

Confidence Provides Necessary Courage

Lesson for October 16, 2022

Unit II: Out of Slavery to Nationhood

Scriptural Background: Judges 6:1-27

Printed Text: Judges 6:1-2, 7-16

Key verse: Then the Lord said to him, "Peace be with you; do not fear, you shall not die."
(Judges 6:23, NKJV)

Word Study

Hook

There is a story of an Atlantic passenger laying in his bunk in a storm, deathly sick--seasick. A cry of "Man overboard" was heard. The passenger thought, "God help the poor fellow--there is nothing I can do." Then he thought at least he could put his lantern in the porthole, which he did. The man was rescued, and recounting the story next day he said, "I was going down in the darkness for the last time when someone put a light in a port-hole. It shone on my hand, and a sailor in a lifeboat grabbed it and pulled me in." Weakness is no excuse for our not putting forth all the little strength we have, and who can tell how God will use it?

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In this week's lesson Gideon felt inadequate for every task God gave him until he learned to trust and tap into God's power. (Sunday School Publishing Board, 2022)

Key Terms

1. **Bondage** (v. 8) – Servanthood; servitude or subjugation to a controlling person or force; slavery.
2. **Cried out** (v. 7) – To call for help in anguish. To make a loud sound because of pain, fear, surprise.
3. **Delivered** (v. 1) – Surrender; To give, put, set; placed.
4. **Midian** (vv. 1, 2) – The Midianites were descended from "Midian", one of the several children born to Abraham and Keturah, who had been sent away to the east so that Isaac might be Abraham's uncontested heir (Genesis 25:1-6). The Midianites provided opposition to the Israelites as they journeyed toward the Promised Land, being found in league with the Moabites (Numbers 22-25), and the Amorites (Joshua 13:21).
5. **Made** (v. 2) – Put together; do; prepare.
6. **Stronghold** (v. 2) – A fortified place; impregnable; a place of security or survival.
7. **Threshed** (v. 11) – To separate seed from (a harvested plant) mechanically; to beat off, beat out.

Lesson Background

The Book of Judges is an action-packed account of the failure of the children of Israel to maintain the high spiritual standards laid down by Moses and Joshua. They not only failed to conquer the land of Canaan as God had challenged them to do (2:1-3; 20-23), but they also fell into the idolatry and sinful practices of the Canaanites (3:7). Their growing disobedience and spiritual apostasy brought on a progressive moral degeneration, seen repeatedly in the various accounts of their oppression and in the historical appendixes that make up the closing portion of the book (chapters 17 to 21). God would teach His people through this period that “rest” was fully available and provided for by Him, but must be entered into by an obedient people. Judges is a tragic sequel to Joshua. In Joshua, the people were obedient to God in conquering the Land. In Judges, they were disobedient, idolatrous, and often defeated. (Judges 1:1 – 3:6), focuses on the closing days of the book of Joshua. (Judges 2:6-9), gives a review of Joshua’s death (compare Joshua 24:28-31). The account describes seven distinct cycles of Israel’s drifting away from the Lord starting even before Joshua’s death, with a full departure into the rejection of God and His covenant (apostasy) afterward. Five basic reasons are evident for these cycles of Israel’s moral and spiritual decline:

1. Disobedience in failing to drive the Canaanites out of the land (Judges 1:19, 21, and 35);
2. Idolatry (2:12);
3. Intermarriage with wicked Canaanites (3:5-6);
4. Not heeding judges (2:17); and
5. Turning away from God after the death of the judges (2:19).

A four-part sequence repeatedly occurred in this phase of Israel’s history:

1. Israel’s departure from God;
2. God’s chastisement in permitting military defeat and suppression.
3. Israel’s prayer pleading for deliverance; and
4. God raising up “judges”, either civil or sometimes local military champions who led in shaking off the oppressors.

Fourteen judges arose, six of them military judges (Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah and Samson). Two men were of special significance for contrast in spiritual leadership: (1) Eli, judge and High-Priest (not a good example); and (2) Samuel, judge, priest and prophet (a good example).

Today’s lesson in Judges 6 about 50 years have passed since the story of Deborah in Judges 5. Under the Judges Israel is a loose confederation of tribes – coming together when required, but mostly independent. In the last half century, they have drifted away from God and once again are worshipping the gods of those around them. The lesson begins as the Israelites turned away from God, returning to their evil ways in the sight of the Lord. Because of this, God delivered them into the hands of the Midianites for seven years. The Midianites took everything from Israel, and Israel became greatly impoverished because of the Midianites. The Israelites did what they would normally do when oppressed; they went crying to God for help.

God sent them a prophet who told them what they did and reminded them of all the good works God has done for them. Next, an angel was sent to a man named Gideon, a mighty man of valor. Gideon asked the angel why all the hardship had fallen on Israel. The Lord told him to go in all his might and save Israel from the Midianites. The Sovereign Lord asked him, “haven’t I sent you,” therefore go with confidence.

Lesson In Depth

I. Blurred Memory (Judges 6: 1-2)

Then the children of Israel did evil: The *forty years of rest* (Judges 5:31) following the defeat of Sisera eventually came to an end. In their prosperity and complacency, Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD.

And the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian: *God* brought Israel into bondage through the oppression of the Midianites. This was an example of God’s *grace* and *mercy* to Israel because the oppression would make them turn back to God. It would have been worse if God had just left them alone.

And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: Israel’s sin was renewed, and Israel’s troubles were repeated. As a result, God allowed the Midianites to oppress Israel for seven years. This oppression also included the Amalekites and the people of the east (a nomadic group from the Syrian desert). So severe was this oppression that the Israelites generally were no longer able to live in their own cities.

Because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which [are] in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds: The Israelites hid themselves in dens and caves; such was the effect of a guilty conscience. Sin disheartens men. The invaders left no food for Israel, except what was taken into the caves. They prepared that for Baal with which God should have been served, now God justly sends an enemy to take it away in the season thereof.

These caves were where they lived when they were hiding from the Midianites. The caves afforded a certain amount of protection from the enemy. They set up places where they could hide and withstand their enemies. At least in the caves, the enemy could attack from only one side. This was a place where they were relatively safe.

II. Selective Amnesia (Judges 6:7-10)

In verses 3-6 the Amalekites and other people from the East joined the Midianites in oppressing Israel (compare 3:13). We are also given some details of the oppression. Whenever Israel had sown their fields and presumably had raised their crops, the oppressors would invade and encamp against the Israelites. They would then destroy what the land had produced, presumably by eating it and enjoying it themselves. They would also take Israel’s flocks of sheep, oxen, and donkeys. They are said to be numerous like locusts, so they would come as nomadic peoples with their tents and livestock and camels without number (see Judges 7:12). They would enter the land, and the result of their invasion would be destruction of what the Israelites had raised.

They left nothing with which Israel could sustain themselves. This is exactly what God predicted would happen when Israel sinned. See Leviticus 26:16; Deuteronomy 28:31.

After the long season of humiliation, fruitless labor, poverty, and domination by an oppressive power, Israel *finally* **cried out to the Lord**. Prayer was their *last resort* instead of their *first resource*. Israel cried out because of their oppressions and mistreatment, and not because of their sins, which had brought those evils on them. Of which, at present, they seemed not to be sensible. And yet such was the goodness and compassion of God to them, that having a mind to deliver them, he immediately, on their crying to him, sends them a messenger to bring them to a sense of their sins. And prepare them for the deliverance he designed to work for them, as follows.

Verses 7-10: God sent an unidentified “prophet” to urge the people to turn back to Yahweh and end their oppression. Up to this time, all the Israelites did was cry out for relief. God wanted something more than a cry; He wanted a confession (Hosea 5:15). The Israelites’ problem was not their enemies but their disobedient hearts. Repentance precedes deliverance (Joel 2:12-17).

The Lord sent a prophet: The delivering judge will appear later. Before Israel could receive and respond to the work of the judge, they first had to be prepared by this un-named prophet.

I brought you up from Egypt: God spoke through the prophet, reminding Israel of all He did for them in the past.

I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians: Even after they were brought out of Egypt, when the Egyptians pursued after them, and overtook them at the Red Sea where they were in the utmost distress, the Lord produced salvation for them. He gave them a passage through it and destroyed the Egyptians in it.

and out of the hand of all that oppressed you: This included the Amalekites who made war with them at Rephidim. Sihon, and Og, kings of the Amorites who came out to fight with them and oppose their passage through their land into Canaan. And the kings of the Canaanites also, who combined against them.

I drove them out from before you and gave you their land: Not only the land of Sihon and Og, but the whole land of Canaan. Out of which more properly the inhabitants of it may be said to be driven.

The Lord fought their enemies and brought them to their land of promise. The Lord has kept covenant with them. He did just as He had promised to do.

And I said unto you, I [am] the LORD your God: The covenant God of them and their fathers, and they ought not to have owned and acknowledged any other besides him.

Fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: Meaning not a fear of being hurt by them.

But ye have not obeyed my voice: God sent this messenger to tell them where the real problem was. It wasn't that the Midianites were so strong; it was that Israel was so disobedient. God had then warned the people not to fear (worship and serve) the gods of the Amorite people who had lived in the land. But the people did not listen, and this was why they were suffering. This is exactly what God had said to them repeatedly, yet they continually refused to learn the lesson. God wanted Israel to cleave to Him, fear and worship Him. They had been guilty of idolatry, and this is the sin the prophet was sent to reprove them for. They have not kept God's laws and His commandments. Their disobedience to God has gotten them in the place they are in.

Israel *thought* the problem was the Midianites, but the real problem was *Israel*. It is human nature to blame *others* for problems that we cause. The message of the prophet also shows that when Israel **cried out to the Lord**, they didn't understand that *they* were the problem. Their cry to God for help did not mean that they recognized or repented of their sin.

III. Encouraged by God (Judges 6:11-16)

These verses introduce us to Gideon, whom God would call to be the judge to deliver Israel from this oppression. Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress in a pit in the ground where he would be less visible and less vulnerable to Midianite attack. The angelic appearance, which was Jesus Himself, means that Gideon hears the word of the Lord directly from the mouth of the Lord: "The Lord is with thee".

The Angel of the Lord came and sat under the terebinth tree: When **the Angel of the Lord** appeared to Gideon, we recognize this is as a *theophany* – an Old Testament appearance of Jesus Christ, in human, bodily form, but before His incarnation in Bethlehem.

The description of the encounter with the **Angel of the LORD** shows that this is not merely an angel speaking on behalf of God. It shows that God himself, appearing in human form, spoke to Gideon

Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress: This indicated a situation of serious distress; also, it indicated a small amount of grain. Wheat was threshed in open spaces, typically on a hill-top so the breeze could blow away the chaff. Wheat was not normally threshed in a sunken place like a winepress.

This is clear because he is doing it rather than having cattle tread it. It is on bare ground or in the winepress rather than on a threshing floor made of wood and is done remotely under a tree out of view. The fear of the Midianites caused this. This was both difficult and humiliating.

And said unto him, the Lord is with thee: This was a strange greeting to Gideon. It didn't seem like the LORD was **with** him. The gracious presence of God was with Gideon while he was threshing. Who very probably was sending up exclamations to heaven, on account of the distressed case of Israel, and was deep in meditation about the affairs of the people of God, and contriving how to deliver them.

Thou mighty man of valor: Such a statement would be expected to be made to a great military leader whom God used to lead his people in battle. As the story proceeds, Gideon will become just such a man, but he was apparently anything but that at this point. In addressing him as “mighty man of valor”, the Lord saw Gideon as he would become, not as he was (Hebrews 11:32).

And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us: Gideon expressed concern about God’s desertion of Israel. Gideon’s response was that, if God was with Israel, why were they suffering so?

He recalled the great miracles God had done for the fathers when He brought them out of Egypt. But Gideon’s own experience indicated that the Lord had forsaken Israel and left them to suffer at the hand of the Midianites.

Gideon here raised the issue of suffering and expresses a common view. If God loves us and cares for us and if God is all-wise and all powerful, why does He allow people – especially His own people – to suffer? But it was not hard to answer the question in the case of Israel at this time. The prophet had really answered the question in verses 8-10. Israel suffered at this time because they had forsaken God to serve the Baals. God was allowing them to suffer at the hand of the Midianites to teach them to repent and return to Him.

And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: The Lord reassured Gideon that he had sufficient power and that he would in fact save Israel from the Midianites. He further assured him that God had sent him. If God has truly sent us, the point is that He will also make sure we have what we need to accomplish the task He commanded us to accomplish. If He tells us to act, we must believe that we can do what He tells us to do. To believe otherwise is to question, not our own ability, but God’s ability and faithfulness.

Have not I sent thee?: Having a command and commission from God, Gideon had authority enough to go about this service. The Lord does not even answer Gideon on his question. He tells him to fight for Israel. There is a promise in this, that the Lord will be with him and strengthen him for the battle. God has promised him victory over the Midianites.

Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel?: Gideon was still doubtful. He asked how he could do such a difficult task, considering who he was. He said he came from the weakest, most humble, and least influential family in the tribe of Manasseh, and he himself was the least powerful member of that family!

Gideon was probably exaggerating here to make a point; nevertheless, this is how he felt about it. How could someone from such an insignificant background accomplish anything so great? This is a common viewpoint felt and expressed by many of us. As we look at our own weaknesses, failures, sins, and lack of ability, we are convinced there is no way God could use us to accomplish anything great. But the problem is that we are looking at human abilities. Notice that Gideon spoke about his family and himself. He saw only the human limitations and failings. We all have such limitations and weaknesses, and we are all at times discouraged like Gideon was.

And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee: God's response was that He would be with Gideon, so Gideon would defeat Israel as one man. This was likewise God's promise to Moses and to Joshua – Exodus 3:12; Joshua 1:5-9. This is the answer to all our doubts and uncertainties. It is true that our human abilities are inadequate to the task God sets before us. This is true for all of us, no matter who we are. None of us accomplishes great things for the Lord on the basis of our great human abilities. None of us has the human ability to accomplish such great things as God called Gideon to do, despite the fact that many seem to think they do have such abilities. But God has the ability to do whatever He chooses. When His power works in us, He can do great things using even those of us who are humanly weak and useless. This is why our trust must be in His power to work through us, not in our own human power – Philippians 4:13.

Conclusion

As we continue to watch Israel as God moves them “From Slavery to Nationhood” historic patterns are repeated: (1) God reveals His plan and requirements for Israel; (2) Israel rebels and reaps the consequences; and (3) God redeems Israel through His love and mercy.

The lessons and warnings for us today:

God uses tough times to get our attention. The Israelites had to deal with deep oppression by their enemies when they had drifted away from God. Because of all this, God allowed their enemies to oppress them. Yes, God allowed it. It is during the oppressive times, the hard times, the stressful times that we have our hearts and attitudes revealed to us. This is when the refiner's fire comes. Sometimes when we are going through hard times it's because we are living according to our own terms rather than God's plans for us. When God allows us to become prey for our enemies it's not designed to annihilate us. The hard times are not designed to destroy us but to get us back on track.

Every experience in life is a test. And every trial in the lives of God's people is tailored to draw us closer to God. When tough times come, instead of looking at them only as if God is punishing you (though often this is the case), try to see them as God's gift of grace.

God sees more than we do. The wonderful thing about God is that even though we're slow returning to Him, He is never slow in responding to us. Verses 7-8 show us that when we cry out to God, He moves in mercy and love toward us. He tells us the truth and begins to work behind the scenes to help us. For Israel, He first sends an unnamed prophet to call them back to total surrender and full devotion. But His plan also included a most unlikely man named Gideon.

God confirms His priorities with His presence. When the Angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, He addressed him and said: "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior." Can't you imagine Gideon around for the man of valor the Lord was addressing! Was God being sarcastic? Or did He see more than Gideon saw? God saw what He was about to make of Gideon.

Do you know who you really are? One of the biggest lies we tell ourselves is that God only uses special people. If you are a born-again believer:

- you are God's child (John 1:12),
- His friend (John 15:15), and
- His masterpiece (Ephesians 2:10)
- You have been justified (Romans 5:1),
- freed forever from condemnation from God (Romans 8:1).
- You are adopted into His family (Ephesians 1:5) and
- your citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20).
- You belong to God (I Corinthians 6:20),
- never to be separated from His love (Romans 8:35)!

You have everything from Him you need for life and godliness! God knows who you are, even if you don't. And He will work to help you see your true identity.

The Lord turned to Gideon and said, "Go in the strength you have and deliver Israel from the power of Midian. Am I not sending you?" Gideon still notes just how unimpressive his resume is. He is the weakest link in his clan, the youngest in his family. He doesn't have any authority to call out the cavalry from his own tribe, let alone from others.

God confirms His priorities with His presence in verse 16, "I will be with you," the LORD said to him. "You will strike Midian down [as if it were] one man." Gideon is given an undeniable commission, told the remarkable results in advance, and promised the unrivaled partnership of the Lord Himself. Gideon needed a personal encounter with God. God met him right where he was, giving him a sense of peace and purpose by His promised presence.

Let us all learn the lesson God taught Gideon. Yes, we may be weak and insignificant. But the question is whether or not God is with us. Let us not give up working for the Lord, because we are discouraged by our own human inabilities. And let us not judge the ability of other people to work effectively for the Lord on the grounds that they possess great personal ability. None of us possesses enough ability to accomplish God's work without God's power. But when He is with us and works through us, we can all be useful enough to please Him, do what He expects of us and receive His reward. The confidence God provides us also gives us courage to move forward.