



Gideon and His Work

Lesson Aim: To demonstrate what anyone can do, regardless of how humble his station in life, if he will submit himself to the will of God.

L9. Text: Judges 6:11-16, 36-40. **Date:** May 1959.

Topic: Sin: Deliverance from; God: Submission to; Gideon.

Today, our study is the work of one of the greatest judges in Israel's history. He is Gideon, the son of Joash. At his call Israel had again done evil in the sight of the Lord and the Lord had delivered them into the hand of Midianites. For seven years this subjection had endured. The Midianites were a nomad tribe, descended from Abraham's concubine Keturah, Genesis 25:2. Its territory was generally south of Israel's territory. Being so close to nomads made army raids into the land so that they left no sustenance for Israel. Israel was greatly impoverished because the Midianites (with the Amalekites and other confederates) robbed them of cattle and destroyed their crops. Naturally this led the people to cry unto the Lord and he heard them.

One new note is introduced in this occasion. A prophet from the Lord came to point out Israel's sin (Judges 6:8-10) and the cause of the judgment. The prophet's message declared that Israel owed God obedience because He had redeemed them from Egypt and settled them in the land. Their suffering had come, according to the prophet, because they had not obeyed the voice of the Lord. Idolatry had brought the enemy upon them and brought Israel into subjection. Their suffering was the punishment of sin.

Our lesson begins with the appearance of an angel of the Lord to call Gideon to the work of judge. Let us approach the study prayerfully, remembering that God can so use any man who submits to His will.

EXPOSITION

I. God Chooses His Own Workers, 6:11-23; 36-40.

1. God's chosen leaders may arise from humble circumstances, verses 11, 15. The angel came from God to make known to Gideon the choosing which qualified him to become a judge in Israel. He found Gideon threshing grain by a winepress. (The Hebrew properly denoted, "threshed wheat with a stick in a wine-press.) This shows the dire poverty in which Israel suffered. Such a small quantity of wheat was threshed in such an unlikely place to hide it from the enemy. When told of the call to the judgeship, he responded in dismay. His tribe was small in the nation; his family was poor; his personal ability, rank and influence were not such to challenge his countrymen to follow him. According to this estimate it seems God could hardly have chosen a more unlikely fellow. And yet, the glory of God's workers is that God takes them from humble, unpromising circumstances and makes them worthy and capable of their calling. Looking upon Christian history, one is impressed that God has over and over again chosen the humble man through whom to do His greatest work. (Look at the lives of William Carey, D. L. Moody, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, and others.) No one can refuse God's call because he is too small. Success depends upon God's ability, not or own.

2. God's chosen leader is assured of Divine presence, verses 12, 16. The angel approached Gideon with the common salutation which means, "May the Lord be with you." Gideon's angry retort was that if the Lord was with him then the evil which the nation experienced was unexplainable. The angel further addressed Gideon as "*Thou mighty man of valour.*" This may refer to some deeds which Gideon had done or may be predictive of what he would do as God's servant. The angel speaks again (verse 16) to assure him that God's presence would be with him. Moreover, this presence would so qualify him for service that the enemy would be overcome as if they were but one man. What an encouragement for Gideon! What an encouragement for us. "*If God be for us, who can be against us?*" Romans 8:31. Examine this call of Gideon in the light of the call of Moses (Exodus 3 and 4) and observe the assurance God gives to those whom He calls and commissions.

3. God's chosen leader may hesitate and question, verse 13. Not always does the call of God meet a mind fully resolved and ready to respond. Such was the case of Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-8), but many others have to consider longer. Gideon had been taught of the history of Israel. He knew of the miracles of the Exodus from Egypt. The announcement by the angel that the Lord is with him brings up the question, "Then if God is with us, why doesn't He show himself through miracles?" The condition of the people was slavery such as was endured in Egypt. Why didn't God move to correct

the matter? The question is not asked in a tone of skepticism so much as in bewilderment. It appeared to Gideon that the Lord had forsaken the nation because of their sin. He is surprised to think of God dwelling among a sinful people without some manifestation of His presence in judgment and deliverance. Let us not scorn a man because he questions. Every man needs to think himself clear in his religious convictions. The person who so thinks through his convictions will probably be more stable than the one who responds blindly and without thought. Doubt and questions are not sin when they arise from a sincere heart seeking truth.

4. God's chosen leader is Divinely commissioned, verse 14. The answer of the Lord to Gideon's question is "The Lord is here; He will show himself in the deliverance of Israel and he intends to deliver Israel through your hand!" Could Gideon believe his ears? Surely he was not worthy nor capable of such a task as delivering Israel would involve. Yet the Lord says, "*Go in this thy strength.*" That is, right there Gideon was endowed of God with the strength (or, might) which the task demanded. Bush has suggested, "God gives men a commission of service by giving them all the qualifications necessary for the execution of it, and when this is the case, human ceremonies merely recognize instead of creating the authority under which such persons act." Trapp has likewise suggested, "A good cause, a good calling, and a good conscience will make a good courage." God's call does not leave a man upon his own. "*Have not I sent thee?*" This assurance goes with every man God commissions. Gideon may well remember these words being said to Moses whom God likewise commissioned (Exodus 3:12) and through whom a great deliverance of the nation was wrought.

5. God's chosen leader is given ample proof of his call, verses 17-23; 36-40. God has great patience with a man who is honestly seeking light. Such a task as delivering Israel from the Midianites was not to be undertaken lightly. Gideon wanted definite evidence that the Lord was actually calling him to that work. The Lord gave Gideon three demonstrations of his call. First, Gideon prepared an offering for the angel who talked with him. The flesh of the animal and the unleavened cakes were placed upon a rock. The angel touched them with a staff in his hand and fire came out of the rock and consumed them. Gideon thus knew he had talked with an angel of the Lord. Second, Gideon lay out a piece of fleece asking that it be wet with dew and all about it be dry. The next morning he wrung a bowl full of water from the fleece while the ground about it was dry. Third, Gideon asked that the fleece might be dry while all about it was dew. The next morning it was so. Thus God was giving evidence of His calling Gideon to be a deliverer of Israel.

The modern Christian wonders if it is right for him to “lay out the fleece.” It seems we do not need such evidence as Gideon needed. We have the full revelation of the Bible, of Jesus Christ, of the Holy Spirit’s leadership, and of centuries of religious history—all of which reveal God’s will and method of work. In the vast majority of instances the asking for further proof would be presumption. However, in these areas where the above do not give light (if such cases ever arise) we may depend upon God to fully reveal His call to any whom He selects.

II. God’s Chosen Worker Must Be Busy, 6:25-35.

These verses are not included in the printed portion of our lesson but are briefly surveyed here that we may have further insight into Gideon’s character.

1. God’s worker must overcome false religion, verses 25-27. It is shameful to observe that Gideon’s own father and members of his household, along with many of the people of the community, were worshippers of Baal. It was for this very reason that oppression had overcome them. Now Gideon is commanded to tear down the altar of Baal and cut down the sacred tree by it. He was to take a bullock (some scholars say it was a bullock intended to be offered in sacrifice to Baal) and offer it in sacrifice to Jehovah on an altar he would build. The wood from the sacred trees was to be used upon Jehovah’s altar to burn the animal offered in sacrifice to Him. In fear, Gideon and ten servants performed this deed by night. Thank God for every man, who in love of the truth and respect for man, opposes false religion and propagates the true.

2. God’s worker must brave the anger of sinners, verses 28-30. When the men of the community went out the next morning they found their “sacred” property destroyed and an altar to Jehovah standing in its place. Finding that it was Gideon who had done the thing, they demanded that his father surrender him voluntarily. (It seems they did not want to start a blood feud by taking him forcibly.) Their purpose was to kill him. Of course sinners get angry when their sin is discovered or when one opposes their pet sin and vice. Trying to hide their vileness behind a mask of pretense, they are furious when their faults are truly found out. Any of God’s people who stand against sin can expect sinners to be angry with them. Let us keep in mind our highest Example: *“For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds,”* Hebrews 12:3.

3. God's worker must stand firm in the face of death, verses 30-32. The men of the city now declare their purpose in seeking Gideon "*that he may die.*" They rallied to the defense of their cult and god. (Isn't it surprising what zeal the proponents of some false religions show?) Joash, the father of Gideon, answers wisely. It is possible his son has opened his eyes to the evilness of idolatry. He questions, "Isn't it presumption for you to try to defend a god? Is it for human beings to be avengers of an outraged deity? Why, such action so impugns the divine character of a god as to question his power to defend himself against dishonor. Such a person should be killed himself. Let Baal contend for himself. If he can't punish an insult, what sort of god is he!" Only thus did he stop the people's insistence for the death of his son. However, God had spoken and Gideon had acted, fully aware of the consequences of his deeds. He had acted from a sense of loyalty toward God and of detest toward the idol. We are here taught that if we take care of God's business He will surely protect us in the process. Read II Timothy 4:16-18.

4. God's worker must enlist the help of others in the work, verses 34-35. At first, Gideon had the help of ten men—his own servants—when he tore down the altar to Baal. Now the Spirit of the Lord comes upon him, making him realize it is time for the work of deliverance to be begun in earnest. The Hebrew text here suggests "the Spirit of the Lord clothed itself with Gideon." That is, it took control of him and enveloped him as one dons a garment. The sounding of the trumpet was the signal for the people to gather. Abiezer, Gideon's own clan, was the first to rally to him. Manasseh, his own tribe, was the next summoned. The tribe of Asher likewise marched to join forces with them. This response becomes all the more surprising in view of the words of Jesus that "*a prophet hath no honour in his own country,*" John 4:44. Perhaps this work of revival was already spreading very rapidly. It is the purpose of God that the Gospel should stop with no man. No single man is an end for the Gospel, but a means through whom it should flow to others. II Timothy 2:2. Let us set our hearts to win someone to Christ and service this week.

III. God's Chosen Worker Will Be Victorious, 7:1-25.

Again, we are going past the printed portion. However, this is essential to get the complete story of God's work through Gideon.

1. The victory does not come by numerical strength, verses 1-8. The response of Gideon's call very likely surpassed expectation. We find him with thirty-two thousand men ready to go into battle. The Lord informs him

the army is too large. If they won the victory they would think it came by their own power and not that God had given it to them. Those who were afraid were allowed to go home and twenty-two thousand left. The army was cut almost in one-third! Yet it was still too many. The men were taken down to the water to drink. Of the ten thousand men, nine thousand and seven hundred bowed down on their knees and drank while three hundred stood and raised the water to their mouths. These three hundred were chosen to go with Gideon and attack the Midianites. Without question, if the victory were won now it would be the Lord's doing. But even if the thirty-two thousand had won it would still have been the Lord's doing.

2. The victory does not come by superior intellectual feats, verses 9-15. Upon the command of God, Gideon takes his servant and goes near the camp of the Midianites who now had the Amalekites and other peoples united with them. They heard a soldier tell his fellow a dream in which a barley loaf tumbled into a Midianite tent and it fell. The friend interpreted the dream to be that God had delivered them into the hands of Gideon. This interpretation of the dream revealed to Gideon that the enemy had fear in his heart. Perhaps this led to the surprise attack which followed. Observe that the secret to the victory which came was not that Gideon outsmarted the enemy nor that he outfought them. Finding the enemy had fear in his heart, Gideon perceived that the Lord had put it there and immediately planned an attack which used that fear as a weapon against them. While God expect us to be wise as serpents (Matthew 10:16), He does not wish us to depend upon our wisdom. To be wise without God is to lose God, I Corinthians 1:19-21. Victory does not come by superior wisdom but by superior faith.

3. The victory is through dependence upon God's power, verses 16-25. Gideon now divides his army into three companies. Each man carried an empty pitcher with a torch in it and a trumpet. (Remember it is dark and the enemy does not know they are there.) The companies are located on three sides of the camp of the enemy. At a given signal they break the pitchers so the torches will shine, blow upon their trumpets, and shout, "*The sword of the Lord and of Gideon.*" They enemy awoke and were terrified. The Lord set them to attacking each other and the army was put to rout. Other men from Israel came to help Gideon and the enemy was subdued. The final victory was due to the work of the God in setting the enemy in dismay and in strengthening the men of Israel. Perhaps it would be well to memorize Zechariah 4:6, "*Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.*"

The people wanted to make Gideon king over them but he refused. He did receive from them the earrings they had taken from the spoil of battle and from the gold he made an ephod. Israel soon began to worship the ephod, however and it became a snare.

QUESTIONS

1. Against whom did Gideon lead the army of Israel?
2. What was the prophet's message to Israel before Gideon was called?
3. Describe what we know of Gideon's home life.
4. Describe what we know of the condition of Israel under the Midianites.
5. Tell of the call of Gideon by the angel of the Lord.
6. What was Gideon's first act in calling Israel to repentance?
7. How many men did Gideon take into battle? How many went back home?
8. What is the significance of the Midianite soldier's dream?
9. Describe the initial attack by Gideon against the Midianites.
10. What wrong did Gideon commit with golden earrings?