



Called

THOUGH GIDEON CONSIDERED HIMSELF INADEQUATE, GOD CALLED HIM TO DELIVER HIS PEOPLE FROM THE MIDIANITES.

JUDGES 6:1-4,7-16

We often compare ourselves to others. This rarely has a positive result. It either leads to pride because we think we are better than others, or it leads to discouragement because we believe others are better than us. It is especially confounding when God calls a person to serve Him in some capacity when someone else seems better fit to do it. God does this so that when the task is accomplished, God will receive the glory for it. Such was the case with Gideon.



When have you felt inadequate for a task? Where did you turn for help?

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

JUDGES 3:7–6:40

Chapter 3 introduces readers to the first three judges of Israel. The judges were men and women God raised up and empowered to deliver the Israelites from foreign oppressors and to establish order during their lifetimes. Verse 8 indicates a powerful Aramean king, Cushan-rishathaim, subjugated the Israelites for eight years. But the Lord raised Othniel, Caleb's nephew and son-in-law to defeat him. Israel enjoyed peace for forty years until Othniel's death.

When Othniel died, Israel rebelled against the Lord again. So the Lord gave Eglon, the king of Moab, power to form a coalition with Ammon and Amalek and attack and defeat Israel, resulting in his possession of the City of Palms (Jericho). Eglon's dominance over Israel lasted for eighteen years, until the Lord raised up Ehud of Benjamin who assassinated Eglon. Ehud led Israel in battle to defeat the Moabites. After that, Israel had peace for eighty years. Following Ehud, Shamgar became a judge and delivered Israel on his own by striking down six hundred Philistines with a cattle prod.

Chapter 4 recounts how Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord again, and that the Lord handed Israel over to the Canaanite King Jabin of Hazor. Then the Lord raised Deborah as the judge to save His people. Barak, a military leader in Israel, called upon Deborah to go with him to defeat the Canaanites. When the Canaanite commander, Sisera, tried to hide from the Israelites, a woman named Jael killed him while he slept. Then the land had peace for forty years. Chapter 5 records the song Deborah and Barak sang praising the Lord for saving Israel.

Judges 6 indicates the Israelites abandoned the Lord again, so the Lord raised up the Midianites, accompanied by the Amalekites and the Qedemites, who oppressed Israel for seven years. As a result, the Israelites were impoverished and cried out to the Lord. The Lord sent a prophet to remind them of how He had saved them out of Egypt, gave them the land of Canaan, and how they responded to Him with disobedience. After that, the Lord called Gideon to be the next judge to deliver Israel from their oppressors. Gideon's account is the largest section in the book of Judges.



As you read Judges 6:1-16, note how God was in control of everything that happened.

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

OPPRESSION (JUDG. 6:1-4,7-10)

¹ **The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD handed them over to Midian seven years,** ² **and they oppressed Israel. Because of Midian, the Israelites made hiding places for themselves in the mountains, caves, and strongholds.** ³ **Whenever the Israelites planted crops, the Midianites, Amalekites, and the people of the east came and attacked them.** ⁴ **They encamped against them and destroyed the produce of the land, even as far as Gaza. They left nothing for Israel to eat, as well as no sheep, ox, or donkey. [. . .]** ⁷ **When the Israelites cried out to him because of Midian,** ⁸ **the LORD sent a prophet to them. He said to them, “This is what the LORD God of Israel says: ‘I brought you out of Egypt and out of the place of slavery.** ⁹ **I rescued you from the power of Egypt and the power of all who oppressed you. I drove them out before you and gave you their land.** ¹⁰ **I said to you: I am the LORD your God. Do not fear the gods of the Amorites whose land you live in. But you did not obey me.’”**

VERSES 1-2

As before, the fickle Israelites *did what was evil in the sight of the LORD* (see 4:1). They once again abandoned the Lord and began worshiping other gods. And as before, the Lord handed them over to their enemies. This time it was the Midianites for seven years. It is important to recognize that this was the Lord’s demonstration of His hatred of sin and of His love for His people. (See Prov. 3:11-12.)

The Midianites were descendants of Abraham by his concubine, Keturah. They had been enemies of Israel since the time they opposed Israel when Moses led the nation into the region east of the Jordan in preparation to enter Canaan (Num. 25:1-18). Like swarming locusts, the Midianites often made decimating, swift strikes on their enemies using camels over long distances. They would leave little of value behind them and get away before any counterstrike could be made.

The effects of the Midianite raids on Israel were devastating. For seven years, the Israelites existed in constant fear as they resorted to living in *the mountains, caves, and strongholds* because of the terrifying lightning strikes of the Midianites that could happen

at any moment. The Israelites were always anxiously having to look over their backs.

VERSES 3-4

The Midianites had allies who joined them in these annihilating raids: the ***Amalekites, and the people of the east***. The *Amalekites* were descendants of Esau and longtime enemies of Israel. They resided in the southernmost region of Canaan in the wasteland of the Negev. *The people of the east* were nomadic people who resided on the edges of the Arabian desert. Both groups were eager to join the Midianites in crossing the Jordan to wreak havoc on the Israelites and plunder the riches of the fertile land of Canaan.

Verses 4-5 describe the tactics Israel's enemies employed. They crossed the Jordan River from the east with their livestock and camels and deployed to locations that gave them a tactical advantage. They allowed their herds to pasture as they launched swift attacks on their camels against the Israelites. Their strategy was comprehensive in both its reach and effect.

These hordes of invaders timed their raids to coincide with the time Israel's crops were ready to harvest. The marauders were like a great swarm of locusts, plundering everything they could and laying waste to everything else. They took all of Israel's food and means of producing more food by leaving them with ***no sheep, ox, or donkey***. Israel's economic base and its means for sustenance were eliminated.

All of these events fulfilled what God warned Israel would happen in Deuteronomy 28:50-51. Israel's covenant unfaithfulness resulted in the covenant curse. Verse 6 states that "Israel became poverty-stricken because of Midian, and the Israelites cried out to the LORD." Even then, their cry was a plea for help without any hint of repentance.

VERSES 7-9

When the Israelites cried out to the Lord because of the oppression of the Midianites, the Lord graciously ***sent a prophet to them***. This is reminiscent of Deborah (Judg. 4:4). But the mission of this prophet was different from Deborah's. God raised Deborah to be a judge to call on Israel's military to act. In contrast, this unnamed prophet did not come with the intent of mobilizing Israel to resist their enemies. However, God's sending of the prophet highlights His responsiveness to the plight of His people. While the prophet's name was unimportant, the message was of utmost

importance because he came bearing a message from God to His covenant people.

There are two parts to the Lord God's message to Israel. Repeatedly, the Israelites appear to have had poor memories when it came to all the wonderful things that the Lord had done for them. Therefore, the first part of the prophet's message in verses 8b-9 rehearses certain extraordinary deeds that God had already done for Israel.

The prophet began his message by stating, ***This is what the LORD God of Israel says***. His audience needed to know that he was the Lord's messenger with the Lord's message. Then, using emphatic language, the Lord reminded the Israelites of five things He had done for them. (1) I brought you up out of Egypt; (2) I delivered you from bondage; (3) I rescued you from your oppressors, the Egyptians; (4) I drove out the Canaanites before you; and (5) it was I who gave you the promised land. The Israelites needed to be reminded again of the wondrous deeds the Lord had done for them.

They were focused on getting relief when what they needed was repentance.

VERSE 10

The second part of God's message through His prophet was an indictment of Israel's unfaithfulness to the Lord. God reminded them that He said, ***I am the LORD your God***. This statement is reminiscent of when the Lord told Moses to tell the Israelites that "I AM WHO I AM" sent him to deliver them from Egypt (Ex. 3:14). In this title, the Lord was declaring, "I will always be who I have always been." Therefore, God was stating that as He has always been faithful to His covenant people, He would continue to be faithful to them.

Given everything the Lord had already done for Israel, they had every reason to be faithfully devoted to Him. Instead, they abandoned the Lord for the gods of the Amorites. The distress they were experiencing was because they ***did not obey*** the Lord. They were focused on getting relief when what they needed was repentance. One might think God's message to Israel was harsh, but nothing could be further from the truth. In His kindness, the Lord exposed their sin and the reasons for their distress, and in so doing gave them an opportunity to repent of their sin and

experience restoration. The people needed to recognize that rejecting their false gods and being faithfully devoted to the Lord was the only way they would experience true and lasting peace.

 **What outcomes should we anticipate if we live in disobedience to God?**

COMMISSION (JUDG. 6:11-14)

¹¹ **The angel of the LORD came, and he sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash, the Abiezrite. His son Gideon was threshing wheat in the winepress in order to hide it from the Midianites.** ¹² **Then the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said, “The LORD is with you, valiant warrior.”**

¹³ **Gideon said to him, “Please, my lord, if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened? And where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about? They said, ‘Hasn’t the LORD brought us out of Egypt?’ But now the LORD has abandoned us and handed us over to Midian.”** ¹⁴ **The LORD turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and deliver Israel from the grasp of Midian. I am sending you!”**

VERSES 11-12

Verse 11 introduces **Gideon**, the judge whom God chose to save Israel from the Midianites and their allies. Gideon’s name means “to mutilate” or “to hack.” It was a fitting name for one who would mutilate and hack down an altar to Baal. Some biblical scholars believe he previously had a different name, and that *Gideon* became his nickname or new name after what he did.

As the account begins, Gideon was **threshing wheat in the winepress** on his father’s farm in Ophrah **in order to hide it from the Midianites**. The winepress would have been a safer place than a more exposed threshing floor. This indicates that Gideon shared the same fear the rest of the Israelites had of the Midianites. The location of Ophrah is unknown, but given Gideon was from the tribe of Manasseh, it was probably located within its tribal allotment.

As Gideon was working, **the angel of the LORD** appeared and said, **The LORD is with you, valiant warrior**. This is an amazing statement. Gideon did not appear to be a *valiant warrior*.

He was hiding like everyone else just hoping to survive. Furthermore, given the hesitancy he will show when he receives his commission to rise up against the Midianites, it may have been frustrating for Gideon to be called *valiant warrior*. But the angel of the Lord knew that the Lord could and would take this timid man and make him into a valiant warrior.

The Lord could and would take this timid man and make him into a valiant warrior.

VERSES 13-14

Upon hearing the messenger's greeting, Gideon's frustrations with God rose to the surface. He asked, "If the Lord is with me, then why has He allowed all of these terrible things to happen to us? And if the Lord is so mighty, then where are all the wondrous things we have heard from our forefathers that He is capable of doing? How could the Lord bring us out of Egypt and then turn around and abandon us to the hateful Midianites?" Gideon's facts were correct, but his conclusion was wrong. He blamed God for the perilous situation when it was Israel that was responsible for it.

The angel appeared to ignore Gideon. He told Gideon, ***Go in the strength you have and deliver Israel from the grasp of Midian.*** Since the Lord was sending him, the Lord would give Gideon the strength to accomplish it. When the Lord calls His servants to do what is impossible for them, He will always instill within them everything they need to accomplish it.



How might our circumstances impact our response to God's calling?



KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Holy Spirit*

The Holy Spirit enlightens and empowers the believer and the church in worship, evangelism, and service. (See Judges 14:6; Acts 1:8.)

REASSURANCE (JUDG. 6:15-16)

¹⁵ He said to him, “Please, Lord, how can I deliver Israel? Look, my family is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father’s family.” ¹⁶ “But I will be with you,” the LORD said to him. “You will strike Midian down as if it were one man.”

VERSES 15-16

Gideon’s fear accentuated his sense of inadequacy. How could he *deliver Israel*? His family was the *weakest* in his clan, Manasseh. He was the *youngest* of his father’s children. From Gideon’s point of view, he did not have the credentials or the ability to deliver Israel. However, the Lord supplied Gideon everything he needed to accomplish God’s will, saying, *But I will be with you*. The Lord’s presence was everything Gideon would need to strike down the entire host of Midianites as if they were but *one man*. When God is with you, everyone else might as well be also.



How does the assurance of God’s presence negate our excuse of inadequacy?



BIBLE SKILL: *Do a word study to gain a better understanding of a passage.*

Scripture is full of “calling” experiences where God selected servants to carry out kingdom work. Study the following passages: Genesis 12:1-4; Exodus 3-4; 1 Kings 19:19-21; Isaiah 6:1-9; Jeremiah 1; Jonah 1; Luke 1:26-38; Mark 1:16-20; and Acts 9:1-9. Identify similarities and differences. Note the particular ways each person was called and how they responded. Examine your own calling from God. Have you experienced a specific call from Him? How have you responded?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + We can anticipate that when people turn their backs on God, they will experience undesirable consequences.
- + We can be encouraged to know that God calls unlikely people to do great things for Him.
- + Believers should trust God when being called upon to take a specific action for Him.



As a group, discuss how you might encourage one another to do great things for God. How can believers be encouraged by the truth that God calls unlikely people to do great things for Him?



Why do people, especially believers, who turn their backs on God experience undesirable consequences? What causes you to have difficulty trusting in God? How can doubting God be turned into trusting God?



Memorize Judges 6:16.

Prayer Needs
