

Lesson 8:

The Purpose of Judges / Gideon

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE:

Judges 6-8:35

MEMORY WORK:

Joshua 1:9

PERSONAL APPLICATION:

If I believe that God is with me and will help me, I can deal with my problems and not be afraid.

LESSON STARTS HERE

INTRODUCTION:

Talk about how, if we love Jesus, we will want to obey (John 14:15): If Daddy or Mommy tells you not to do something, do you get mad and act ugly? No, because God tells us in His Word to obey our parents. Should you hit your brother or sister? No, because the Bible says to be kind to each other, etc.

Last week, we studied about Moses and Joshua. Joshua was a good leader and he wanted the Israelites to never forget all the great things God had done for them. Joshua wanted them to always obey God. But the Israelites forgot what God had done for them. They chose not to obey God, and many bad things happened. Because of His great love for the Israelites, God chose “judges” to help the people obey Him again. Listen carefully to what happened and then we are going to learn a fun song with all the names of the judges in it.

POINTS TO EMPHASIZE:

Note: This lesson is lengthy, but the first section should not take long to teach. Study the main points and share with the students what you think is appropriate for them to understand the basic concept and transition to the judges. 4-5 year olds should not be expected to memorize all judges especially when they will only be studying a few in detail.

1. In last week’s lesson, we talked about Joshua reminding the Israelites how God had kept His promises to them for hundreds of years. Before he died, Joshua called all the leaders of the twelve tribes together and reminded them that “the Lord your God is He who has been fighting for you” (Joshua 23:3). Joshua was afraid that the Israelites would forget about their promises to worship God, and only God, as they became more and more comfortable in Canaan. The people of Canaan worshipped many idols and many different things in nature.
2. At this point in their history, the Israelites had not destroyed all of these wicked people, as God had told them to. There was a very real danger that the Israelites would start to think that the

idol-worshipping people weren't so bad and that their religions weren't so bad either. If that happened, Joshua knew they would be more and more likely to marry idol-worshippers. And eventually they would completely lose their identity as God's chosen people.

3. After Joshua died, his fears became reality, since "another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord, nor the work which He had done for Israel" (Judges 2:10). The Israelites who followed Joshua throughout the conquest of Canaan had not taught their children and grandchildren about God's promises and the importance of obeying Him, even though Moses had warned them to teach God's Word diligently to them (Deuteronomy 11:18-20). So after just one generation, the Israelites stopped fighting the idol-worshippers and became more and more friendly with them. They "did evil in the sight of the Lord" (Judges 2:11) and "forsook the Lord God of their fathers" (Judges 2:12).
4. Because of their disobedience, God punished the Israelites. He allowed idol-worshipping people to attack them and take away their crops and belongings. After some time, the Israelites "cried out" (prayed) to God for help and promised to obey Him. So God sent a judge to help them defeat their enemies. This same cycle (disobedience, punishment, repentance, and deliverance) happened over and over again.
5. These judges were not like judges in a courtroom today. They were sent by God to deliver the Israelites from dangerous enemies and to bring the Israelites back to God.

Note: The judges were "raised up by God to defeat a particular enemy in a particular territory and give the people rest. These judges were not national leaders; rather, they were local leaders who delivered the people from various oppressors. It is possible that some of the periods of oppression and rest overlap. Not all of the tribes participated in each battle..." (*Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament*, p. 231. ISBN: 0-89693-847-6).

Also keep in mind that each of the judges were not necessarily righteous people. Just because the Bible tells what a certain judge did without comment, it does not mean that God always endorsed his behavior (e.g., Samson). God used the judges to fulfill His ultimate purpose of providing deliverance for His people.

6. The people would obey for a time, while the judge was with them. But when the judge died, the people quickly became disobedient again, choosing to turn away "quickly from the way in which their fathers walked, in obeying the commandments of the Lord" (Judges 2:17b).
7. The book of Judges is a record of a very sad cycle of the Israelites' choices not to follow God's commands:
 - Disobedience: idol worship (often mixed into the worship of God)
 - Punishment: Israelites attacked by their enemies (usually Philistines or Midianites)
 - Repentance: Israelites cried to God for help
 - Deliverance: a judge sent by God; brought time of peace and obedience

8. There were 14-15 judges. The book of Judges tells us very little about most of these people who were chosen by God to deliver the Israelites.

- **Othniel**—Caleb’s son-in-law; brought peace for 40 years
- **Ehud**—left-handed; killed the King of Moab
- **Shamgar**—killed 600 Philistines with an ox goad; died in the first year of his service
- **Deborah**—the only woman judge
- **Gideon**—defeated a huge Midianite army with only 300 men
- **Abimelech**—son of Gideon who ruled three years; very wicked; killed 70 brothers [Not always considered a judge, because he was not appointed by God; he took control himself.]
- **Tola**—judged 23 years
- **Jair**—had 30 sons who rode on 30 donkeys; helped maintain peace for 22 years
- **Jephthah**—judged for six years; made a foolish promise
- **Ibzan**—judged seven years
- **Elon**—judged 10 years
- **Abdon**—had 40 sons and 30 grandsons who rode on 70 donkeys; judged eight years
- **Samson**—strong man with weak character; long hair; served as judge for about 20 years; killed more Philistines on his last day than he had killed before
- **Eli**—served 40 years; had two very evil sons
- **Samuel**—served for 12 years; bridged the gap between the judges and Israel’s first king (Saul). [Some scholars do not consider Samuel as one of the judges, but instead, as a priest and prophet only: a transitional figure between the judges and Israel’s monarchy.]

RECoMMEnDED READInG FoR TEACHERS: See the article “[Jephthah’s Daughter](#)” by Dave Miller on the Apologetics Press Web site for further study on the difficult passage in Judges 11.

9. The Israelites refused to obey God, choosing instead to become like everyone else around them, worshiping idols. The judges were supposed to be leaders and teachers who would help the Israelites, but the Israelites did not always listen. Today, Christians are God’s chosen people; He also expects us to listen to His Word and obey **only** Him, just as He expected the Israelites to do. If we don’t obey Him, we will become unhappy and have problems we would not otherwise have, just like the Israelites did.

Part 2 of Lesson - Gideon

1. The **Midianites** came against Israel during harvest times and destroyed homes, crops, and livestock, over and over. They were “as numerous as locusts; both they and their camels were without number” (Judges 6:5). Many Israelites hid in caves and in the mountains to escape these attacks. After seven years of very hard times, the Israelites finally cried out to the Lord (prayed) for help. (Remind the children of the cycle of disobedience throughout the time of the judges.)

NOTE: The Midianites were also descendants of Abraham, through his second wife, Keturah (Genesis 25:1-2). They were warlike nomads who knew how to use camels in warfare very well. But they were also skilled merchants. Midianite traders (apparently traveling with Ishmaelites, also descendants of Abraham, through Sarah’s Egyptian maidservant, Hagar) bought Joseph (Genesis 37:25,28). Moses’ father-in-law and wife were Midianites (Exodus 3:1). When the Israelites were getting ready to take over Canaan (the Promised Land), the Midianites joined the Moabites to fight against them (Numbers 22; 24; 25).

2. God sent a prophet, whose name we do not know (Judges 6:7-10), to remind the people that it was He—YAHWEH, the “Great I AM”—who brought their ancestors out of slavery in Egypt and gave them the land in which they dwelled. But instead of being gratefully obedient, the Israelites turned to idols over and over again, worshiping man-made things they could see instead of the all-powerful (omnipotent), One True God.
3. After that, an angel of the Lord sat down under an oak tree near where Gideon, of the tribe of Manasseh, was secretly threshing grain to hide it from the Midianites.

HISTORICAL NOTE: While in control, the Midianites would not allow the Israelites to harvest their grain, so Gideon was hiding his work in a winepress. A winepress was usually made of two troughs, cut out of rock, with a channel connecting them. The grapes were brought in baskets from the vineyard and put in the winepress (in the upper trough); there the grapes were smashed with bare feet, and the juice drained off into the lower reservoir. The upper trough could be eight or ten feet square and 12 to 18 inches deep, while the lower one was three or four feet deep and about four feet square.

4. The angel called Gideon “a valiant (brave) warrior,” which was ironic for two reasons: he was working in secret because he was afraid; and he was a farmer, not a warrior (trained soldier). God can see what we are capable of, even before we know it!
5. Even though Gideon surely knew that the prophet was telling the truth about the reasons for their hardships (Judges 6:10), Gideon showed his lack of faith with questions: “If...Why...Where...How....” Verse 14 says “the Lord turned to” Gideon to look at him, saying, “Have I not sent you?” “Surely I will be with you.”

RECOMMENDED READING FOR TEACHERS: See the article “[Seeing God Face to Face](#)” by Eric Lyons on the Apologetics Press Web site for a discussion about an alleged Bible discrepancy regarding humans seeing God.

NOTE: In Judges 6:14, the speaker changes from being the Angel of the Lord to being the Lord, Himself. Barnes explains: “When messages are delivered by the Angel of the Lord, the form of the message is as if God Himself were speaking” (*Barnes’ Notes on the Old Testament*, 2010, electronic database). “Angel of the Lord” and “Lord” are used interchangeably elsewhere in Scripture as well (e.g., Judges 2:1; Exodus 3).

6. God allowed Gideon to ask questions, to express his fear, and to ask for signs (proof) that this angel was really speaking for God. Gideon prepared unleavened bread and a lamb and brought them to the angel. The angel told him to put the meat and bread on a nearby rock and pour broth over everything. After Gideon followed his instructions, the angel held out his staff, and fire came from the middle of the rock, burning up everything.
7. The angel told Gideon to tear down his father’s altar to Baal and the **Asherah** beside it using a young bull. Gideon was afraid to do so during the day, because of the wrath of his family and the men of the city, so he went at night time. Then Gideon offered the bull as a sacrifice to God on the wood left from the Asherah.

Asherah: a wooden pole worshipped as an idol representing the Canaanite goddess Asherah

8. The next morning, the men of the city were very upset. After an investigation, they found out that Gideon had torn down the idol and burned the Asherah. They wanted to kill Gideon, but his father Joash said if Baal were really a god, he could defend himself.

NOTE: It is interesting to note that Gideon’s father stood up for him when the men of the city came to kill Gideon. Judges 6:25 indicates that the altar was Gideon’s father’s, and verse 27 indicates that Gideon had reason to fear “his father’s household” or “family” by destroying the idols. Either his father was still loyal to Baal, but stood up for his son so he would not be killed, or he had a change of heart concerning his allegiance to Baal. Given his zealous statement in verse 31, the later seems more likely.

RECOMMENDED READING FOR TEACHERS: See the article “[Different Names, Same Person](#)” by Eric Lyons on the Apologetics Press Web site for a discussion about an alleged Bible discrepancy regarding Gideon’s name.

9. Then the Midianites, Amalekites, and others from the East, gathered together in the Valley of Jezreel. So Gideon gathered Israelites, including the Abiezrites (i.e., descendants of Abiezer, the son of Manasseh) and others of Manasseh, soldiers from Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali. Many soldiers came.

NOTE: It is interesting to note that men from the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali were a significant part of Gideon’s army, as they were in Barak’s army (Judges 4:6,10; 5:18).

10. Then Gideon asked for a second sign to determine whether God would give Israel victory through Gideon. He asked God to make a piece of wool (fleece) wet and the ground around it

dry. The next morning, that is exactly what he found. Gideon asked for a third sign: make the fleece dry and the ground around it wet. The next morning, it was exactly as Gideon had asked.

11. At least 32,000 Israelite men came to Mount Gilead, near the Midianite camp. After all the signs God had given Gideon, He expected Gideon to trust Him even more—to defeat the Midianites with only a “skeleton crew,” an “army” of only 300 men. (read Judges 7:1-8 to find out why thousands of men were sent home.) Gideon had to trust God to go into battle with only 300 men and not be afraid.
12. God told Gideon to sneak into the Midianite camp that night with his servant Purah to listen to what the enemy soldiers were saying. The Midianites and their allies, the Amalekites, were camped in a huge valley; there were so many that they looked like locusts covering the ground. Gideon and Purah were able to get close enough to some of the soldiers and overhear them talking about a dream. The Midianite soldier who had the dream described it. His companion then said, “This is nothing else but the sword of Gideon...for into his hand God has delivered Midian and the whole camp” (Judges 7:14). Hearing this, Gideon and Purah went back to their own camp, excited and confident that God would help them defeat this vast army. Gideon responded by bowing down and worshiping God.

HISTORICAL NOTE: The Israelites divided the night, starting at 6:00 PM, into three, four hour “watches.” The **middle watch** was from 10:00 PM-2:00 AM, when we are in our deepest sleep. [See *The Pulpit Commentary*, Volume 3, 2007, electronic database]

13. As God directed him, Gideon divided the 300 men into three companies and spread them out around the valley. They each had a trumpet in their right hands and empty pitchers and torches in their left hands. “At the beginning of the middle watch” (i.e., just after 10:00 PM), Gideon gave the signal, and all 300 men blew their trumpets at the same time, jolting the enemy soldiers from their sleep! Then Gideon and his men broke all their pitchers. The loud noises and the torches all around them made the Midianites think a much larger army was ambushing them. In the darkness, the Midianites were confused and frightened. They were so frightened that they started killing each other! Over 120,000 enemy soldiers died that night (Judges 8:10).
14. Throughout the Bible, signs and miracles have been given to prove that the message spoken was, without any doubt, from God, Himself (Mark 16:20). Although the signs that God gave Gideon proved God’s will for Gideon, Gideon was still afraid at times to obey God, just as we will be afraid to obey God at times too, even though we know God is there and with us. God knew that Gideon could do the job, but he had to overcome his fear and obey.
15. Even when I am afraid, I must remember that God is with me, just like He was with Gideon. If I believe that God is with me, I have to be willing to do whatever He asks me to do—faith plus action!

RECOMMENDED ADDITIONAL VISUALS (note disclaimers):

- Betty Lukens' felt pieces
- ABeka Flash-a-Card Series (DISCLAIMER: use the cards, not the lesson book;)
- Free Bible Images – Saved on flash drive. Can be presented on classroom tv. Script included in lesson file. This lesson has two files: 08A (Gideon's signs from God) and 08B (Gideon's Army)
- Props for telling or acting out story – Blocks to build idol, fabric for fleece, Jar (brown paper lunch bags are a lightweight thing that can be placed over the torches), trumpet, torch (battery operated candles would be neat)

SONGS AND FINGERPLAYS:

“The Judges” (Click to Hear)

Author: Unknown*

(Tune: “One Little, Two Little, Three Little Indians”)

God set jud-ges over Is-rael,
One brave wo-man, 14 men.

They helped Is-rael fight their bat-tles,
Led them back to God from sin.

Oth-niel, E-hud, Sham-gar, Debo-rah,
Gid-eon, A-bim-e-lech, To-la, Jair,
Jeph-thah, Ib-zan, E-lon, Ab-don,
Sam-son, E-li, Sam-u-el “

SUNDAY

LEARNING CENTERS AND ACTIVITIES:

- Help the children roll up laminated sheets of construction paper to form “trumpets.” Provide paper coffee cups with handles for their “pitchers”/“empty jars. Many other similar ideas are on the internet for making various ram’s horns and pitchers.
- Let the children act out the story,
 - Tear down an altar – This could be as simple as a figure made out of mega blocks
 - Check the fleece (Faux fur is available at hobby lobby)
 - Drink water from the river. Show the two different ways people were drinking: (1) Cup their hands and bring water to mouth, or (2) get on their knees
 - Take trumpet and empty “pitchers”. Gideon blows trumpet, then class yells “The sword of the Lord and of Gideon.” Then break pitchers

WEDNESDAY NIGHT

INTRODUCTION:

POINTS TO EMPHASIZE:

1. Review Sunday’s lesson. briefly ([See Review Questions](#) for example questions.)

LEARNING CENTERS AND ACTIVITIES:

- Review Game - Ask the children to stand against one wall, and tell them they are in Gideon’s army, moving toward the Midianites. Ask a simple question from the story and when someone answers, they can all take a step closer to the other side of the room. Ask questions until they have advanced to the other side of the room (the Midianite camp).

Review Questions

1. How many generations did it take for the Israelites to forget God?
 - a. One
2. Did God punish the Israelites for their disobedience?
 - a. Yes
3. How did God punish the Israelites?
 - a. He allowed idol-worshiping people to attack them and take away their crops and belongings.
4. Did the Israelites pray and ask for forgiveness?
 - a. Yes
5. How did God deliver the Israelites from their enemies?
 - a. By individuals known as judges
6. How many judges were there?
 - a. 15: one woman and 14 men
7. Name the Judges. (Sing Song)
 - a. Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah, Gideon, Abimelech, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, Samsom, Eli, and Samuel
8. After 40 years of peace
 - a. under the judgment of Deborah), the Israelites forgot God, and God sent what nation to punish them? Midianites
9. Name the judge that God used to deliver the Israelites from the Midianites?
 - a. Gideon
10. The Angel of God described Gideon as what type of warrior?
 - a. Valiant or brave
11. What did Gideon do for a living?
 - a. Farmer
12. What was the first sign that God showed Gideon?
 - a. Gideon placed unleavened bread and a lamb on a rock and poured broth over everything. The angel held out his staff and fire came from the middle of the rock, burning up everything.
13. What was the second sign that God showed Gideon?
 - a. God made a piece of wool or fleece wet and the ground dry.

14. What was the third sign that God showed Gideon?
- God made the fleece dry and the ground wet.
15. How many men did God choose to fight the Midianites?
- 300 men
16. How did God defeat the Midianites with Gideon and the 300 men?
- By blowing trumpets and breaking pitchers. The Midianites thought that a large army was attacking them, and they started to kill each other in panic.

