

June 11  
Lesson 2

# GIDEON

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 83:1-12, 18

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Judges 6-8

## JUDGES 6:11-18

<sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, “The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.”

<sup>13</sup> “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.”

<sup>14</sup>  
The



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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?”

<sup>15</sup> “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.”

<sup>16</sup> The LORD answered, “I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive.”

<sup>17</sup> Gideon replied, “If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me. <sup>18</sup> Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you.”

And the LORD said, “I will wait until you return.”

## KEY VERSE

*When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, “The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.”—  
Judges 6:12*

## LESSON AIMS

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

1. Describe the encounter between Gideon and the angel of the Lord.
2. Explain Gideon's three questions as they relate to their historical context.
3. Identify one struggle of life in which he or she views self as "the least" in being able to overcome it, and write a prayer for the Lord's strength to do so.

## LESSON OUTLINE

### Introduction

- A. Against All Odds
- B. Lesson Background

### I. Big Trouble ([Judges 6:11-13](#))

- A. Cowering Warrior ([vv. 11, 12](#))
- B. Missing Miracles ([v. 13](#))

### II. Weak Tribe ([Judges 6:14-16](#))

- A. Promised Presence ([v. 14](#))
- B. Puny Pedigree ([v. 15](#))  
*"I'm Not OK?"*
- C. Sure Success ([v. 16](#))

### III. Security Sought ([Judges 6:17, 18](#))

- A. Asking for a Sign ([v. 17](#))  
*Seeing Angels and Seeking Signs*
- B. Receiving Assurance ([v. 18](#))

### Conclusion

- A. What's Your Excuse?
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Against All Odds

The odds seemed to have been stacked against her, having been born into slavery in Maryland in 1822. As a child, she was often beaten and whipped by various masters. She received a head injury when a slave owner threw a heavy metal weight at another slave and hit her by mistake. The result was a lifelong struggle with epilepsy, dizziness, and pain.

Who would *not* expect such a person to live and die in obscurity? But that was not the case for Harriet Tubman! She escaped from slavery, but risked recapture as she returned to lead numerous missions to rescue approximately 70 enslaved family and friends. Against all odds and led by a strong Christian faith, Harriet Tubman overcame slavery, injury, abuse, and disability. History now knows her as an abolitionist, a humanitarian, and a Union spy who helped guide a raid that freed 700 slaves during the American Civil War.

Very few people who live in Western democracies will ever face the challenges of a Harriet Tubman. Even so, we all experience what it's like to have the odds stacked against us at one time or another. Today we will look at a judge of Israel who seemed to have little chance of success—until God stepped in!

### B. Lesson Background

The lessons for this month feature four of the six major judges in the book of Judges. The [previous lesson](#) was about Deborah and Barak. This study moves directly to the next judge—Gideon, a member of the tribe of Manasseh. The final verse of [Judges 5](#) states that Israel had rest for 40 years after Barak defeated Sisera and the Canaanites. During that time the memory of the previous oppression began to fade. A new generation arose and began to worship other gods.

Again God allowed others to oppress Israel—Midianites, Amalekites, etc. ([Judges 6:3](#)). The Midianites were descendants of Abraham and Keturah ([Genesis 25:2](#)). When Moses fled from Egypt, he settled in Midian and married a daughter of a priest in Midian ([Exodus 2:15, 16, 21](#)).

The Amalekites had Esau as their progenitor ([Genesis 36:10, 16](#)). The Amalekites attacked the Israelites after they left Egypt and as they were approaching Sinai ([Exodus 17:8-16](#)). That was the battle when Israel would prevail only when Moses raised his hands. After the battle Moses stated that there would be war against Amalek from generation to generation.

These two groups, plus “other eastern peoples” (a general name for eastern groups of Arabs), came against Israel in great numbers. For seven years they came and destroyed the crops and livestock of the Israelites ([Judges 6:1, 4](#)).

After seven years the Israelites cried to the Lord ([Judges 6:7](#)). The Lord sent a prophet to remind Israel of what he had done for them when they came out of Egypt and to rebuke them for their disobedience ([vv. 8-10](#)). This condemnation by God’s prophet is immediately before the text for today. God then moved to prepare another judge to deliver his penitent people.

It had been 47 years since Deborah and Barak, with God’s help, subdued the Canaanites: 40 years of peace ([Judges 5:31](#)), followed by the 7 years of oppression ([6:1](#)). The approximate date for the events of this lesson has been determined to be about 1175 BC.

## I. Big Trouble

([JUDGES 6:11-13](#))

### A. Cowering Warrior ([vv. 11, 12](#))

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

The first verse of the lesson provides several facts. It contains three personalities, explanations about them, two helps to identify the place of the event, the strange action that one of them is doing, and why he is doing it.

The *angel of the Lord* is the first person mentioned. The word *angel* may also be given as *messenger*, so a messenger of the Lord comes and sits *under the oak tree in Ophrah*. This town is in the territory of Manasseh ([Judges 6:15](#)). Later information about it is very negative ([8:27; 9:5](#)).

There are dozens of references in the Old Testament to “the angel of the Lord” or “the angel of God” ([Judges 6:20](#)). The first is [Genesis 16:7](#), in the days of Abraham. This being makes the ground holy, as in [Exodus 3:2-5](#) when Moses is first called to lead Israel from Egypt, or when he is called “the commander of the Lord’s army” in [Joshua 5:15](#). This being receives worship and sacrifices. The terminology may change to “commander of the army of the Lord” ([Joshua 5:14](#)). The “angel of the Lord” appearing in [Exodus 3:2](#) says “I am ... God” in [Exodus 3:6](#). The angel of the Lord is mentioned in chapters 2, 5, 6, and 13 in the book of Judges.

Many have suggested that this is actually Jesus, God’s divine messenger who appears as a man in the Old Testament era and then comes in the New Testament as one who experiences the totality of life in the flesh. In this regard, “messenger” would be intended, since angels do not receive worship ([Revelation 22:8, 9](#); compare [Hebrews 1:1-9](#)).

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

*Joash the Abiezrite* and his family are of the tribe of Manasseh ([Judges 6:15](#)). Manasseh was the older son of Joseph in Egypt ([Genesis 41:51](#)), and Abiezer was a former leader in the tribe (see [Joshua 17:2](#)).

The third personality in this verse is Gideon, a son of Joash. [Judges 8:19](#) indicates that Gideon had brothers and that they had been killed by the Midianites. This could have caused him to have differing emotions about the invaders—anger, vengeance, and a certain fear for what they could do to him and others.

In this verse Gideon’s task is to thresh wheat. Threshing is usually accomplished by using a sledge pulled by animals. Gideon’s method is different, for he is hiding. The word used means that he is using a stick to beat the wheat. The result is the same—the seed is separated from the chaff and straw.

His place of work is strange—a *winepress*. This type of winepress is made by excavating rock to form a recessed area where grapes could be smashed by walking on them. The juice then runs in a trough to a collecting vat. Gideon is hiding so that the Midianites will have difficulty seeing him. It may be imagined that he is muffling the sound as much as he can.

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

To say that *the angel of the Lord* appears means that he makes his presence known, not that he has been invisible for a while as he sat under the oak tree. Gideon is absorbed in his work, and the noise of his beating the grain stalks can drown out the sounds of someone nearby.

The greeting to Gideon has two parts: a statement that *the Lord is with* him and that Gideon is *mighty*. Concerning the latter, the majority view is that he will become such a person because of what is about to happen. The minority opinion is that Gideon has already distinguished himself in combat, given that he is able to recruit a sizable army ([Judges 7:3](#)). The angel’s statement carries with it a humorous contradiction—that a man of such courage is hiding.

#### *What Do You Think?*

What are some ways Christians send contradictory, mixed messages to the culture at large?  
How do we fix this problem?

#### Talking Points for Your Discussion

Concerning mixed messages about Christianity in general

Concerning mixed messages about individual Christians

Two Midianite leaders affirm later that Gideon resembles a prince ([Judges 8:18](#)). He therefore has physical features that help him to be a leader among men.

### B. Missing Miracles (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 begins to question the stranger. Little does Gideon know that he is trying to debate God! This is indicated by the first *lord* in the verse. The four letters are not all capital letters; the word involved could easily be translated as *sir* as the same Hebrew word is in [Genesis 23:6](#). By contrast, as Gideon uses the word LORD (all capital letters), he is referring to Yahweh (three times), the sacred name of God. This is explained more fully in the front matter of many Bibles.

Gideon’s questions reveal that he is aware of the glorious history of Israel. In his family, these things are being told by the older generation to the younger. Gideon knows about the bondage in Egypt and the miraculous events that followed. This includes the 10 plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea, the giving of the Law, the 40 years in the wilderness, and the crossing of the Jordan when it was in flood stage.

After the questions, Gideon makes a statement that is really seeking an answer for the oppression that he, his family, and his people are enduring. Gideon has heard about the wonderful works of God in the past, but now it seems to him that God is no longer concerned about his people.

#### *What Do You Think?*

How can we resist thinking that God has abandoned us? What will happen if we don’t?

#### Talking Points for Your Discussion

In cases that affect you alone

When feelings of abandonment swirl around your group (family, Sunday school class, etc.)

When feelings of abandonment sweep across the nation

## II. Weak Tribe

([JUDGES 6:14-16](#))

### A. Promised Presence (v. 14)

**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?”**

The speaker is now not referred to as an angel, but as *the Lord* (again, Yahweh). We notice immediately that the Lord does not answer Gideon’s questions. Instead, he looks at Gideon and commands that he *go in the strength* he has. Gideon is the one who will *save Israel* from the Midianite oppressors.

Then God asks a question of his own: *Am I not sending you?* This question has the force of a command. Obedience to this command is necessary, for the command is from the God of Israel, the only God there is.

#### *What Do You Think?*

What have you found to be the most reliable indicators of God’s will? Why?

#### Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding bigger “callings”

Regarding smaller, daily activities

Considering the cautions of [Job 42:7](#); [Proverbs 15:22](#); [James 4:13-17](#); [1 John 4:1](#); [Revelation 22:18, 19](#)

### B. Puny Pedigree (v. 15)

**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 does not like the oppression, but he does not think much of the idea of being the leader that lifts it either! So he responds with a question and statements about his unsuitability for such an important task. He suggests that he is a nobody. Gideon is not the first person to resist God's call to leadership. Moses had similar reactions when charged to deliver Israel from years of oppression in Egypt (see [Exodus 3:10-4:17](#)).

### ***"I'M NOT OK?"***

The book *I'm OK, You're OK* hit the *New York Times* best-seller list in 1972 and remained there for two years. This was an early book promoting what became known as Transactional Analysis. The book's thesis is that relational problems can be addressed if we analyze our interactions with one another as transactions.

The author speaks of four life positions one takes in relationship transactions. They are (1) I'm not OK, You're OK, (2) I'm not OK, You're not OK, (3) I'm OK, You're not OK, and (4) I'm OK, You're OK. When God called Gideon to serve him, Gideon responded in the *I'm not OK, You're OK* position. He listed reason after reason why he was not good enough to answer God's call. Although this may sound like humility, it showed that Gideon was leaving God out of the transaction.

In essence, God responded from the *I'm OK, You're OK* position. This position affirmed what Gideon could accomplish with divine help.

Most of us have areas in our self-perception in which we think *I'm not OK*. However, our relationship with God in Christ helps us realize that even though we are sinners, we have become new creatures. We are capable of doing whatever God calls us to do with him. He does not call us to service only to abandon us later! —C. R. B.

#### *What Do You Think?*

What are some ways to overcome feelings of inadequacy when sensing God's call to a task?

#### Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding the content of prayer

Regarding the counsel sought of others

Regarding examples from Scripture

Other

## **C. Sure Success (v. 16)**

**<sup>16</sup> The LORD answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive."**

The phrasing *all ... leaving none alive* is an interpretive rendering of what would be "as one man" if the underlying Hebrew were translated rigidly word for word. Either way, in the battle to come it will seem as if Gideon is winning it all by himself! (The *you* in *you will strike down* is singular.) Assurance of victory is most welcome, but should there be some type of sign or proof that the source of this prediction is God?

## **III. Security Sought**

(JUDGES 6:17, 18)

### **A. Asking for a Sign (v. 17)**

**<sup>17</sup> Gideon replied, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me."**

Gideon wants to know of a certainty that what he is concluding is true. Before he undertakes the difficult and dangerous task of gathering an army, he needs to know that what he is getting himself into has a good chance of succeeding. His politeness is shown in the phrase *if now I have found favor in your eyes* that prefaces his request for a *sign*.

Gideon's caution does not necessarily demonstrate a lack of faith. The somewhat aggressive nature of his responses thus far seems to indicate that the guest has the appearance of just an ordinary man (contrast [Judges 13:6](#)). Gideon may be assuming that the messenger is a prophet, but still he wants a sign. Even Moses expressed a concern that the people of Israel would not believe him, so God gave him signs that he could employ to show that the source of his commission was none other than God himself ([Exodus 4:1-9](#)).

### **SEEING ANGELS AND SEEKING SIGNS**

Many people testify that they have experienced the presence of so-called guardian angels. Some even claim to have video proof! An Internet search for "angel appearances," etc., will result in numerous hits. One video shows a figure with glowing hands appearing from nowhere to rescue a bicyclist who was hit broadside in an intersection by a truck. Immediately after the apparent collision, the figure and the victim disappear from the point of impact, only to be seen several yards away with the crash victim getting off a stretcher and limping to the curb. The

figure that helped him is walking away.

Another site tells the story of a Christian man who survived a “10,000 pound truck axle” that crushed him while two angels came to his aid to save his life. He experienced what is said to be a “miraculous recovery.” Of course, it is possible for digital footage to be faked. Yet however we explain such matters, numerous biblical passages confirm angelic appearances.

In Gideon’s case, the angel’s presence gave him the needed courage to go into battle for the Lord. But does that mean it’s wise to anticipate, or even request, a visit of an angel? There is no indication that Gideon did either!

For those today seeking angelic visitation as a sign of some kind, the words of Jesus serve to remind that “a wicked and adulterous generation looks for a sign,” but the only sign he offered the people was “the sign of Jonah” ([Matthew 16:4](#)). Our faith is strengthened by the ever-present reality of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, not by a once-in-a-lifetime visit by an angel. —C. R. B.

#### *What Do You Think?*

In addition to studying Scripture together, how would you counsel a fellow Christian who claims to receive signs from God?

#### Talking Points for Your Discussion

When the claim involves receiving miraculous signs

When the claim involves receiving non-miraculous signs

## B. Receiving Assurance (v. 18)

**18. “Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you.”**

**And the LORD said, “I will wait until you return.”**

Gideon seeks assurance that his unexpected visitor will not make an unexpected exit, and the request is honored. The messenger promises to remain until Gideon returns.

The word that Gideon uses for his special gift (*my offering*) usually refers to a grain offering, similar to what is described in [Leviticus 2](#). This may be a time of scarcity, but Gideon is still able to provide a meal for his unusual guest. Gideon probably anticipated that a miraculous sign of some sort after the meal will further credential the messenger and his message. Gideon wants to be certain that this is a commission from the Lord.

A sign is indeed given, but not in the way Gideon may anticipate. The verses that follow reveal that Gideon prepares a young goat, bread, and broth. The angel tells him to place the meat and unleavened bread on a rock (which is about to serve as an altar) and to pour out the broth. It is assumed that the broth is poured on the offerings. The angel then touches these gifts with the end of his staff. Fire erupts from the rock and consumes the gifts. The angel then vanishes from sight (compare [Judges 13:20](#)).

After Gideon recruits his army from four tribes, he asks for another sign to make certain that the Lord really will deliver Israel through him (see [Judges 6:36-40](#)). First, Gideon says he will place a fleece on the threshing floor. He wants the fleece to have dew on it the next morning, but the ground surrounding it to be dry. It happens.

But Gideon wants even more of these blessed assurances. It is natural for dew to evaporate more quickly from other surfaces, so he asks that the procedure be reversed on the next morning. That is, he desires that the fleece be dry, and that the ground be covered with dew.

But that is not the end of the story. If Gideon can ask for signs, then God himself can also make some unusual requests! After Gideon recruits 32,000 men ([Judges 7:3](#)) to go against 135,000 Midianites ([8:10](#)), God states that his army is too big! He instructs Gideon to reduce his fighting force to 10,000 and then to a mere 300. Thus the force ratio increases from more than 4-to-1 against Gideon’s army to 450-to-1. But that is just right for God. The remainder of [Judges 7 through 8:28](#) gives the account of Gideon’s thrilling victory that results in 40 years of peace.

## HOW TO SAY IT

Abiezer *Ay-buy-ee-zur.*

Abiezrite *Ay-buy-ez-rite.*

Amalek *Am-uh-lek.*

Amalekites *Am-uh-leh-kites or Uh-mal-ih-kites.*

Barak *Bair-uk.*

Canaanites *Kay-nun-ites.*

Esau *Ee-saw.*

Keturah *Keh-too-ruh.*

Manasseh *Muh-nass-uh.*



Midian *Mid-ee-un.*

Midianites *Mid-ee-un-ites.*

Ophrah *Ahf-ruh.*

Sinai *Sigh-nye or Sigh-nay-eye.*

Sisera *Sis-er-uh.*

Yahweh (*Hebrew*) *Yah-weh.*



**Visual for Lesson 2.** Start a discussion by pointing to this visual as you ask, “When was a time in your life that you found this to be true?”

## Conclusion

### A. What’s Your Excuse?

Gideon was called by God for a special task, and the man went to work to deliver his people. God had Gideon employ an unusual strategy (see [Judges 7:16-25](#)), and the sword of the Lord won a great victory.

If God were to tell you that he had special plans for you, how would you respond? Perhaps your excuses sound like some of these: *I’m too weak; I’m tired; I don’t know what to say; I can’t do it alone; Everyone is against me; Nobody cares about me; This world is changing so fast; Satan is making my life miserable; I just feel lost; I can’t do anything right!*

Like Gideon, we may be tempted to answer a perceived call from God with excuses. But each of these excuses and more are answered in promises God gives to those who trust him. When God calls, he also provides the resources for us to answer.

## B. Prayer

Thank you, O God, for the promise of your presence in the battles against sin and for giving the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ—regardless. We pray this in his name. Amen.

## C. Thought to Remember

God plus one is a majority.

# INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

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## Into the Lesson

Read the following unlikely success story: “One of nine children, she was born a slave in Maryland in 1822. As a child she was often beaten and whipped by various masters. She received a head injury when a slave owner threw a heavy metal object at another slave and hit her by mistake, resulting in her lifelong struggle with epilepsy, dizziness, and pain. After escaping slavery, she returned many times to help other slaves to freedom along the Underground Railroad.”

Ask students to identify this heroine who succeeded against all odds. The answer is Harriet Tubman. Mention that “she was a devout Christian who worked as an abolitionist, a humanitarian, and a spy for the North during the Civil War, helping guide a raid that freed 700 slaves.”

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “What Are the Odds?” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Quickly go through this activity by letting the class call out guesses.

After either activity say, “We know what it’s like for people to have the odds stacked against them. Today we will look at a judge of Israel who seemed to have little chance of success—until God stepped in!”

## Into the Word

Divide students into small groups of four or five. Hand out the following interview questions, and ask the groups to use [Judges 6:11-18](#) to help them prepare Gideon’s responses to an investigative reporter. Each group should select one person to answer for Gideon. (1) “So, Gideon, what exactly were you doing when the angel of the Lord appeared and called you a ‘mighty warrior’?” ([6:12](#)). (2) “It seems like your first words to the angel were to complain that God wasn’t taking very good care of you and your people. Why is that?” (3) “There’s some confusion about who was speaking to you: was it an angel or the Lord himself?” (4) “What did the Lord want you to do?” (5) “It seems like you were less than eager to obey. What excuse did you use?” (6) “Were you reassured by what the Lord told you? Why?” (7) “And yet you asked him for a sign. What sign did he give you?” (See [Judges 6:19-21](#).) Rotate between the various groups as you ask the questions to the selected “Gideons.”

Use the following Scripture references to lead a discussion of the questions that Gideon asked of the Lord. Have someone read [Judges 6:1, 2](#), then say, “Gideon’s first question seems to imply that God wasn’t taking good care of them. But why were they in such a mess?” (*They did evil in God’s eyes.*) Then read [Judges 6:8-10, 13](#) and ask, “How did Gideon use God’s past help to further his complaint?” (*He wasn’t showing them mighty miracles as he did in Egypt.*) Just like Gideon, what other great leader tried to make excuses for himself? (*Moses; see Exodus 3:11.*) Say, “Gideon may have remembered the signs that God gave Moses when he asked for a sign. Do you remember the three signs?” (*changed rod to a snake, made his hand leprous, and turned water to blood*).

Conclude by asking, “What was it about Gideon’s situation that explains why he needed so much convincing?”

## Into Life

Divide the class in pairs and have partners ask each other these two questions:

1. What excuses have you been using for not serving God in some area?
2. How can the promises God made to Gideon help you overcome this excuse?

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “What’s Your Excuse?” activity from the reproducible page. Allow students time to consider it individually and then take it home with a challenge to memorize one of the verses there.