

The Call of Gideon

Devotional Reading: [2 Corinthians 12:1–10](#)

Background Scripture: [Judges 6:1–27](#)

Judges 6:1–2, 7–16a

¹ The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. ² Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds.

⁷ When the Israelites cried out to the LORD because of Midian, ⁸ he sent them a prophet, who said, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ⁹ I rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians. And I delivered you from the hand of all your oppressors; I drove them out before you and gave you their land. ¹⁰ I said to you, ‘I am the LORD your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.’ But you have not listened to me.”

¹¹ The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. ¹² When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, “The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.”

¹³ “Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?’ But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.”

¹⁴ The LORD turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?”

¹⁵ “Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.”

^{16a} The LORD answered, “I will be with you.”

Key Text

The LORD said to [Gideon], “Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die.”

—[Judges 6:23](#)

God’s Exceptional Choice

Unit 2: Out of Slavery to Nationhood

Lessons 5–9

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Describe the historical context of Israel’s oppression.
2. Articulate the presupposition behind Gideon’s first question.
3. Determine one or more ways to avoid false thinking regarding whether God is *with* or *not with* him or her.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Getting into Action
- B. Lesson Context

I. Midianite Oppression (Judges 6:1–2)

- A. Punishment (v. 1)
- B. Hiding (v. 2)

Fight, Flight, or Freeze?

II. Divine Deliverance (Judges 6:7–16a)

- A. Prophetic Warning (vv. 7–10)
- B. Angelic Assurance (vv. 11–12)
- C. Gideon’s Response (v. 13)
- D. God’s Clarification (vv. 14–16a)

An Unexpected Christmas Sermon

Conclusion

- A. From Why to What’s Next
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

How to Say It

Abiezrite	<i>A-by-ez-rite.</i>
Amorites	<i>Am-uh-rites.</i>
Gilead	<i>Gil-ee-ud (G as in get).</i>
Habakkuk	<i>Huh-back-kuk.</i>
Maccabees	<i>Mack-uh-bees.</i>
Manasseh	<i>Muh-nass-uh.</i>

Ophrah *Ahf-ruh*.
Sivan *See-vahn*.
Zechariah *Zek-uh-rye-uh*.
Zephaniah *Zef-uh-nye-uh*.

Introduction

A. Getting into Action

Rather than sitting at home and worrying during the pandemic of 2020, retirees Ted and Ellen decided to act. Many families in their community had been unemployed or underemployed as a result of the pandemic, so Ted and Ellen “adopted” seven families and brought them food each week. Some of the food was from a local food bank and some from their own kitchen.

This couple took the initiative to do something for others. While food matters, human connection matters more. Their work and presence brought a bit of God’s deliverance to those who needed it.

When we read the “big” stories of the Bible, we may be tempted to imagine that God works only or primarily through dramatic events. But countless “small” stories of generosity and faith have occurred through the centuries as God has worked through the hands and feet of believers (compare [Mark 9:41](#); [12:42](#)). When people of faith answer God’s call, the blessings of unexpected opportunities to serve follow.

B. Lesson Context

The book of Judges features accounts of a series of leaders (“judges”) who arose to rescue Israel from foreign oppressions during the era 1380 to 1050 BC. These stories fit together to paint a picture of a dreary pattern: the Israelites sinned, God punished them with foreign oppression, the Israelites repented, a deliverer came, and peace followed. Gideon, the deliverer-judge of today’s lesson, was the fifth of perhaps 14 judges; he served in that capacity during the first half of the twelfth century BC. The Midianites, the oppressors whom Gideon was to confront in today’s text, came from what is now northern Saudi Arabia or southeastern Jordan. They had created a sophisticated society based on trade across the Arabian Peninsula with the cultures around its perimeter (Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and Mesopotamia; compare [Genesis 37:28](#)). They were not barbarians. The Midianites shared a history with Israel (see [Exodus 18:1](#); etc.), a history that included conflict (see [Numbers 25:14–18](#); [Psalm 83:9–12](#)).

I. Midianite Oppression ([Judges 6:1–2](#))

A. Punishment (v. 1)

1. The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and for seven years he gave them into the

hands of the Midianites.

The book of Judges often begins the accounts of deliverer-judges by referring to the *evil* that the nation of Israel had engaged in (Judges 3:7, 12; 4:1; 10:6; 13:1). Their evil actions are the first part of a pattern of sin—servitude—supplication—salvation that structures most of the book of Judges. The length of the suffering of *seven years* is relatively short when compared to oppressions lasting 8 (3:8), 18 (3:14; 10:8), 20 (4:3); and 40 years (13:1).

The nature of the evil that *the Israelites did* is not specified. But in other instances where the phrase “evil in the eyes of the Lord” occurs, the evil is idol worship (Judges 2:11–13; 3:7; 10:6).

What Do You Think?

How can you tell whether hard times are God’s judgment for sin or simply the result of living in a fallen world?

Digging Deeper

How will your reactions differ between the two?

B. Hiding (v. 2)

2. Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds.

The land of Israel features large and small *caves*, both natural and man-made. When people felt vulnerable, they might flee to one of them for refuge (see 1 Samuel 13:6; 1 Kings 18:4; compare Revelation 6:15; compare the nonbiblical 2 Maccabees 6:11). *Strongholds* are fortresses with difficult access (1 Samuel 23:14, 19; Ezekiel 33:27).

Fight, Flight, or Freeze?

I saw my sister’s hair spread on the pillow behind her on the couch. I was angry because of an insult she had hurled at me, so I grabbed a handful of hair and pulled. Incensed, she jumped up and lunged at my own hair, pulling a handful. I screamed, and a fight ensued. This was a rare occurrence since we usually got along well. For some reason, we overreacted, and we had the biggest fight of our lives.

The fight did not last long. I knew if I told my parents about the fight, we would both get in trouble. I did not want to be in trouble myself, and deep down I did not want her to get punished. So, confronted with the options of fight, flight, or freeze, I chose the middle option—running away and hiding in the other room.

We may struggle to know whether fight, flight, or freeze is best; the Scriptures offer many right and wrong examples of all three choices (compare and contrast Genesis 19:17, 26; 27:43; Exodus 14:13; Psalm 46:10; John 18:10–11; Hebrews 6:18; etc.). One thing we know: God’s Word guides us in these choices (Matthew 10:23; etc.). But one other issue comes before all that: How do we ensure that the opposition we face is not God’s response to our own sin?

II. Divine Deliverance (Judges 6:7–16a)

A. Prophetic Warning (vv. 7–10)

7. When the Israelites cried out to the LORD because of Midian,

The pattern of deliverance involved Israel pleading for help. The prayers may have resembled the petitions found elsewhere in Scripture (see [Psalm 44](#); [Lamentations 5](#)). In such compositions, the writers both complained to God about their situations and asked for help in relieving them.



Sheet 6—Fall 2022, *Adult Resources, Standard Lesson Quarterly* Curriculum

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Lesson 7

Visual for [Lesson 7](#). Show this image and discuss how being in God's will allows believers to live without fear.

8. he sent them a prophet, who said, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

The 17 prophetic books of the Old Testament do not always state the precise occasion that prompted their prophetic oracles. However, some texts do speak of prophets appearing on the scene

in order to warn their audience or to call them to action (examples: [1 Samuel 2:27–36](#); [1 Kings 13:1–10](#)).

The unnamed *prophet* in the verse before us, however, brings a word of challenge that will ultimately bring about the people’s deliverance. Prophets were not all that unusual in the life of Israel. God had spoken through Moses regarding his will that the people listen to his prophet ([Deuteronomy 18:14–22](#)). God used both men and women (see [Exodus 15:20](#); [Judges 4:4](#); [2 Kings 22:14](#)) to serve as prophets and declare his directives for his people.

This prophet’s message is grounded in Israel’s core story: the story of the exodus. The phrase *land of slavery* always shows up in stories about Israel’s departure *out of Egypt* ([Exodus 13:3, 14](#); [20:2](#); [Deuteronomy 5:6](#); [6:12](#); [7:8](#); [8:14](#); [13:5, 10](#); [Joshua 24:17](#); etc.). By the time of the events of today’s text, the exodus was more than 250 years in the past. Generations had come and gone. But the Israelites did not need a reminder of what it was like to be oppressed—they were being oppressed by the Midianites at the time! Rather, the prophet was reminding the people of Israel of the one who had delivered their ancestors.

9. “I rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians. And I delivered you from the hand of all your oppressors; I drove them out before you and gave you their land.

The deliverance had two parts: exodus and settlement. God’s gift of the *land* ([Exodus 23:31](#); etc.) had made it possible for the people to enjoy their relationship with God in the rhythms of holy life.

Appeal to the story of the settlement appears also in [Amos 2:9–11](#). According to that prophet, God had driven out the pagan population in order to make possible the delivered people’s place in their land. The Israelites, however, ultimately imitated the people they had displaced by engaging in idol worship, thereby disowning their redeemer (see commentary on [Judges 6:1](#), above).

10. “I said to you, ‘I am the LORD your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.’ But you have not listened to me.”

The foundational story of the exodus always should have pointed the Israelites toward loyalty to *the Lord*. His displacement of *the Amorites* to make room for the Israelites should have done so as well. Amorites are mentioned dozens of times in the Old Testament, along with numerous other “-ites” whose lands were given to Israel. The Amorites seemed to have been particularly sinful, in light of [Genesis 15:16](#) (compare [2 Kings 21:11](#)). Whether the writer is referring to Amorites specifically or just using that designation to refer to all the dispossessed “-ites” in general is uncertain.

Since the Lord had demonstrated his power in forming and settling Israel as a nation, it made no sense to *worship* other gods. But for ancient peoples, worship was less about matters of pro and con arguments than it was about not leaving any gods accidentally unworshipped (examples: [2 Kings 17:24–41](#); [Acts 17:23](#)). The idea of worshipping one and only one God, no matter where one lived, was highly unusual. This outlook is reflected in the fact that the plural word *gods* occurs more than 200 times in the Old Testament.

But commonly accepted cultural practices do not necessarily have God’s approval. Idolatry was an act of disloyalty. When Israel adopted pagan cultural practices, they abandoned the religion that Moses had led them in decades earlier.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways to warn people of God’s judgment while “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15)?

Digging Deeper

What do you do if people then dismiss you as being judgmental?

B. Angelic Assurance (vv. 11–12)

11a. The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah

The second scene in this story involves a different sort of messenger, a heavenly being, who appears near a certain *oak* tree. Large trees—whether solitary or in a grove—were often used as landmarks and significant places for the people (Genesis 12:6; 18:1; 35:4; Joshua 19:33; Judges 4:11; etc.). They also served as shade and so places of rest and conversation for people who had worked all day and wanted a break. For various references to oak trees specifically, see Joshua 24:26; 2 Samuel 18:9–10; 1 Kings 13:14; Ezekiel 6:13.

There are two biblical towns named Ophrah. One was located in the tribal territory of Benjamin, about a dozen miles north-northeast of the city later known as Jerusalem (Joshua 18:21–24). The other *Ophrah*, the one under consideration here, was in the tribal territory of Manasseh; some students propose that the name is another designation for the town of Gilead mentioned in Judges 10:17. In any case, this is “Ophrah of the Abiezrites” (Judges 6:24; also see 6:11b, next).

11b. that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites.

This half verse reveals that the oak tree under which the heavenly messenger was sitting was on the property of father *Joash* which would pass to *son Gideon*. To be an *Abiezrite* was to be of the tribe Manasseh (see Joshua 17:2). For Gideon to be threshing *wheat* is a time indicator: the wheat harvest in this region occurs in the month of Sivan, which is late May or early June. The *winepress* won’t be used for its intended purpose until the grapes ripen later in the summer months.

Gideon could have been threshing either by striking sheaves with a flail or by having oxen pull a threshing sledge on a hard outdoor surface (compare 1 Chronicles 21:20–23). Threshing is different from winnowing, the latter occurring after the former, although they occur in the same place (compare Ruth 3:2; Matthew 3:12; Luke 3:17). That Gideon felt the need to hide the wheat indicates the oppressive treatment from *the Midianites* regarding Israel’s crops (Judges 6:3–6).

12. When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, “The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.”

The heavenly messenger greeted Gideon not on the basis of his past achievements (as far as we know), but as a foreshadowing of what he was to become: a *mighty warrior*. The statement that *the Lord is with you* is not a cliché; it occurs rather rarely in the Bible. The only other place a heavenly messenger uttered this phrase unconditionally is in Luke 1:28, to Mary. The phrase was used presumptively by Nathan the prophet (2 Samuel 7:3). The longer, conditional use of the phrase is found in 2 Chronicles 15:2: “The Lord is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you.”

More common is the assurance that “God is with you” ([Genesis 21:22](#); [1 Samuel 10:7](#); [1 Chronicles 17:2](#)). Combining the words *God* and *Lord* in such an assurance occurs elsewhere (see [22:18](#); [28:20](#); [Zephaniah 3:17](#)).

C. Gideon’s Response (v. 13)

13. “Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?’ But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.”

Gideon’s cynical response reflected a sense of despair as he pointed out the gap between his then-current experience and the age-old stories of deliverance. The reader knows that the Midianite oppression was the due punishment brought on by Israel’s sins (see [Judges 6:1](#), above). Did Gideon not realize this?

This sort of protest appears often in the Bible as various people wonder about God’s apparent lack of involvement or concern (examples: [Joshua 7:7](#); [Lamentations 2](#); [Habakkuk 1:2–3](#)). Gideon’s question should not strike us as rude, much less unfaithful, but as a heartfelt attempt to make sense of his experiences.

Questions about the message of predecessors seem especially important. Moses encouraged parents to teach their children about the experiences of deliverance ([Exodus 13:14–16](#)). Israel’s poetic literature proclaimed the importance of remembering God’s deeds ([Psalm 78:1–8](#)). Gideon has trusted the message of his ancestors. At the time, however, he could not resolve the apparent disconnect between “then” and his “now.”

D. God’s Clarification (vv. 14–16a)

14. The LORD turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?”

Gideon’s call to become the deliverer bears similarities to those of Moses ([Exodus 3:1–4:17](#)) and Joshua ([Joshua 1:1–9](#)).

The reference to *the strength you have* seems strange. What so-called strength did Gideon have? The text says nothing of his political intelligence or past military experience. His skills as a farmer might have prepared him for the physical rigors of warfare, but little else.

Perhaps the answer lies in the previous verse. Gideon knew the ancient story of Israel’s deliverance as told in the exodus story. He dared to question God as to why his present realities seemed so different. The strength that Gideon desired would fill him as he went where God sent him (see [Judges 6:34](#)).

An Unexpected Christmas Sermon

I like shaking people out of long-held and complacent expectations. One time when I did so was in using [Judges 6:14](#) as a text for a Christmas sermon. For those who expected a sermon from [Matthew](#)

1, 2, or [Luke 2](#), the shock was rather total!

My impetus for using [Judges 6:14](#) at Christmas was the oft-heard lament that Christ was being taken out of Christmas. The greeting “Merry Christmas” was being replaced with “Happy Holidays.” Stores stocked increasing numbers of lawn displays of Santa Claus and decreasing numbers of Nativity scenes. Christmas was ever more becoming commercialized. It seemed as if the truth of Immanuel, meaning “God with us” ([Matthew 1:23](#); compare [Judges 6:12](#)), was disappearing by means of secular commercialism.

My answer and challenge to the problem was an extended application of [Judges 6:14](#): Go in your might and save your Christmas! Begin first at home: prioritize the placement of Nativity scenes. Replace expectations of receiving things with gratitude of having already received. Identify and avoid provocations that cause the season of love to become a season of shove.

The challenge of [Judges 6:14](#) can apply to many areas of Christian life. The most important area right now is the one where you need to set aside the complaint of “If the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us?” ([Judges 6:13](#)). Otherwise, you won’t be able to hear God’s declaration “Go in the strength you have” and solve the problem.

—R. L. N.

What Do You Think?

What unused spiritual gifts has God given you that you can begin to use this week?

Digging Deeper

Would you seek the counsel of a fellow Christian before doing so? Why, or why not?

15. “Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.”

Gideon objected to the call on the basis of insignificant lineage (compare [Isaiah 6:5](#); [Jeremiah 1:6](#)). A leader in antiquity needed family connections and alliances with other families. When Gideon pointed to the insignificance of his *family*, he was not simply being modest. He knew that political leaders needed a power base of connections.

What Do You Think?

What task is God giving you today that will stretch you beyond your comfort zone?

Digging Deeper

When was a time that service to God caused you to place more trust in him than in yourself?

16a. The LORD answered, “I will be with you.”

The explicit promise *I will be with you* is the strongest assurance Gideon can receive! This promise is all the more striking given the phrase’s rarity in the Old Testament (see [Genesis 26:3](#); [31:3](#); [Exodus](#)

3:12; Joshua 1:5; 1 Kings 11:38; Isaiah 43:2). These can be contrasted with the opposite, the Lord's promise elsewhere to *not* be present (see Deuteronomy 1:42; Numbers 14:43; Joshua 7:12).

What Do You Think?

When sensing a call to action, how can you know that the calling is really from God?

Digging Deeper

Which Scripture passages help you most to answer that question?

Conclusion

A. From Why to What's Next

Today's text begins an account of how Israel experienced deliverance from an oppression. It draws on the most important Israelite story—the exodus—by pointing out the gap between the memory of the story and the present experience. God had delivered in the past, but he seemed no longer willing to do so. As with many stories of the call of prophets or kings, the hero here (Gideon) gets to express the confusion that the readers must also feel and that we may still feel when our beliefs and our experiences seem to clash.

When that happens, we can get stuck brooding in an endless cycle of asking why, as Gideon did (compare Jeremiah 5:19; 13:22; 16:10; etc.). In that regard, it is important to note what is missing in Judges 6:14: the Lord did not answer Gideon's why question of Judges 6:13. We are answerable to the Lord, not he to us (compare Job 38–41). Our why questions will not always be answered; sometimes the Lord will only tell us what's next. Sometimes trouble can result when we try to run ahead of the Lord by assuming we know what's next (examples: Numbers 14:39–45; Joshua 7:1–12). Gideon also seems to have allowed himself to fall into this trap later (Judges 8:24–28).

Yet on balance Gideon was attentive to the Lord's will. He refused to become king, insisting that God alone should rule Israel (Judges 8:22–23). Like all of us, Gideon experienced both successes and failures. When he heard the call to act, he stated his doubts openly, asking God for answers. But when God did not answer those questions, Gideon wanted miraculous signs (see 6:17–22, 36–40).

It's been said that there are two ways to learn things: by wisdom and by experience. Wisdom is when we learn from the mistakes of others; experience is when we learn from our own mistakes. The life of Gideon is recorded that we might learn from his successes and failures (compare Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11; 2 Timothy 3:16). While his call differs from that of Christians, Gideon's life still has much to teach us. The Lord still calls us to serve. He still says that he is with us (Matthew 28:19–20). But are *we* with *him*?

B. Prayer

Oh God who warns and challenges, raise us up to be your hands and feet in your saving work. May our questions reflect direction as you remind us of your presence. We pray in the name of your Son,

Jesus. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Let God work through your faith.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Distribute in random order 10 sheets of paper (you prepare), each displaying one letter of the word *insecurity*. Ask recipients to stand before the class and display their letters. Encourage other class members to voice suggestions regarding the order of the letters. (Smaller classes can distribute two sheets to each participant, who hold one in each hand.)

After the correct order of letters is established, write the letters on the board in correct order in a vertical column. Ask the class to work with you to create an acrostic, where letters of horizontally written words intersect with the letters in the vertical column.

Take a poll by asking: “How many of you remember a time when you felt insecure?” Ask for a show of hands. Then ask, “How many of you experienced a situation when insecurity made the problem worse?” Ask for another show of hands.

Lead to Bible study by saying, “Today we’ll look at a Bible story showing how God called someone who may have been characterized by one or more of the words in our acrostic—or maybe not!”

Into the Word

Divide the class into four groups, designating them **Israelites Group / Prophet Group / Angel Group / Gideon Group**. Ask all groups to listen as today’s text is read-aloud to discover and take notes on what the namesake(s) of their groups said and did. After the reading, have participants work within their groups to write a monologue spoken by a representative of each group that retells what their namesakes said and did. Instruct that in the retelling, groups can use their “sanctified imaginations” to fill in gaps with additional material that is consistent with the nature of the character(s) they will be portraying.

After several minutes, call for monologues to be delivered to the whole class. After each monologue, allow the rest of the class to ask questions.

Write *Surprised by God* on the board as a stimulus for whole-class discussion as you ask, “How does that phrase make a good title for the story of Gideon?”

Into Life

Distribute copies of a handout (you prepare) that features these three column headings:

Tough Situation! / God's Work? / God's Silence?

Have the following instructions printed on the handout: “Jot down a word or phrase under each heading to describe a situation when you prayed for God to intervene. Note whether you saw how God worked or that he seemed silent.” State that they have a maximum of one minute to finish, and no one will be put on the spot to reveal what they’ve written. After the minute, allow sharing within groups for those who desire to do so.

Then pose this question for whole-class discussion: “When we as Christians go into action to help resolve tough situations of our country, how do we know whether God is *with* or *not with* us?” (If you think the question will cause the discussion to turn political, rephrase it to minimize that possibility.) After responses, ask, “What about tough situations we are facing as a congregation?” Following the ensuing discussion, ask members to return to their groups to discuss personal situations. As they ponder various courses of action or inaction, how do they determine whether God is *with* or *not with* them?

Option. Close the class by distributing copies of the “Help!” exercise on the activity page, which you can download. Allow one minute for participants to complete as indicated individually before voluntary sharing. Or use this activity as a take-home prayer prompt for the week ahead.

Option. Distribute copies of the “Called to Rescue” crossword puzzle on the activity page as a take-home.