

October 16, 2022

"The Call of Gideon"
Lesson 3 of Unit

Judges 6:1-2, 7-16

Intro

There are a lot of "big" stories in the Bible. We might think that God works only or primarily through dramatic events from reading these stories. But God has, throughout Scripture, worked through "small" stories of people's generosity and faith.

One such action comes from Gideon, the person central to today's passage. He was the fifth "judge" given to Israel. The pattern in the book of Judges is like this: Israel sins, God punishes with foreign oppression, the people repent, God sends a deliverer (judge), and peace follows. The oppressors Gideon will confront are the Midianites, who came from northern Saudi Arabia or southern Jordan. They had a sophisticated culture based on trade across the Arabian Peninsula. They also share a history of conflict with Israel.

Read Judges 6:1-2

1. vs. 1: Here begins the pattern mentioned in the introduction
 - "The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord"
 - The evil isn't specified here
 - In Judges 2, 3, and 10, the evil is idol worship
 - The people are oppressed by the Midianites lasts for 7 years
 - That may seem long, but there are longer periods in Judges 8, 18 (twice), 20, and even 40 years!
2. vs. 2: The people seek places to hide while the Midianites oppress them
 - Mountain caves, clefts, and strongholds
 - Some of these were natural; some were man-made
 - A stronghold is usually a man-made fortress with difficult access

Read Judges 6:7-16

3. vs. 7: The Israelites meet the next phase of the Judges pattern
 - They cry out to the Lord
 - This usually means they do two different things
 - They complain to the Lord about their mistreatment
 - They ask God to help them, to deliver them
4. vs. 8: This verse begins a 3-verse passage that has God explaining His relationship to Israel
 - This passage is spoken by a prophet, someone whom God sent to speak in His name
 - The sending of a prophet happened many times in the Old Testament
 - This prophet's message begins with the core story of Israel:

The exodus out of Egypt, frequently called “the land of slavery”
By the time of Gideon, the exodus was about 250 years in the past
Israel still knows what it’s like to be oppressed, as they were in Egypt
The prophet reminds them it was God who delivered them out of slavery in Egypt

5. vs. 9: God again reminds them that He was the deliverer

The deliverance had two aspects

First the exodus—“from the hand of the Egyptians”

Israel leaves that land

Second, the settlement in the land of promise

“I drove them out before you and gave you their land”

But the people joined in the false idol worship that the former residents practiced

6. vs. 10: God reminds the people of who He is and what He asks

“I am the Lord your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live”

He has delivered them from Egypt, and from previous oppressors

He gave them a land to live in by removing the nations who worship false gods

Given these facts, why would they worship false gods instead of the Lord God?

It was unusual to worship only one god, no matter where a person lived, in those days

The goal was not to anger any god by forgetting to offer worship to him/her

For God, worshipping other gods is an act of disloyalty

Worshipping false gods is abandoning the God who delivered them from slavery

It’s going away from what Moses taught them over 200 years earlier

7. vs. 11: This verse begins the second half of the story

A different messenger, “the angel of the Lord” enters

He sits under an oak tree (the only one?—the text says “the oak...”)

Under the shade of a tree is/was a good place to sit and talk

This tree is on the property of “Joash, the Abiezrite”

The Abiezrites are part of the tribe of Manasseh (see Joshua 17:2)

Gideon, who will be the central figure today, is the son of Joash

He is threshing wheat in a winepress (which sounds odd!)

Threshing happens after the harvest, which is in May-June in this region

The winepress won’t be needed until later, when the grapes ripen

He is doing this to keep the grain from the Midianites

This comment shows how Midian is making life hard for the Israelites

8. vs. 12: The angel says two interesting things to Gideon

First, he says “The Lord is with you”

The only other use of this phrase from an angel is to Mary in Luke 1:28

This phrase has no conditions to it—it is a statement of God’s presence

A longer phrase with conditions occurs in 2 Chronicles 15:2:

“The Lord is with you when you are with Him. If you seek Him,
he will be found by you, but if you forsake Him, he will forsake you.”

Second, the angel calls Gideon “mighty warrior”

This seems to be a foreshadowing of what is coming

There is no mention of Gideon’s history as a warrior

Also, God usually uses someone unlikely to accomplish His plans

9. vs. 13: Gideon’s response to the angel in vs. 13 could seem to be from doubt or lack of faith

His words are similar to the ideas expressed in Lamentations 5

The people see that they are oppressed

God delivered His people in the past—why is He not doing that now?

Gideon’s words are trying to make sense of a difficult situation

As Moses instructed, the story of the exodus has been told over the years

The people know that God delivered Israel from Egypt

Why is what happened then so different from what is happening now?

10. vs. 14: Gideon’s questions get an unexpected answer from the angel

“Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand.”

Gideon, who knows well the exodus story, is being called to play the role of Moses here

He is to be God’s instrument in saving the people from an oppressor

God verifies this by His rhetorical question: “Am I not sending you?”

11. vs. 15: Gideon definitely sounds like Moses in his response here in vs. 15

“How can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest...I am the least”

Part of what Gideon is saying is based on what qualified someone to be a leader then

They were usually the leader of the family, the oldest or strongest

They usually had connections and alliances with other families

Gideon notes his family is insignificant, “the weakest in Manasseh”

He’s not putting on false modesty; he knows political leaders need a power base

12. vs. 16: God’s response is short and powerful

“I will be with you.”

Gideon is not being asked to move in his own strength and abilities

God has promised His own presence to help Gideon accomplish this task

Application: This first half of our text dealt with Israel needing deliverance from oppression. And the text shows the gap between memory of how God has delivered in the past and their present situation. Like us at times, Gideon looks at what God has done and what the current reality is and says, “God, where are You now when I/we need You?”

Note that God did not answer Gideon’s questions in vs. 13; He won’t always answer ours either (though He is never angry at us for expressing these questions). God calls us to serve Him, just as He called Gideon. We are to trust that He knows better than we the entirety to the situation. And He knows our doubts and weaknesses, so just like Gideon, He tells us He is with us (Matt. 28:19-20).

Prayer: Father God, thank You for Your warnings and for your mercy. Help us to be willing workers for Your kingdom. When we ask questions, remind us of Your presence. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

