

GIDEON

In our last lesson, we studied an account of how the people of Israel were faring as settlers in the land God had given them. The early chapters of the book of Judges sum up the situation: In spite of all that God had done for them, they forsook Him and began to worship and serve the false, worthless, non-existent god of the Canaanites, Baal (pronounced "bale"). Finally, their true God would give them what they wanted -- He would remove His hand of protection and leave them to their chosen way and new gods. At this, their fellow Baal-worshippers would turn on them and attack them. Unable to rescue themselves in their own strength, the Israelites would cry out to God for deliverance. In mercy, God would raise up a judge (or deliverer) and would save them from their enemies.

Review your memory verses by writing them out on a separate piece of paper: Hebrews 11:1, Genesis 15:1, Hebrews 11:6, Genesis 50:20, Hebrews 11:25-26 and Joshua 1:9.

Read Hebrews 11:32-34.

1. Through His judge Deborah and through Barak, what had God done for His people when they cried out under the constant, long-term attack of Jabin, the Canaanite king? See Judges 4:23-24, 5:31.

Now read Judges 6:1-10. The Amorites in verse 10 probably include all the inhabitants of Canaan, according to the NIV Study Bible note. Also notice the new and demoralizing "secret weapon" introduced by the Midianites into Canaanite warfare in verse 5 -- the camel.

2. Describe what you see in verses 1-6. (After the last lesson, this may seem vaguely familiar...)
3. Summarize the prophet's message in verses 7-10.
4. They realized that they needed physical deliverance! By giving the people this message before rescuing them from the Midianites, what do you think God wanted to show them?

Now let's meet Gideon, the next of our Hebrews 11 heroes of faith, and our next monument to the faithfulness of God.

Read Judges 6:11-7:25 for an overview of Gideon's role in God's deliverance of Israel.

5. As part of the story line, a piece of Gideon's family background information is made clear in Judges 6:25-27. What do you discover?

Re-read Judges 6:11-14.

6. Who is this visitor that comes to Gideon under the oak in Ophrah? See 6:11-12, 14.

7. The people of this time usually did their threshing in an open field or on a hilltop, to allow the wind to blow away the chaff they'd beaten from the wheat kernels. Yet in 6:11, we find Gideon threshing down in one of the specially-dug pits used for crushing the grapes. Why?

8. a. Noting these circumstances, how does the Lord address Gideon in 6:12?

b. Why do you think He uses this title?

9. Notice Gideon's immediate response to the "man's" greeting (6:12-13). Explain the emotions or struggles you detect -- what do you think is going on in Gideon's head and heart?

Apparently Gideon had not been where he could have heard the prophet's words of 6:7-10 (in "church"?) or he would have known, not only the reasons behind Israel's situation, but also more about the character of Israel's LORD who kept communicating to them.

10. In answer to Gideon's words, the LORD could have responded in many ways, from scolding to self-defense. How does He reply in verse 14?

11. God wanted to work with Gideon -- and had some fairly spectacular plans in mind! Why might God's choice of Gideon seem surprising, considering what you have seen of him thus far?

12. From all appearances, Gideon may have just looked like a Baal-worshipping Israelite -- with a chip on his shoulder concerning the God of his forefathers. But God isn't fooled, confused or put off by any of this, in Gideon or in us. The following passages help us see why. Tell what you discover and highlight the truths that encourage you most today.

I Samuel 16:7b

Psalm 138:6-8

Psalm 139:1-13

Luke 15:3-6

Isaiah 42:1-3

13. God knew right where Gideon was -- in more ways than one! He pursued him and had a wonderful plan for him. How does this picture of your God encourage you personally today (for yourself or as you think of ones you love)?

14. Read through the next bite-sized chunks of Scripture with these aims in mind:
- A. To make note of God's specific acts of kindness and protection that help Gideon's young faith.
 - B. To also note actions and attitudes in Gideon that are signs of a teachable heart.

God's personal goodness to Gideon

Signs of a heart God can teach

Judges 6:

14-16

17-24

25-32

33-40

Note: In verses 33-40, the intent is not to encourage us to use Gideon's requests as a pattern. It is more to let us see the kindness of God in coming down to Gideon's level in his early steps of faith in a faithless society.

God's kindness (cont'd)

Gideon's teachable heart (cont'd)

Judges 7:

1-8

9-15

16-25

15. Scripture gives you a great vantage point -- it allows you to look back over the lives of actual people and see the real story. It also shows you your God unveiled. In a few sentences, tell what you have learned of Him through Gideon's life.

Unlike Gideon, you and I are still in the middle of our stories - still living by faith and not by sight. Deep pain, sin, inexperience, ignorance and a deceiving fallen world are just some of the things that can make us feel that the wonderful goodness of God is at work for some folks like Gideon, but not for us. As we learned back in the Scriptures shared in question 12, God deeply understands this struggle we experience. He longs to comfort us, to clear our vision and to teach us the hope-building skill of trusting Him. When you find yourself struggling to see whether His love and goodness are truly at work in your life, your Lord would tell you above all, "My child, turn your eyes back to the cross." It is there that His wonderful heart of love and power for you are most clearly seen. And it is the Cross that is the true measure of His great care for you and yours every step of the way.

16. Through Gideon's story, the Lord shows us more ways to develop eyes that see Him more clearly. Think back on the ways Gideon grew in his confidence in and dependence on the Lord's goodness: he poured out his true feelings and doubts to God, he listened to God carefully, he tried to see himself honestly, he ventured out (sometimes with trepidation!) to do what God made clear, he joined hands with other fellow warriors that God provided. What steps can you take to follow his example, and how might each step help you?
17. Read Psalm 145:13-20 aloud -- this will be our heart's song for eternity. We may sometimes struggle now, but then we will know "He has done all things well!". As you look back on your Journey, has God begun to show you just a few glimpses of His goodness in your life? Take some time to remember, share and praise. Amen!

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