

LESSON 3

THE LORD SAVES ISRAEL THROUGH GIDEON

BEFORE YOU TEACH

Midianites

The Midianites, desert people who descended from Abraham's second wife Keturah (Gen 25:1-2), were always in conflict with Israel. While the Israelites were still wandering in the desert, they battled the Midianites and almost destroyed them completely (Num 31:1-20). However, as the Israelites failed to completely destroy the Midianites, the tribe repopulated and began oppressing Israel.

In Gideon's time, the Midianites (and Amalekites) were camel-riding nomads who crossed the Jordan River into central Canaan at harvest time to plunder and destroy, causing famine-like conditions. They are believed to be the first people to domesticate the camel on a large scale, which gave them greatly increased desert mobility. They preferred attacking the Israelites when the harvest was ripe, and destroying "the produce of the earth." Out of their misery, the people of Israel cried out to God, who raised up Gideon to deliver them.

Gideon

The name Gideon means "destroyer" or "mighty warrior." Gideon was the son of Joash, from the clan of Abiezer in the tribe of Manasseh. As is the pattern throughout the Book of Judges, the Israelites had again turned away from God following forty years of peace that had been brought about by Deborah's victory over Canaan.

Now, God once more allowed Israel to be attacked by the neighboring Midianites and Amalekites. God heard the Israelites' cry for help and chose Gideon, a young man from an unremarkable clan in the tribe of Manasseh, to free the people of Israel from foreign attacks, and to lead them back from their worship of idols.

The Midianites never recovered from the attack, and the land was at peace for forty years during Gideon's lifetime. Gideon returned home and eventually had seventy sons by many wives. He died an old man and was buried by his father in Ophrah. His victory over the Midianites was remembered for many generations as the "day of Midian" (Isa 9:4).

Threshing Wheat

Gideon happened to be threshing wheat in a winepress when the Angel of the Lord first appeared to him. Threshing wheat was the process of separating the grains of wheat from the useless outer shell called the chaff. Farmers would toss the beaten wheat into the air, and the chaff would be blown away by the wind.

Traditionally, farmers threshed their wheat in large, open areas. If Gideon had done this, however, he would have been an easy target for the bands of raiders who were overrunning the land. To protect himself from the Midianite raiders, Gideon was forced to thresh his wheat in a winepress, likely in a pit that was out of sight of passers-by.

BIBLE TEXT

Judges 6-7

BIBLE TRUTH

God can use even the weakest or smallest in mighty ways.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. God gives the victory, but we must obey His lead.
2. To be able to let God use us to do His great work.

MEMORY VERSE

"The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped."

(Psalm 28:7a)

PRAYER

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we pray. We thank You, Lord, for gathering us here today to worship You. Even though we are young, we know that You can still use us to do great things. Please guide us through today's lesson as we learn how You used Gideon and his 300 men in a mighty way. Hallelujah! Amen.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR STUDENTS

“You’re too young”; “You’re too small”; or “You don’t know how.” Your students at this age may have heard these words countless times while attempting to help others. However, with God, no one is ever “too young,” “too small,” or “too weak,” especially children! In fact, when Jesus was on earth, He respected children and called on others to follow their simple faith (Mt 18:3-4, 10).

Explain to your students that Jesus did not come to earth as a grown-up. He entered our world as a baby in Bethlehem. The Lord knows what it’s like to be a child, because He had been one, too. He knows and cares about the fears, hopes, and desires of children, and He responds to children with acceptance and love.

Encourage your students to think of ways the Lord can use them. Instead of dwelling on the things they can’t do, the students can focus on the things they can do. Help them think of ways they can serve the Lord at home, at church, and at school.

You can do a simple exercise on the board:

1. Draw three wide columns on the board and label them, “Home,” “Church,” and “School.”
2. Give students a minute or two to think about all the things they can do to serve the Lord in these three locations.
3. Have the students come up 3 to 4 at a time to write down all the things they can think of.
4. Have a quick class sharing about all the things they wrote down.

The students may be surprised to see how much they can already do for the Lord. They will find that no one is too young or too weak to serve the Lord. God can use the weakest and smallest in mighty ways, for He is the origin of all strength. You can use this as an opening activity before telling the story.

VOCABULARY

shield: a person or thing that provides protection

winepress: a place to crush grapes to make wine

Baal: a made-up god that people in biblical times worshiped instead of God

Asherah: a made-up goddess that people in biblical times worshiped instead of God; she was the wife of Baal

dew: little drops of water that form at night

torch: a large flame that could be carried around and used as a light

REVIEW

Last week, we learned about a brave and special woman who led the Israelites. Do you remember what her name was? (Deborah.) What did Deborah do? (She went with Barak into battle.) What happened in the battle? (God took care of His people and helped them win the battle.) Who helped the Israelites win? (God.) What happened to Sisera, the commander of the enemy’s army? (He ran away into the tent of Jael, who hammered a tent peg through his head and killed him.)

What did we learn from last week’s lesson? Right, God is the one who gives us success in our lives. Deborah and Barak sang a song of praise to God for giving them success. We should also praise God whenever we do something well. We should honor Him only.

After the Israelites conquered their enemy, they had peace in the land for forty years. But soon, they began to sin against God again. Because of their sin, God allowed the Midianites to overpower them. Do you know who the Midianites were? [Wait for students to respond.] The Midianites lived in the desert and were very mean and violent to the Israelites. Today, we will learn how God sent another leader to save the Israelites.

BIBLE STORY

The Midianites Bully the Israelites

Back then, there was no peace in the land of the Israelites because the people from Midian were always attacking the land. The Midianites were very powerful and numerous. They would bully the Israelites and destroy their land until it was ruined entirely. The Israelites were forced to live in caves and in mountains because of these ambushes. Whenever the Israelites planted crops in the ground, the Midianites would ruin all of their crops and kill all of their sheep, cattle, and donkeys. They gave the Israelites many troubles and made them very poor, until the Israelites had no other solution but to cry out to the Lord for help.

The Lord Sends Gideon

What kind of person do you think God would send to the Israelites to rescue them from their misery this time? Someone who was strong and mighty, or perhaps an experienced soldier? Would anyone like to guess? [Encourage students to answer.]

Well, the Angel of the Lord appeared one day and sat down under an oak tree that belonged to a man named Joash. He had a son named Gideon, a young man at the time. Gideon was down in a winepress, threshing his grain and trying to stay hidden from the Midianites.

[Explain to the students what a winepress looks like by printing an image from the Internet or illustrating it on the board for them to see. Also, talk about the process of threshing wheat. See "Before You Teach" for more information.]

The Angel of the Lord spoke to Gideon [use a dramatic voice to imitate the Angel's voice], "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior." [Continue with a strong and positive voice.] "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior!" [Motion with hands for students to say it again with an even louder voice.] "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior!"

How do you think Gideon felt when the Angel called him a "mighty warrior?" [Wait for students to reply.] He probably didn't feel like a mighty warrior, hiding down there in the winepress. He probably didn't feel like the Lord was with him, either.

So, instead, Gideon said to the Angel, "But if the Lord is with us, why are all of these terrible things happening to us? What happened to all of the wonderful things the Lord did when He brought our fathers out of Egypt? Now the Lord has forgotten us and left us to the Midianites."

At this time, the Lord turned to Gideon and said, "Go with the strength that you have and save Israel from the Midianites. Am I not sending you?"

[Use a timid and worried voice to say this line.] "But Lord," Gideon asked, "How can I save Israel? My clan is the smallest in the tribe, and I am the weakest in the family."

The Lord answered, "I will be with you, and you will defeat all of the Midianites."

Gideon thought of himself as the least of the least. But remember, the Lord called him a "mighty warrior." That's because the Lord saw him not only as who he was, but who he could be. So Gideon asked God for a sign that this was really God talking to him. Gideon prepared some food for the Angel and set it on the table. The Angel touched the food with His staff and there the food was consumed in the fire like an offering on an altar, and the Angel disappeared!

Israel Prepares to Fight Midian

Convinced now that the Lord was with him, Gideon fearlessly tore down all the altars to the false gods Baal and Asherah that were in his town. He then rallied 32,000 men to prepare for battle against the Midianites. A few days before the battle, Gideon asked the Lord for another sign to confirm that God would use him to save Israel.

Gideon Asks for a Sign

Gideon said to God, "If You will save Israel through me, as You have promised, please show me another sign. I will put a sheepskin on the floor. If the ground all around it is dry and the sheepskin is wet with dew in the morning, I will know that You will save Israel through me."

The next morning, Gideon got up very early, and it happened just as he had said: Though the ground was dry, he wrung out a bowlful of water from the sheepskin.

Then Gideon said to God, "Please don't be angry with me, and let me ask one more thing. This time, make the sheepskin dry and the ground around it wet with dew." That night, God did as Gideon asked. Only the sheepskin was dry, and the ground all around it was wet with dew.

The Lord Chooses Three Hundred Men

By this point, Gideon was probably starting to feel like a mighty warrior. But then God did something unexpected. The Lord said to Gideon, "You have too many men. If I allow you to win with this many men, you may brag and say that you saved yourselves. So tell anyone who is afraid that they may go home." As a result, 22,000 men left, and 10,000 stayed.

The Lord again said to Gideon, "There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will tell you which men to take with you." So Gideon took the men down to the water. The Lord said to Gideon, "Take the 300 men who lapped the water with their hands. All the other men who got down on their knees to drink may go home." In the end, only 300 men stayed with Gideon to fight against the Midianites, as God had planned.

Gideon Hears an Encouraging Dream

Now Gideon must have been really afraid. He wanted to trust God, but the situation seemed impossible. The night before the battle, Gideon looked down into the valley of

the Midianite camp below him and saw that the Midianites were as thick as locusts. Their camels alone were more numerous than the sand on the seashore.

God knew that Gideon was still afraid, so He told him to sneak down into the Midianite camp and listen to what the men were saying. Then Gideon would feel better and know that God was with him.

That night, Gideon and his servant Purah snuck into the Midianite camp. Gideon got there just as a man was telling his friend, "I had a dream that a round loaf of barley bread came tumbling into the camp. It struck the tent with such a great force that the tent fell down." His friend replied, "This means that God has surely given us into Gideon's hands!"

The Lord Gives the Israelites Victory

When Gideon heard the dream and its meaning, he worshiped and praised God. He returned to the camp of Israel and called out, "Get up! The Lord has given the Midianites into your hands!" Gideon divided the 300 men into three groups. He gave every man a trumpet and an empty jar with a torch inside of it.

"Watch me," Gideon told them, "Follow my lead. When I get to the edge of the camp, do exactly as I do. When you hear my group blow our trumpets, then blow your trumpets from all around the camp. Shout, 'For the Lord and for Gideon!'"

At about ten o'clock at night, Gideon and his group reached the edge of the Midianite camp. They blew the trumpets and broke the jars that were in their hands. All three groups blew their trumpets and smashed their jars. With the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right, they shouted, "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!"

Each man stayed in his position all around the camp, and all the Midianites ran, shouting and crying as they went. When the trumpets were blown, the Lord caused the men of the camp to fight against themselves with their swords. The Israelites had a total victory!

In this way, the Israelites defeated the Midianites, who did not trouble the Israelites again. While Gideon lived, Israel enjoyed peace for forty more years.

Final Thoughts

Here is a question for you to think about as we come to the end of our story: "How can you do things for God when you think that you are too young and can't do anything right?" [Have students turn to their neighbor to share their thoughts. Call on a few pairs to share with the class.]

Well, like Gideon, you can remember this: "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior!" Yes, you can do it! You can do great things for God regardless of your age. For He is our strength and our shield!

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

- 1. Why did God allow the Midianites to overpower the Israelites?** The Israelites began sinning against God again.
- 2. Who did God choose to save the Israelites?** Gideon.
- 3. Did kind of family did Gideon come from?** A weak one.
- 4. What signs did God use to show Gideon that he would win the battle?** On one night, the sheepskin was wet while the ground was dry; on the other night, the sheepskin was dry while the ground was wet.
- 5. Why was it better for a soldier to lap water from his hands than to bend over the river?** He could still be on the lookout for the enemy.
- 6. During the battle, how many men did the enemy have and how many did Israel have?** The enemy had too many men to count and Israel only had 300.

MEMORY VERSE PRACTICE

Please reinforce the memory verse every week.
You can practice the memory verse with your students anytime during class.

"The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped." (Psalm 28:7a)

 SPIRITUAL TEACHING & LIFE APPLICATION

1. God gives the victory, but we must obey Him with all our heart.

Gideon and 32,000 Israelite troops gathered near the Midianite camp, but their 135,000 oppressors severely outnumbered them. Gideon was ready to do battle, but God had other plans. God told Gideon to let anyone who was afraid to go home. 10,000 stayed, but God wanted a smaller group. He was going to show His people how powerful He was. Finally, with only 300 men, Gideon and his little army surrounded the Midianites. On his signal, they blew trumpets, broke the pitchers covering their torches, and shouted, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" (Judg 7:20). This story illustrates an invaluable lesson: **it is God who gives the victory**. Then the unthinkable happened. These 300 men—holding not swords, but torches and trumpets—routed the entire Midianite camp. Scripture records that God "set every man's sword against his companion throughout the whole camp" (Judg 7:22). God turned the enemy camp into defeat and huge chaos! This was indeed a miracle of God!

We know that God is a powerful God. But what does it take to win? That's right, our obedience!

Obedience to Jesus Christ

The genuine proof of love is obedience. God wants genuine obedience that is from our hearts, not externally motivated.

A. Jesus commanded us to obey.

John 15:10

"If you keep (**obey**) My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love."

John 15:20

"Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept (**obeyed**) My word, they will keep (**obey**) yours also."

B. The Apostles also obeyed.

Acts 5:29

"But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: 'We ought to **obey** God rather than men.'"

Phil 2:12

"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always **obeyed**, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own **salvation with fear and trembling**."

2. I am never too young to do great things for God.

Have you ever thought that you were too young to serve God? Well, you'd be surprised to learn that God can use young children like you to do His important work in the world. Do you already have some ideas of how God can use you to be His "mighty warrior"? If you have a willing heart to do things for God, He will give you opportunities that are just right for who you are, and where you are.

God knows exactly how you can serve Him at home, at school, and at church. Here are some of the ways you can serve the Lord. Take a minute to review the list and see how many you can achieve in the next weeks to come:

1. If you're good at reading, writing, math, or any other subject in school, you can offer to help someone who might be having a hard time with these subjects.
2. You can donate a Bible storybook to your church library or a local public library.
3. Invite a friend to come to church and attend an RE class with you.
4. Pray for your friends and their families. God is pleased to answer the prayers of His children.
5. Ask God to show you how to help someone. Maybe you can offer to carry groceries for someone, weed a neighbor's yard, help Mom with some house chores, pick up trash at school and in the classroom, etc.

6. Tell a friend about the Lord Jesus Christ and how He died and rose for them. Let them know that they can be a child of God, just like you.
7. Take care of your body, which is the holy temple of God, by staying away from harmful things.
8. At the end of the school year, give your favorite teacher or coach a thank-you card with a nice message and a verse from the Bible.
9. If you are good at sports, honor God as the giver of your skill and show good sportsmanship.
10. Prepare yourself to serve by attending church, reading your Bible every day, and praying. All of these will help you learn about God and what He'd like you to do.

Remember to "let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim 4:12). God has provided many ways for you to serve Him, as long as you have a heart to be His mighty warrior and do great things for Him.

HOMEWORK ANSWER KEY

1. "The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped." (Psalm 28:7a)
2. B
3. A
4. 32,000; 300
5. "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior!"
6. Because Gideon was uncertain, afraid, and cautious.
7. They were a weak army. The Israelites probably felt very scared at seeing that many Midianites encamped against them, even though they knew that God was with them.
8. Answers may vary.

ACTIVITIES

1

Never Forsaken Game

Objective: To reinforce God's love to children, and how He will never forsake us.

Materials

- A chair for each student

The following activity is similar to musical chairs, but with a twist.

Instructions

1. Set the chairs back to back. Make sure you have one less chair than the number of students playing.
2. Explain to the students that instead of hearing music, they will hear you read some promises from the Bible. (The promises tell us that God will never forsake us.)
3. They are to listen to the promises closely. When they hear you say the word "forsake" or "forsaken," they may sit down in a chair.
4. If they sit down before you say the word, they are automatically out.
5. There are five texts, so there should not be more than six students playing per round.
6. Texts can be repeated for each new round.
7. Print out the following texts ahead of time so you don't have to look each one up individually during the activity (students who get "out" can read the text for the next round).

- Deut 31:6
- 2 Cor 4:9
- Heb 13:5
- 1 Sam 12:22
- Ps 9:10

2**True or False Review Game**

Objective: To review story details by playing the game.

Materials

- Two pieces of construction paper labeled “True” and “False”
- Tape

Preparations

Prepare a list of true and false statements about today’s lesson. Some examples have been listed below.

- Gideon came from a powerful family (F)
- Gideon was separating the grain from the straw in a winepress when an Angel came to see him (T)
- Gideon won the battle with only 300 men (T)

Instructions

1. Mark off two areas in the classroom, designating one the “True” area and one the “False” area by taping the labeled pieces of construction paper on the floor.
2. Read the statements aloud one at a time. If the student thinks the statement is true, they should stand in the “True” area; if false, then in the “False” area.
3. Depending on your students, you may choose to eliminate those who answer incorrectly. (They may sit back down at their seats.) If you choose not to eliminate, the students can keep score of how many they have answered correctly.

3**Bible Drama**

Objective: To review the story details by role-playing.

Materials

- Piece of fleece, wool, or cotton
- Real or toy trumpet
- Long tapestry candle (to represent torch)
- Pitcher

Instructions

1. This Bible story contains many small acting parts that may be pantomimed by the students without reading a script.
2. The entire story can be dramatized as you narrate the story.
3. The props mentioned in the above materials list are recommended for added visual effect.
4. Role-playing parts needed:
 - Gideon
 - Israelite army
 - Purah
 - Two Midianite soldiers
 - Midianite army

E1 Year 1 Book 4 Lesson 3—The Lord Saves Israel through Gideon

Homework Assignment

Name: _____ Parent signature: _____ Date: _____

Bible Truth: God can use even the weakest or smallest in mighty ways.**Lesson Objectives:** 1. God gives the victory, but we must obey His lead.
2. To be able to let God use us to do His great work.**Bible Reading:** Please put a checkmark in the space when you complete the reading each day.**Prayer:** Please put a checkmark in the space on the days you prayed to God.

	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
Bible Reading							
Prayer							

Memory Verse

Please write down this week's memory verse.

(Psalm 28:7a)

What I Learned from the Bible This Week

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Homework Assignment

Understanding What You Have Learned

1. Write down the memory verse for this week.

Multiple Choice

2. _____ : After Deborah died, who did the Israelites gradually turn to for worship?
- a. God
 - b. Idols
 - c. Kings
3. _____ : What did Gideon's army take with them into battle?
- a. A trumpet and a jug
 - b. A sword and a piece of metal
 - c. A cross and a stone

Fill In the Blank

4. Gideon had _____ men to start out as he prepared to fight the battle. He had only _____ left in the end that actually fought in the battle.

Short Answer

5. What did the Angel of the Lord say to Gideon when they first met?

6. Why did Gideon ask God for signs?

7. Compared to the Midianite army, was the Israelite army a weak one or strong one? How do you think the Israelites felt when they were about to fight the Midianites?

Life Application

8. Although the Israelite army was a small one, God still used them mightily. How can God use us today to serve Him at home, at school, and at church? Draw examples below.

At home...

At school...

At church...