

The Judges 2



Lesson 6 Judges 6-8

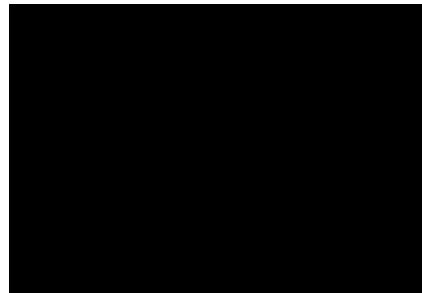
What happened before?

Time and time again the Israelites would start worshipping idols like the nations around them. Each time this happened, God would allow their enemies to treat them very badly and they would suffer great hardships. When they could take the suffering no more, they would ask God to deliver them from their enemies. God raised judges who, with God's help, would defeat their enemies. They would get rid of the idols and be faithful to God for awhile. However, their faithfulness would only last a few years before the Israelites would start worshiping idols again.

The last judge we studied was Deborah, who was a prophetess. Barak was the commander of Israel's army and he assisted Deborah in delivering the people from the hands of their enemies once more.

Bible Story:

It seems that the children of Israel would never learn. Once again, they did evil in the sight of the Lord. Because of their sin, God delivered them into the hands of the Midianites for seven years. Things were so bad that the children of Israel had to hide out in caves. The Midianites would bring their tents and cattle, and camp near where the Israelites grew their crops. There were so many of them that the Bible describes them as a plague of grasshoppers or locusts. As soon as the grain was ripe, the Midianites ravished the land, taking all of the grain, sheep and cattle. Anything they did not take for themselves, they destroyed. The Israelites suffered great poverty. They suffered because they disobeyed God.



The situation in Israel was so bad that Gideon had to thresh his wheat secretly, so the Midianites would not see him and come take away the grain as soon as it was threshed. While Gideon was working hard to provide for his family, the angel of the Lord appeared to him. The angel told him that the Lord was with him and that he would be the deliverer of the people. Gideon did not feel that he was qualified because his family was poor in Manasseh, and he was the least in his father's house. The angel explained that the Lord would be with Gideon, and he would be able to defeat the Midianites.

Gideon asked the angel for a sign to show that he was truly God's spokesman. Gideon then left and prepared a feast for his guest. He used an ephah of flour to make unleavened cakes. (An ephah was about three-fourths of a bushel.) He prepared a baby goat, putting the flesh in a basket and the broth in a pot, and brought it to the angel. According to the custom at that time, the broth was for consumption there, and the flesh for him to take on his journey.

The angel told Gideon, "Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth." Gideon obeyed. With his staff, the angel touched the flesh and unleavened cakes, and there rose up fire out of the rock, consuming them. The angel of the Lord then disappeared.

The miracle of the fire rising from the rock and the vanishing stranger convinced Gideon that he had seen an angel of God. Gideon was afraid, because at that time people thought if they saw an angel of the Lord face to face, they would die immediately. At once God reassured Gideon that all was well saying, "peace be unto thee, fear not: thou shalt not die." Gideon built an altar to the Lord at that place and called it "The Lord is Peace."

God began giving him instructions for the work that he was chosen to do. The first task God gave Gideon was to overthrow the altar of Baal (which his father worshipped) and to cut down the grove that was by it. He then was to build an altar and offer a seven-year old bullock to the Lord. Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the Lord had commanded. They did this at night because he feared his father's household and the men of the city. The next morning, when the men of the city saw what had happened, they wanted to know who had done such a thing. When they found out it was Gideon they wanted to kill him. Gideon's father, Joash, answered them by saying that if Baal was the true God, he could avenge himself. The people agreed and called Gideon Jerubbaal which means, "Let Baal plead." The first thing Gideon did to please God was to reject his father's religion, to tear down the altar of Baal, for it was idolatry.

Meanwhile, the Midianites and the Amalekites invaded more of Israel's territory. Gideon began to gather an army to fight them. Gideon was ready to fight, but he was not really sure God would save Israel by his hand and requested another sign from God. He put a fleece of wool on the floor and asked that the next morning there would be dew on the fleece, but not on the earth beside it. The next morning Gideon wrung a bowl full of water out of the fleece, yet the earth was dry. Begging the Lord not to be angry with him, Gideon requested one more sign. This

time he wanted the fleece to be dry, with dew on the ground. God did as He was asked and the next morning the fleece was dry and there was dew on the ground.

After being reassured by the miracle of the fleece, Gideon gathered 32,000 men from the tribes of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali. The men camped beside the well of Harod, ready for battle. God, however, told Gideon that he had too many people. God knew that if they won the battle with that many warriors, people would say the victory belonged to man, not to God. Therefore, He instructed Gideon to send home anyone who was fearful or afraid. Twenty two thousand took advantage of this offer and returned to their homes. That left Gideon with 10,000 soldiers. God said that was still too many. He told Gideon to take the people to the water. Anyone who got down on his knees and drank from the stream was to be sent home. Those men who lapped water from their hands were allowed to stay. Only 300 passed the test! Gideon had only 300 men to fight 135,000 Midianites.

That night, the Lord appeared to Gideon and told him that He had delivered Midian into his hand. Knowing that Gideon might be afraid, He sent him down to the Midianite camp. Gideon heard one man tell of a dream he had about a cake of barley, which rolled over and over through the Midianite camp, hitting a tent and causing it to collapse. The man who heard the dream said, "This is nothing but the sword of Gideon!" The men were convinced that Gideon was going to defeat them.

When Gideon heard this, he felt confident that God was with him. Returning to the Israelites, he said, "Arise, for the Lord hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian." Gideon divided the 300 men into three companies to appear on three sides of the Midianite camp. He gave each man a trumpet and pitcher with a lamp inside. The trumpets were made of the horns of cattle or rams. The pitchers were empty jars that served the double purpose of guarding the torches from the wind and hiding the lights until the critical moment when they were needed. Gideon told the people to watch him and do as he did.

Gideon planned a surprise attack on the Midianites at night while they were sleeping. At about 10:00 p.m. the three companies blew their trumpets, broke their pitchers and cried, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon." Standing around the camp, the men continued to blow their trumpets. When the Midianites awoke and saw lights so close and heard the trumpets and war cry of 300 voices, they thought a large army was invading them. In their panic and in the darkness of the night, they began to kill one another. Those who were left fled to an area toward the Jordan, but the Israelites pursued them and defeated them. Some 120,000 men were killed.

Because he trusted in God rather than in his army, Gideon gained victory with a handful of men and received a place among the heroes of faith. (Hebrews 11:32.) He was such a great man that the people of Israel wanted to make him a king. He reminded them that God was their king!

After this great victory, the land had peace for 40 years. Gideon had seventy sons, as he also had many wives. His concubine also bore him a son whose name was Abimelech. Abimelech was not a good man like his father, Gideon. We will learn more about him in our next lesson.

Tragically, after Gideon died, the people immediately returned to worshipping Baal. The Israelites had quickly forgotten God!

