
IT'S IN THE BIBLE

SERVANTS OF GOD

Study Guide / Lesson 10

GIDEON: MIGHTY WARRIOR

Commentary on Judges 6 - 8

After forty years of peace under the leadership of Deborah and Barak, the Israelites again forgot God and sinned. Therefore God allowed them to be tested by surrounding nations—the Midianites and Amalekites (6:1-6). Midianites, a nomadic tribe related to Israel through Abraham and Keturah (Genesis 25:1-2), lived in the desert southeast of Palestine. Israel was so ravaged by this tribe that they *“cried out to the LORD for help”*—a phrase that appears often in the Old Testament (see Exodus 2:23). It was a repentant cry, and God responded positively (6:7-10).

Whenever the Israelites returned to God in repentance, He received them lovingly. Once again God sent a prophet to explain why Israel was suffering. He sent His angel to set apart a young man from the tribe of Manasseh—Gideon, the son of Joash (6:11, 15). When God called him, Gideon was threshing wheat in a hot, dusty winepress instead of outdoors, because he feared the Midianites. The angel of the Lord addressed Gideon as *“mighty warrior”* and he responded, *“if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us?”* (6:12-13). God had already answered that question, telling the Israelites they had not listened to His voice (6:10; see 2:11-15). Gideon was strong, but the reference here was to the power God would give him (6:34). Gideon was to *“save Israel out of Midian’s hand”* (6:14). He replied, *“But Lord, how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest...and I am the least in my family”* (6:15). Note that throughout history, God has chosen those who feel inadequate to be His leaders. When God called Moses, he responded in the same way: *“Who am I?...Please send someone else”* (Exodus 3:11; 4:13). Isaiah cried, *“Woe to me!...For I am a man of unclean lips”* (Isaiah 6:5). Jeremiah could not see himself as God’s spokesman: *“I do not know how to speak”* (Jeremiah 1:6). God is pleased with the person who knows he is inadequate in his own strength but trusts in God’s power. He delights in the one who responds as Isaiah did after confessing his inability: *“Here am I. Send me!”* (Isaiah 6:8). When we respond positively to God, He assures us of His presence: *“I will be with you”* (6:16; see Joshua 1:3, 5).

When the Lord is with us, who else do we need? Gideon needed to know that this was truly God Almighty who called him to this task. Asking the angel to wait, Gideon cooked him a sacrificial meal from his meager store of food—the grain he had just threshed and a goat hidden from the Midianite scavengers. Gideon must have been startled when asked to put the meat and cakes on a rock and pour out the broth. Apparently he obeyed without hesitation. It must have seemed wasteful to him, yet he did as he was told. God did not consider it a waste because He saw a man willing to offer up to Him that which was difficult to give. A man like that was one God could use!

His guest touched the meat with his staff, and fire flared from the rock, consuming the offering. Then he vanished. Gideon was sure he had seen the angel of the Lord face to face (6:22); he built an altar to God and called it *“The LORD is Peace”* (6:24). God had found His man and His man had found Him. That night Gideon bravely followed God’s instructions to destroy the altar of Baal and the Asherah pole (6:25-27). It was crucial that all of the things that devastated Israel spiritually and morally be removed. Gideon risked his life by obeying God, for the men of the town now declared that he must die (6:30). When Joash defended his son, not one man dared to touch Gideon. They renamed him Jerub-Baal, meaning *“Let Baal contend with him”* (6:31-32). The incident was reported to

the Midianites, Amalekites, and eastern tribes (6:33). All plotted to attack Gideon and Israel in the valley of Jezreel (also known as the valley of Armageddon, which will be a battleground in the end time, according to Revelation 13:1-10; 16:12-16). The battle was not Gideon's: the Spirit of God now filled him, and he sounded the trumpet call to battle. But soon he wanted still another sign from God to indicate whether He would use him to deliver Israel. Their situation seemed hopeless: a few brave farmers with homemade weapons against a mighty force with countless camels (7:12). God reassured Gideon by showing His control over nature—first a soaking wet fleece lay on dry ground, then a dry fleece lay on ground wet with morning dew, just as Gideon had requested (6:36-40).

Think About It: Gideon laid a fleece to confirm God's will for him. He was ready to perform his dangerous task if he were sure God had called him. God honored his requests, for He wanted Gideon to be sure of His will for him. Let us offer ourselves fully to God, allow Him to transform us, order our lives according to His will, and obey Him fully as did Gideon (Romans 12:1-2).

~~~~~

Gideon called up brave men from the tribes of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali (6:35). About 32,000 responded (7:3)—not many against an army perhaps six times that size. But God reduced the Israelite manpower, sending 22,000 home and saying there were still too many. Israel might *"boast against me that her own strength has saved her"* (7:2). So He told Gideon to screen the remaining men (7:4-6); only 300 met the Lord's requirements. Now God was ready to lead them to victory (7:7). It was vital that the Israelites know that it was God—not their military might—that won the battle. Victories come *"not by might nor by power, but by [God's] Spirit"* (Zechariah 4:6). God used a dream to paralyze the Midianites' hearts with fear, and to encourage Gideon and his 300 men (7:15). They followed His orders through to a victory of faith more than equal to the victory at Jericho (Joshua 6:15-21). There was no doubt that it was the Lord who fought on behalf of Israel. *"A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!"* (7:20).

After the battle Gideon was chided by the Ephraimites (8:1), who felt slighted because they had been called in at the last (7:24-25). Gideon wisely defused their anger (8:2-3) by doing as Proverbs 15:1 suggests: *"A gentle answer turns away wrath."* But he dealt firmly with the men of Succoth and Peniel when they rejected his pleas for supplies for his men (8:4-9). Gideon and his band of 300 men pursued the eastern invaders into the desert and defeated all 15,000 of them on their own ground. Hot, tired, hungry, they fought valiantly because God was with them.

Having seen the collapse of their enemies, and now having freedom and peace, the Israelites asked Gideon to be their king, which He nobly declined (8:22-23). But then he erred greatly by asking them to give him gold earrings from their share of plunder, which he made into an ephod. This ephod was unlike the priestly ephod (Exodus 39:2-5). Israel worshiped it as an idol, and it *"became a snare to Gideon and his family"* (8:27). The worship of this ephod eventually led to the return of the worship of the Baals. That did not occur until after Gideon's death when the Israelites *"again prostituted themselves to the Baals"* (8:33). However, the land rested from war for forty years—the remainder of Gideon's life. We can see in Gideon's story the marvelous results of God working through just one man.

**Personal Summary:** The story of Gideon shows that God is able to transform one who trusts and follows Him. When Gideon was called to deliver his people, he seemed an unlikely candidate because he was fearful. Yet the angel of the Lord called him a *"mighty warrior"* who would achieve great victory over the powerful Midianites (6:12, 16). Because Gideon believed God and allowed God to guide him, he became the powerful man described by the angel. Because Gideon obeyed God, he accomplished the great triumph promised by the angel. How does God depict you and me? Has He described us in ways that may not apply to us now, but which we must trust Him to develop in us? Have we been appointed to do something we could never perform alone, but which we are willing to allow Him to do through us? God loves and calls us as we are; but He sees what we can be in Him. Because the Lord is with us, we are able to become the people He has claimed us to be (6:12). He empowers us to fulfill the task He has called us to do (6:16). Let us fully trust Him to live and work in us as we follow the way He has prepared for us.

## HOME STUDY QUESTIONS

### COMMENTARY REVIEW: Gideon: Mighty Warrior

- 1) What lecture or commentary phrases encouraged you as you learned about God's concern for the Israelites and for Gideon? In what ways does He show His care for you?

### QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 10 Jephthah: The Judge — Judges 9 - 12

Please record Scripture verses where your answers are found. Questions marked with an asterisk (\*) may require extra thought and/or additional Bible knowledge.

#### Abimelech Rules Over Shechem — Judges 9

- 2) How does Abimelech become king in Shechem?

\*3) What do you think Jotham means by his opening sentence in verse 7?

- 4) a. In your own words, briefly state the message of Jotham's parable in verses 8-15.  
b. What is Jotham's curse?  
c. How is the curse fulfilled?

#### Israelites Suffer Consequences Of Sin — Judges 10:1-9; Psalm 106:34-43

- 5) a. List words and phrases describing how the Israelites suffer as a result of their sin.  
b. Read Psalm 106. What do the Israelites do to make themselves vulnerable to sin?  
c. In Psalm 106, how does God react to their sin?
- \*6) Do you see a lesson for us in the above passages? Explain.

#### Israel Again Cries To God For Help — Judges 10:10-16; Psalm 106:44-45

- 7) Describe Israel's first appeal to God.
- 8) Write the five phrases in verses 15-16 that describe their second appeal and response to God. Explain the significance of each phrase. The first answer is given for you.

| <u>Phrase:</u>      | <u>Significance:</u> |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| (1) We have sinned. | Confession of sin.   |
| (2)                 |                      |
| (3)                 |                      |
| (4)                 |                      |
| (5)                 |                      |

**Personal Thought:** Did you notice that after the Israelites had confessed and repented of their sin, they began to serve God? *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9). Then we, too, must serve Him.

\*9) Psalm 106:44-45 expresses God's mercy toward the Israelites. Which words from these two verses have special meaning for you?

**Israel Asks Jephthah To Deliver Them — Judges 11:1-33**

10) Describe Jephthah's way of life and give the reason for it.

11) a. What do the elders of Gilead ask Jephthah to do?

b. How does Jephthah react to their plea?

\*c. Why do you think the elders choose Jephthah to lead them?

**Personal Thought:** Have you experienced rejection? Sometimes it is in God's plan for us to be restored, like Jephthah, after we have been rejected. But sometimes He uses such experiences to give us new direction. Our usefulness to God does not depend on personal restoration among those who have rejected us. Our usefulness to God depends on our faith and trust in Him.

12) a. Briefly summarize the dispute between Jephthah and the king of the Ammonites.

b. Who does Jephthah say will decide the dispute?

c. How does the king of the Ammonites respond?

13) a. How is Jephthah equipped for battle?

b. How is the battle won?

**Jephthah's Vow Causes Him Great Sorrow — Judges 11:34-40; 12**

14) a. Using a dictionary, define the word *vow*.

b. According to Deuteronomy 23:21-23, what guidelines are given about making and keeping vows to God?

c. What does Jesus teach in Matthew 5:33-37 concerning the making of vows?

15) a. What is Jephthah's vow?

b. Why do you think Jephthah feels he cannot take back his vow?

c. Review Psalm 106:37-39. God desired the sacrifice of a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart (Psalm 51:16-17). How do you think Jephthah concludes that God would desire the thank offering of a human sacrifice?

16) What distresses you most about Jephthah? What do you admire about him?

**Personal Thought:** Jephthah tried to fit God into his realm of experience rather than act on what he knew of God through God's revealed law. Too often we try to make God conform to our experience rather than follow His instruction: *"Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's [good and perfect] will is"* (Romans 12:2).