges with misplaced confidence.

What's In This for Us?

God Uses the Unlikely: Gideon's story is a prime example of how God often chooses those least expected to accomplish His purposes. This teaches us that no matter how inadequate we feel, God can use our weaknesses to demonstrate His strength and achieve great things. It calls us to trust God's choice and timing, even when we doubt our capabilities.

The Importance of Obedience: Despite his initial doubts and fears, Gideon obeyed God's commands. This obedience led to Israel's deliverance from the Midianites. It reminds us that faith in action, through obedience, is powerful and can lead to significant changes in our lives and those around us.

Seeking Confirmation from God: While we should never test God, Gideon's request for signs came from wanting assurance for the task ahead. This means seeking God's guidance and confirmation through prayer, scripture, and wise counsel when facing essential decisions or challenges.

God's Patience with Our Growth: Gideon's progression from doubt to faith highlights God's patience and understanding of our spiritual growth. God meets us where we are, ready to strengthen and reassure us as we grow in faith. This encourages us to be honest with God about our doubts and fears, knowing He is patient and willing to guide us to more assertive faith.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Gideon's call and commission is a rich source of spiritual lessons that resonate with our modern experiences. His journey from a doubtful, reluctant leader to a victorious deliverer underlines the power of faith, obedience, and God's guidance. It teaches us that God's criteria for choosing His instruments often defy our expectations, demonstrating His ability to use our perceived weaknesses for His glory.

Gideon's story encourages us to seek God's will in our lives, reminding us of His patience and readiness to assure while we grow in Him. We need to embrace our vulnerabilities, knowing that in them, God's strength is made perfect. Through obedience, earnest seeking, and trusting in God's patience, we, too, can navigate our challenges with confidence, contributing to God's purposes in our world today.

For Reflection

1. How does Gideon's initial hesitation in accepting God's call reflect our common challenges in trusting God's plan for our lives?
2. In what ways does Gideon's story demonstrate the importance of obedience to God, even when His commands seem challenging or illogical?
3. How does the concept of God using "the weak things of the world to confound the wise" (1 Corinthians 1:27) manifest in the story of Gideon?
4. What can we learn from God's provision of signs to Gideon? How does this inform our understanding of seeking confirmation from God in our decisions?
5. Gideon's actions required significant courage. Discuss how Christians today can find the courage to stand against societal pressures and idolatry, drawing parallels with Gideon's destruction of his father's altar to Baal.
6. The story of Gideon is a journey from fear to faith. How does this mirror our spiritual progress, and what steps can we take to strengthen our faith?
7. Gideon's army was reduced from 32,000 to 300 men. What does this drastic reduction teach us about God's perspective on strength and victory?
8. Gideon asked for signs from God before taking action. How does this contrast with the concept of "living by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7), and where do we draw the line between seeking confirmation and demonstrating faith?
9. With Gideon, we see his identity change from that of a fearful individual to that of a leader called a "mighty warrior" by God. How does this transformation speak to the identity changes you have experienced in Christ?

10. Gideon's story ends with Israel being delivered from the Midianites. How does this victory highlight the theme of redemption, and in what ways does it point to the ultimate redemption found in Jesus Christ?

¹⁰ Smith, p. 149.