

Gideon (Part 2)

(Judges 7)

Introduction

Can God do mighty things? [Teacher, help the children discover what a mighty God we have.] He created the whole universe; He put the sun and the moon and the stars in place with the flick of His fingers (Psalm 8). Can God do miracles? [Teacher, lead the children in a discussion of what miracles are and let them give you examples from their own lives.] Every time God heals a scraped knee or a broken bone, it is a miracle.

Today we are going to learn how God used Gideon, a cowardly man, and his tiny army to deliver the people of Israel from the hands of mighty enemy forces.

Opening Prayer

Father, You are a mighty God and You want us to know that we can depend on You to do mighty things in our lives and through our lives. Show us how trustworthy You are this morning, so that we will put our faith in You, no matter what. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

*With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.
(Matthew 19:26).*

Lesson

For the past 3 weeks we have been studying the book of Judges. This is the time period for the children of Israel after Joshua had died and the people were left with no leader. During the times of the Judges, the people would go through periods of trusting and obeying God, then after a while they would forget about Him. Soon, the Israelites would even start to worship the false gods of their enemies. That would make God angry, so He would allow the enemy nations around them to conquer them.

And, the enemy nations would treat the children of Israel harshly until finally they would cry out to the Lord for mercy. And, even though they didn't deserve it, God, in His mercy, would send the children of Israel a judge.

Judges were not kings; they were more like an umpire in a baseball game. They made decisions that helped bring peace and justice to the people. They were also leaders who led the people in battle against their enemies.

First we learned about a judge named Deborah. She was a great leader. She was trustworthy, brave, fair and just. The people loved her.

Last week we learned that the armies of Midian, Amalek and other nations from the East united in one vast army against Israel. When the people cried out to the Lord for help, He sent them a judge named Gideon.

Gideon was not a brave man. But God promised Gideon that He would use him in a mighty way to deliver the Israelites out from under the harsh rule of the Midianites. However, Gideon wasn't willing to believe God's promise right away. Gideon had to keep asking God for proof of His love and care.

Gideon decided to test the Lord to see if He was really telling Gideon the truth. He laid out a fleece overnight and told the Lord that if the fleece was wet, but the ground around it was dry, then he would believe the Lord. So, the Lord did as Gideon asked. But Gideon wasn't convinced. So, he asked for just the opposite the next night, he laid out the fleece a second time and told the Lord that if the fleece was dry, but the ground around it was wet, then he would believe the Lord. So the Lord did as Gideon asked the second time. And Gideon had no choice but to trust God.

Remember that when God asks you to do something difficult, He will help you do it. God wanted Gideon to trust Him and He wants you to trust Him, too.

Gideon then gets his fighting force together. And we pick up story in Judges 7

Judges 7:2

The LORD said to Gideon, "You have too many warriors with you. If I let all of you fight the Midianites, the Israelites will boast to me that they saved themselves by their own strength."

Gideon was probably shocked to hear God tell him that he had too many soldiers in his army. Gideon only had 32,000 men compared to the 135,000 Midianite soldiers! Gideon probably thought he needed more men, but God told him he had too many men!

God wanted to make sure that it was very unlikely Gideon could win the war without His help. Why? Because God didn't want Gideon or the children of Israel to take credit for the victory.

Judges 7:3

Therefore, tell the people, "Whoever is timid or afraid may leave this mountain and go home." So 22,000 of them went home, leaving only 10,000 who were willing to fight.

Many of the soldiers were glad to hear Gideon's words because they were afraid and wanted to go home. In fact, twenty-two thousand men went home, leaving only 10,000 men. After those soldiers left camp, Gideon was probably sure he needed every soldier that was left to fight the vast army of the Midianites.

Judges 7:4

But the LORD told Gideon, "There are still too many! Bring them down to the spring, and I will test them to determine who will go with you and who will not."

Judge 7:5

When Gideon took his warriors down to the water, the LORD told him, "Divide the men into two groups. In one group put all those who cup water in their hands and lap it up with their tongues like dogs. In the other group put all those who kneel down and drink with their mouths in the stream."

Judges 7:6

Only 300 of the men drank from their hands. All the others got down on their knees and drank with their mouths in the stream.

Judges 7:7

The LORD told Gideon, "With these 300 men I will rescue you and give you victory over the Midianites. Send all the others home."

The men who put their face in the stream could have easily been ambushed by the enemy. The men who drank from their hands were able to keep a lookout for the enemy. Those were the men that God wanted in His army. And there were only 300 in all!

Judges 7:8

So Gideon collected the provisions and rams' horns of the other warriors and sent them home. But he kept the 300 men with him. The Midianite camp was in the valley just below Gideon.

That night while the troops were sleeping, God told Gideon to take one of his servants and spy out the Midianite camp.

Judges 7:9

That night the LORD said, "Get up! Go down into the Midianite camp, for I have given you victory over them!"

Gideon obeyed and saw that there were more tents in the enemy camp than he could count. It would be a miracle if he could win the battle with an army of only three hundred men.

In the darkness as Gideon sneaked into the enemy camp, he could hear two men talking in their tent. One of the men had just awakened and was telling the other man about a dream he'd just had.

Judges 7:13

Gideon crept up just as a man was telling his companion about a dream. The man said, "I had this dream, and in my dream a loaf of barley bread came tumbling down into the Midianite camp. It hit a tent, turned it over, and knocked it flat!"

Judges 7:14

His companion answered, "Your dream can mean only one thing—God has given Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite, victory over Midian and all its allies!"

God gave Gideon assurance that He was going to give the Israelites the victory! When Gideon heard this, he had confidence; he was ready to fight the Midianites with the three hundred men.

Gideon then divided the soldiers into three groups. To each man he gave a trumpet, an empty clay jar and a torch. Then he explained the battle plans. They were to surround the enemy camp on three sides in the darkness. They were to light their torches and hide them inside the clay jars. Then when Gideon gave the signal, they were to blow their trumpets, break the jars and show their torches and shout, "The sword of the Lord and Gideon!"

The Midianites awoke with a start at the sound of the trumpets, the breaking pitchers and the shouting. When they saw the flare of torches all around them, they thought a huge army had come against them. They were terrified and started fighting each other. Many soldiers were killed in their own camp.

Judges 7:21

Each man stood at his position around the camp and watched as all the Midianites rushed around in a panic, shouting as they ran to escape.

Gideon's army simply watched as the Midianites fell into panic, confusion, and disorder. Not one of Gideon's men had to draw a sword to defeat the enemy. Gideon's small army could never have brought about such a victory in their own strength. God wanted to show Israel that victory depends not on human strength or numbers, but on trust and obedience in God.

Gideon and his men won the battle because God had been with them and helped them. God didn't need a huge army to be successful. All he needed was people who trusted and obeyed him, even when the battle plan didn't make sense to them.

It didn't make any sense to Gideon that God would reduce the size of his army from 32,000 to 300 men. But God wanted to be sure that Gideon and all of the children of Israel knew that their victory against the Midianites wasn't because of their strength. God wanted them to know that they were totally dependent upon the Lord, that God was their strength!

That's the same for us today. God wants us to trust and obey Him completely, even when we think we might have a better way. Gideon thought he needed a much bigger army. But God gave him the victory with only a few men.

Anything that any of us does well is because God has given us the ability. Do you do well in school? Are you good at sports? Can you play the piano? Or sing? Everything that you have accomplished in life is because of God! Remember, we are all dependent on God for every breath that we take, for every moment we're awake. God will give you what you need to be successful in life. You can depend on Him.

After this successful battle, Gideon was the judge in Israel for the next forty years.

Closing Prayer

Father, You want us to learn that we are dependent on You for everything. Help us to trust and obey You, even when we think that we know better than You. Help us to remember that we are totally dependent on You for everything in life. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Object Lesson

Fear Fights Our Faith

Supplies: 2 empty plastic water bottles, one with a cap. Rubber glove with **F E A R** written on each of the 4 knuckles of the fingers.

Say: See these two bottles? They both look the same, but one is different. The one with the cap is full of faith! You can't see it right now, but it's there. The other bottle is empty; it has no faith.

Do: Put on the glove making a fist to show the word **FEAR**.

Say: Gideon was a man who was afraid; he did not have much faith. He even hid when the Angel called his name. Fear fights our faith.

Do: Raise your gloved hand; show them that you are about to hit the empty bottle without the cap.

Say: What do you think will happen if FEAR grips someone without faith? [Let the children respond.]

Do: Squeeze the bottle.

Say: The bottle was crushed; that's because we need faith to fight fear back.

Say: What do you think will happen if FEAR grips someone that is full of faith? [Let the children respond.]

Do: Squeeze the bottle with the cap.

Say: FEAR could not crush it. In fact, it doesn't even look like it hurt it at all.

You see, with faith we get strength from God. Jesus once said to His disciples, "*Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?*" (Mark 4:40) We cannot see faith itself, but we can see what faith produces in us. It gives us strength, courage, peace of mind, and self-control. We do not need to worry or be afraid of anything when we have faith in Jesus. Why? Because we have faith that God will give us the victory!

Game Center

Use the following questions in a game of your choice:

- Gideon had 32,000 men willing to fight the Midianites but God said:
 - "There are too many men."
 - "There are not enough men."
- How many left when God told Gideon, "Anyone who is afraid can leave"?
 - Nobody left
 - 22,000 left.

c) 2,000 left.

- When God said, "There are still too many" Which ones got to stay? Those that:
 - Lapped water like a dog
 - Kneeled down and drank
- What did Gideon's men NOT have to do win the battle?
 - Blow their trumpets
 - Break their jars so the light would shine
 - Shout
 - Draw their swords and charge
- True or False: The Midianites throughout the camp turned on each other with their swords.

Other Game Questions

- First, Gideon's army had 32,000 men in it. Why did 20,000 men go home? (The Lord said that the army was too big so Gideon told all of those who were afraid to go home.)
- Why didn't God allow Gideon to take all 32,000 of his men into battle? (He didn't want the Israelites to boast that they saved themselves by their own strength.)
- Which soldiers were allowed to leave and go back home? (Anyone that was timid or afraid to fight the Midianites.)
- How did Gideon choose the final 300 that would fight the Midianites? (By the way they drank water. If they cupped the water in their hands and lapped it up they stayed in the army. If they put their faces down in the water, they had to go home.)
- Why was it better for a soldier to lap water from his hands than to bend over the river? (He could still keep a look out for the enemy.)

6. What happened when Gideon went down to the Midianite camp to spy on them? (He heard two Midianites talking about a dream.)
7. How did God give Gideon assurance that He was going to give the Israelites the victory? (The Midianite man dreamed that a loaf of bread rolled down and smashed his tent.)
8. What did Gideon's army take with them into battle? (A trumpet, a clay jar, and a torch.)
9. Explain the battle plans. (1. Divide into 3 groups and surround the Midianite camp; 2. light the torches and hide them in the clay jar; 3. At Gideon's signal, (a) blow the trumpets, (b) break the jars, (c) show the torches, and (d) shout, "*The sword of the Lord and Gideon.*")
10. Why didn't Gideon and his men have to draw their swords? (When the Midianites heard the trumpets and saw the torches, they started fighting and killing each other and then they ran away.)

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