

Lesson 71

God Uses Gideon

God used Gideon to defeat the Midianites and deliver the Israelites.

Overview

Lesson Focus

The Israelites sinned and worshipped false gods, but they cried to God to deliver them from the oppression of the Midianites. God chose Gideon as the judge who would lead the Israelites in battle. God was patient with Gideon's fears and doubts and gave him and his 300 men the victory over the vast Midianite army.

Key Passages

Judges 6:1–2, 6:11–16, 7:2–7, 7:16–22; 1 Corinthians 15:9–10

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe God's encouragement to Gideon as a leader.
- Recognize God's role in defeating the Midianites.

Memory Verse

Psalm 34:17–18 When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

Prepare to Share

Scriptural Background

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

The recurring cycle of Israel's history during the time of the judges continued for about 300 years. This cycle included the Israelites' disobedience and idolatry, God's judgment on them through neighboring nations, their cry to God for deliverance, God's mercy and compassion in raising up judges to deliver them, and their peace until they again fell back into idolatry. In Judges 6 we find that because the Israelites were once again doing evil in the sight of the Lord, God allowed them to be oppressed by the Midianites. They finally cried out to him for help, and God sent a prophet to tell them why they were being oppressed (Judges 6:6–10). The Lord was about to provide an unlikely hero for them through Gideon.

The angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, who was threshing wheat in secret so that the raiding Midianites would not take it (not a very valiant act). Surprisingly, the angel of the Lord called Gideon a "mighty man of valor." He told Gideon that he would lead Israel to defeat its current oppressors, the

Midianites. Gideon revealed his fear and lack of trust in the Lord as he responded that he was from the weakest clan of Israel and the least in his family (Judges 6:15). But the Lord responded with confidence, explaining that he would be with him. In Judges 6:14, the Lord had told Gideon to “Go in this might of yours,” but God also clearly told him the source of that might—himself. And in verse 34, as Gideon gathered men for battle, it was because the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon. Scripture is clear that it was the Lord moving in these events, using Gideon; it was not Gideon’s own strength or ability that won the victory. We see, as the account unfolds, that God wanted his power alone to be demonstrated.

In Judges 7, a substantial number of men had rallied to Gideon (though they would still have been outnumbered by the Midianites). God gave Gideon orders to reduce the number of men who would participate in the battle. First, any who were fearful were commanded to leave. Next, God directed Gideon to accept only those who drank by lapping the water from their hands. Thus, the fighting force was reduced to a mere 300 to face the Midianite army of 135,000. God wanted the victory of this battle to point to him alone as deliverer. He did not want the Israelites to think that this victory was theirs. God knew the Israelites would be tempted to think that they had saved themselves (Judges 7:2).

The account of the battle is dramatic. Gideon’s 300 men stealthily approached the Midianites with covered torches. Suddenly, at Gideon’s signal, they blew their trumpets, broke the jars that covered their torches and shouted, “A sword for the Lord and for Gideon,” inciting panic among the Midianites (Judges 7:20–21). In the midst of this panic, God ordained that the Midianites would turn their swords on each other—this was God’s battle, and the victory was accomplished by his power, working through Gideon’s obedience (Judges 7:22).

God used Gideon, a simple man, to accomplish a great victory against a fearful opponent. Gideon was obedient and proved to be strong, due to the Lord’s strength in him. Gideon was the fifth and one of the greatest judges of Israel. Because of his faith in the Lord, he is mentioned with the great and faithful saints in Hebrews 11.

It could only have been the Lord who would allow 300 men to defeat the vast Midianite army. Gideon realized this. The people, however, were quick to forget, as evidenced when they requested that Gideon rule over them (Judges 8:22). Gideon’s loyalty to God shone bright as he turned down this honor and reminded the people of God’s sovereignty in his rule over them (Judges 8:23).

Sadly, Gideon compromised his faith by requesting and accepting offerings of gold, plundered by Israel from their enemies, and he used the gold to make an ephod (a kind of ceremonial breastplate). This ephod, set up in Gideon’s city of Ophrah, became a snare to Gideon and his family (Judges 8:27).

Historical/Apologetics Background

Gideon acted faithfully and courageously in battle, but God desires to be the object of his people’s worship and gratitude, and he will not share that worship: “I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to

carved idols” (Isaiah 42:8). God used people all through history and continues to use people today to accomplish his will. But he makes it clear that even when he does so, it is he who ultimately deserves the credit: “For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). Both the desire and the ability to obey God are the results of God working in us.

In Judges 8, we find that the men of Ephraim wanted to share the credit that belonged to God for the battle won. We then find that the men of Succoth and Peniel would not credit God (or anyone) without proof of a certain outcome. And finally, we see that Israel, rather than giving credit to God for using Gideon, gave Gideon credit instead of God. This inclination to overlook and disbelieve that it was God who orchestrated the victory was at the root of Israel’s tendency to fall back into sin, even after a deliverance such as this. God uses his people to accomplish his perfect plans. But when the plans are accomplished, we must not forget that we are his workmanship created to do the good works he has prepared for us to do (Ephesians 2:10).

Gideon judged Israel for 40 years, and the land had peace from the Midianites (Judges 8:28). Unfortunately, Gideon fell into polygamy, which was never God’s plan for marriage (Genesis 2:24). Gideon’s many wives bore him 70 sons, and a concubine in Shechem bore him a son named Abimelech (Judges 8:30–31). Abimelech became king of Shechem after murdering his 69 brothers (Judges 9:5–6). He judged Israel for three years before God punished him for his sins (Judges 9:22, 9:56). Gideon’s family suffered and was nearly destroyed because of Gideon’s failure to follow God’s plan for marriage. We see a similar pattern of jealousy and murder as a result of polygamy in the families of Jacob and King David. May God guard us from seeking to rob him of glory or walking in willful disobedience to him.

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