



# 5

## God Uses Gideon

### Key Theme

- God uses people to accomplish His perfect plans.

### Key Passages

- Judges 6:11–24, 7:1–8, 7:15–25; 1 Corinthians 15:9–10

### Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe God's sovereignty in choosing Gideon as a leader.
- Recognize God's role in defeating the Midianites.



## Lesson Overview



### Come On In

Students will place bookmarks at Judges 6 and 1 Corinthians 15.

Students will practice the memory verse using the Memory Verse Strips.

- Cut paper into strips for each student to mark today's study passages.
- Print and cut out the Memory Verse Strips from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student. Put complete sets into envelopes or small plastic bags.



### Studying God's Word

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God used Gideon to lead a small army to defeat the Midianites. The Midianites were a nearby nation that attacked Israel and Gideon. Gideon was not mighty, but the Lord worked mightily through him to accomplish His purpose.

- Study the Prepare to Share section.
- Go Before the Throne.



### Activity: Trumpet, Pitcher, Torch Game

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Students will review the lesson by playing a game that matches statements relating to the account of Gideon with the persons that would have said them.

- Print and cut out one set of Trumpet, Pitcher, Torch Point Cards from the Resource DVD-ROM for your use during the game. Put them in a cup, bowl, or other container.
- Print and cut out one set of Character Question Strips from the Resource DVD-ROM. Fold them and put into a cup, bowl, or other container.



# Prepare to Share

## SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

As you begin to prepare for your lesson this week, please prepare your heart and mind by reading Judges 6–8.

The recurring cycle of Israel's history during the time of the Judges continued for the 300-year period. This cycle included the Israelites' disobedience and idolatry, God's judgment on them through neighboring nations, their cry to God that He would deliver them, God's mercy and compassion in raising up judges to deliver them, and finally Israel's fall back into disobedience. In Judges 6 we find that because the Israelites were once again doing evil in the sight of the Lord, God allowed them to be oppressed by the Midianites. They were now crying out to Him for help (Judges 6:6). The Lord was to provide an unlikely hero for them through Gideon.

The Angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon—who was threshing wheat in secret so that the raiding Midianites would not take it (not a very valiant act)—and called Gideon a “mighty man of valor.” He told Gideon that he would lead Israel to defeat its current oppressors, the Midianites. Gideon revealed his fear and lack of trust in the Lord as he responded that he was weak and of the weakest clan of Israel (Judges 6:15). But the Lord responded with confidence, explaining that He Himself would be with him. In Judges 6:14, the Lord told Gideon to “Go in this might of yours,” but God also clearly told him the source of that might: “Have I not sent you?” And in verse 34, as Gideon gathered men for battle, it was because “the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon.” Scripture is clear that it was the Lord moving in these events, using Gideon; it was not

Gideon's own strength or ability that won the victory. We see, as the account unfolds, that God wanted His power alone to be demonstrated.

In Judges 7, a substantial number of men had rallied to Gideon (though they would still have been outnumbered by the Midianites). In Judges 7:2–8, God gave Gideon orders to reduce the number of men who would participate in the battle. First, any who were fearful were commanded to leave. Next, God directed Gideon to accept only those who drank by lapping the water from their hands. Thus, the fighting force was reduced to a mere three hundred to face the Midianite army of 135,000. God wanted the victory of this battle to point to Him alone as deliverer. He did not want the Israelites to think for a minute that this victory was theirs. “And the Lord said to Gideon, ‘The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, “My own hand has saved me”’” (Judges 7:2).

The account of the battle is dramatic and noble. Gideon's three hundred men stealthily approached the Midianites with covered lamps. Then suddenly, at Gideon's signal, they broke the jars that covered them and shouted, “The sword of the Lord and of Gideon,” inciting panic among the Midianites (Judges 7:20–21). In the midst of this panic, God ordained that the Midianites would turn their swords on each other—this was God's battle, and the victory was accomplished by His power, working through Gideon's obedience (Judges 7:22).

God used Gideon, a simple man, to accomplish a great victory against a fearful opponent. Gideon was obedient and proved to be strong, due to the Lord's strength in him. Gideon was the fifth and one of the greatest judges of Israel. Because of his faith in the

Lord, he is mentioned with the great and faithful saints listed in Hebrews 11:32.

As stated before, the victory for this battle was the Lord's. It could only have been the Lord who would allow 300 men to defeat the Midianite army. Gideon realized this. The people were quick to forget as evidenced when they requested that Gideon rule over them (Judges 8:22). Gideon's loyalty to God shone bright as he turned down this honor and reminded the people of God's sovereignty in His rule over them (Judges 8:23).

Sadly, Gideon compromised his faith by requesting and accepting offerings of gold, plundered by Israel from their enemies, and he used the gold to make an ephod (a kind of ceremonial breastplate). This ephod, set up in Gideon's city of Ophrah, became a snare to Gideon and to his family (Judges 8:27).

## **HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND**

Gideon acted faithfully and courageously in battle, but God desires to be the object of His people's worship and gratitude, and He will not share that worship: "My glory I will not give to another" (Isaiah 42:8). God used people all through history and continues to use people today to accomplish His will. But He makes it clear that even when He does so, it is He who always ultimately deserves the credit: "it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). Both the desire and the ability to obey God are the results of God working in us.

In Judges 8, we find that the men of Ephraim wanted to share the credit that belonged to God for

the battle won. We then find that the men of Succoth and Penuel would not credit God (or anyone) without proof of a certain outcome. And finally, we see that Israel, rather than giving credit to God for using Gideon, gave Gideon credit instead of God. This inclination to overlook and disbelieve that it actually was God who orchestrated the victory was at the root of Israel's tendency to fall back into sin, even after a deliverance such as this. God uses His people to accomplish His perfect plans. But when the plans are accomplished, we must not forget that we are His workmanship created to do the good works He has prepared for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). To Him be the glory forever (Romans 11:36).

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



## **BEFORE THE THRONE**

Awesome God, you encourage me. I delight in your Word and am amazed at how you use simple and foolish people to accomplish your purposes. Even though Gideon was close to despair as he focused on the Midianites, you came to him and gave him hope and victory. Lord, help me to walk by faith in you and not to despair when my circumstances overwhelm me. Help me to model that kind of faith walk to my students. Cement your Word in our minds that we might not sin against you, and that we might be light and life to the dark world around us.



## COME ON IN

As students arrive . . .

- They will mark their Bibles at Judges 6 and I Corinthians 15 with strips of paper.
- They will put the Memory Verse Strips in order and recite the verse together and/or to each other. They may work individually or in teams.

*This time at the beginning of class should be used to review the Memory Verse. We have provided a template on the Resource DVD-ROM you can use to make Memory Verse Strips to be put in order each week. You may have other ideas and ways to encourage your students to memorize the verse.*



## Review

As we come to today's lesson, we are in the period of the judges who ruled Israel after Joshua and the elders of his generation died.

*Refer to the History of Israel poster and the Period of the Judges section. When we left Israel last time, they had forgotten all that God had done for them and they served the idols of the Canaanites. There had been several judges raised up by God to lead the people, but they continued to fall back into idolatry*

and faced God's discipline at the hands of the surrounding pagan nations.

As we find them today, they are about 150 years removed from the death of Joshua. Gideon judged Israel beginning about 1245 BC. We will look at his life in our lesson today and see how God used him to rescue Israel from the Midianites.



## Studying God's Word

► Write on the board, "Why did God choose Gideon?"

### READ THE WORD

Let me give you a short summary of Judges 6:1–10. The Midianites and other nations to the east of Israel were constantly plundering the land and destroying the crops and livestock of Israel. The passage describes them coming into the land with their tents and camels like a swarm of locusts. Israel was devastated and the people cried out to the Lord. God sent a prophet to them to remind them of the mighty deeds He had done for their ancestors and of their failure to worship Him alone. Things were looking bleak. The *Midianites* were the descendants of Midian, who was a son of Abraham through his wife Keturah.

Let's read Judges 6:11–24 together. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

Judges 6:11–24

## EXAMINE THE WORD

### Observe the Text

- ? **Who appeared to Gideon?** *The Angel of the Lord.*
- ? **Looking at verses 14 and 16, who was speaking to Gideon?** *The phrases “The Lord turned” and “the Lord said” make it clear that this is another instance of the pre-incarnate Jesus appearing to give direction to His people.*
- ? **Looking at verses 17 to 21, what sign did Gideon seek to affirm that this was indeed God delivering this message?** *He offered a sacrifice of bread, meat, and broth to the Lord. The Lord received the sacrifice and consumed it with a fire. After that, He departed out of Gideon’s sight. Only God would accept this form of worship, so this is not an angelic being. The account of Manoah in Judges 13 is almost identical and can be used as another example of a Christophany.*
- ? **How did Gideon react to His visit?** *Gideon was afraid that he would die because he had seen God (see Exodus 33:20), but God told him he would not die. After receiving the consolation, Gideon built an altar to God.*
- ? **Back to the beginning of the passage. Where was Gideon when the Lord came to him and what was he doing?** *Gideon was in a winepress threshing wheat for fear of the Midianites.*
- ? **How did Gideon respond to being addressed as a mighty man of valor with God’s favor?** *He doubted that God was still with Israel since they were oppressed by the Midianites and had not seen any miracles or deliverance.*
- ? **What command did Gideon receive from God?** *The Lord told him to go in his might and save Israel from the Midianites.*
- ? **What might did Gideon have on his own?** *Very little; he was a weak man from a weak clan.*
- ? **Why did God choose Gideon?** *There is no indication in the text of any specific qualities or reasons for choosing Gideon. It seems that God chose Gideon in spite of who he was.*
- ? **What assurance did God give Gideon in verse 16?** *He promised that He would be with Gideon.*
- ? **What idea is repeated in verses 12 and 16?** *God would be with Gideon as He goes out to battle the Midianites.*

### Discover the Truth

Even in their rebellion and worshipping of idols, God was gracious to His children and heard their cries. He was going to send Gideon to rescue them from the Midianites.

- ? **What attribute of God would allow Him to choose Gideon over others in Israel?** *Sovereign—He does all that He pleases and is in complete control of everything.*

GRACIOUS

SOVEREIGN

➤ In this account, we have the Angel of the Lord (Jesus) sent as the messenger, and the Spirit of the Lord sent to empower Gideon, representing the Lord God. The Trinity is present, though shrouded, in the Old Testament.

God was not confident in Gideon's ability to conquer the Midianites. In fact, as we continue through the account of Gideon, we will see how God very intentionally removed any reason for boasting from the men He chose to fight the battle. God was using these men to bring about His plans regardless of who they were.



## READ THE WORD

The night after He met God, Gideon was directed to destroy the altar and idol of Baal, and build an altar to God in its place. He did it by cover of night and had his life threatened by the men of the city (Judges 6:25–32).

As the Midianites, Amalekites, and people of the East gathered in the Valley of Jezreel, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon and he called for an army to assemble for battle (Judges 6:33–35).

Gideon also asked God for two more signs of assurance, but we will look more closely at the fleeces Gideon set before God in our activity in a few minutes.

We are going to read the account of the battle in two parts. Will someone please read Judges 7:1–8? *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

Judges 7:1–8

## EXAMINE THE WORD

### Observe the Text

- ? As the army gathered, what was God's conclusion about its size? *He said it was too large and that they would claim the glory for themselves rather than giving the glory for the victory to God.*
- ? How many fearful soldiers left? *22,000 left, leaving 10,000 Israelite soldiers.*
- ? How did God respond to the army of 10,000? *He still said it was still too large.*
- ? How did God whittle down to number to 300? *He had them go to the water and drink. All those who lapped by bringing their hands to their mouth were chosen and the rest were sent away.*
- ? How big was the army they were facing? *This answer is not in the passage, so it is important to read an account in context. Here we can cross reference Judges 8:10. There were 15,000 men left and 120,000 had killed each other. The enemy army was initially 135,000 men.*

Judges 8:10

### Discover the Truth

Just as God had chosen Gideon, He chose 300 men to serve as the army to attack the 135,000 warriors assembled in the valley below them. What a battle plan! But God was with them.



## READ THE WORD

GRACIOUS

During that night, God offered Gideon another sign—number four—that the battle was to be won by the Israelites. Gideon went to the edge of the enemy camp and overheard the interpretation of a dream which named Gideon as the leader who conquered the army (Judges 7:9–15). God was gracious to Gideon to give him another clear sign and assure him of the outcome despite his fear.

Let's read the rest of the battle account in Judges 7:15–25. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

Judges 7:15–25

## EXAMINE THE WORD

### Observe the Text

- ? **What was the battle plan for the 300 warriors?** *In three groups, they would take their swords, torches inside of pitchers, and trumpets into the darkness. At Gideon's signal they were to blow the trumpets, break the pitchers revealing the torches, and shout, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!"*
- ? **How did the enemy army respond in verse 21?** *They ran away screaming.*
- ? **What was the Lord's part in the battle?** *He caused the enemy to turn their swords on one another, killing many men—and the rest fled.*
- ? **How many Midianites were killed by the Israelites?** *They killed no one until they began to pursue them as they fled.*

### Discover the Truth

Just as God had promised, He was with them in the battle, if it can be called a battle, and He miraculously caused the enemy to turn against one another. Gideon acted in faith along with the tiny army he led, knowing that God was faithful to keep His promise to bring victory. As the enemy fled, the Israelites pursued them, sending messengers to have other tribes assist them in finishing off the fleeing remnant.

Clearly it was not what Gideon had done, but what God had done through him that brought victory.

This is the same truth Paul understood. Will someone please read 1 Corinthians 15:9–10? *Have someone read the passage.*

1 Corinthians 15:9–10

Paul also acknowledged his own limitations and that it was by the grace of God that he could accomplish the things God had for him to do. Gideon had to be obedient and carry out the attack and then pursue the enemy, but he knew it was by God's grace that he was able to accomplish such a task. All the glory went to God—the one who deserved it.





# Trumpet, Pitcher, Torch Game

## MATERIALS

- Trumpet, Pitcher, Torch point cards in a container
- Character Question Strips in a container

## INSTRUCTIONS

*Divide the class into two or three teams. On the board write three names: Gideon, The Lord, and One of Gideon's 300. Choose the team with the youngest player to go first. Have that team draw a card from the Trumpet, Pitcher, Torch point cards.*

*Pick one of the Character Question Strips. Read the question aloud. The playing team must answer using one of the three names on the board (Gideon, The Lord, or One of Gideon's 300). Give them 15 seconds to choose a name. Continue asking questions among the teams until all questions have been answered or time is up.*

*If the playing team guesses correctly, award them the number of points they drew previously. List points on the board or have the team start a collection of their point cards, and add them together at the end.*

*If a team guesses incorrectly, put the question back in the drawing cup to be used again.*

Let's see if you were paying close attention to what happened to Gideon. Each team will pick a point. Then I'll read a statement that either Gideon, the Lord, or One of Gideon's 300 men would have said. Your team must decide who you think the statement comes from. The team that gets the highest points wins. Explain how the game works to the students. Begin game.

## CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

The Lord used Gideon even though he was not mighty. Gideon had an obedient spirit and trusted God to lead them to victory. The Lord is able to accomplish His plans through you, too, if you'll trust Him and obey Him. Are you willing to humble yourself in obedience to Him like Gideon did?



# Applying God's Word

## WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

Gideon is certainly an important character, and he led the Israelite army into battle. However, Gideon was just a man. He did not defeat the Midianites. He did not rise up to lead Israel of his own initiative.

God chose Gideon. God encouraged Gideon. God gave Gideon signs. God chose the men for the battle. God caused the Midianites to turn on one another. It is God who is the hero of this plot! We learn that men are weak and that God is strong. We learn that men fail

to do what they are supposed to do and that God is always faithful to accomplish His plans. But, He still chooses to use people to accomplish those plans. By His grace, we get to be a part of fulfilling His purposes on the earth.

## GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? In what ways do you identify with Gideon's response as he is called to a role of leadership? *Discuss various answers.*
- ? What encouragement to live your life in obedience to Christ do you find in this account? *Discuss various answers, focusing on the idea that God will always give us the grace to obey His commands as we trust Him.*
- ? Why is it right for God to demand that mankind worship Him? *God is the Creator and has the right to demand anything from His creatures. Because God is glorious and holy and righteous, He deserves our worship.*
- ? What type of skepticism would you expect to hear from someone who doubts the account of Gideon and the battle with the Midianites? *Many people might consider the account a myth since it is such a small army against such a massive force.*



### MEMORY VERSE

**Joshua 1:8–9** This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.



### GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for teaching us through His Word.
- Praise God for His faithfulness and empowering grace.
- Ask God for faith to obey His commands and trust Him to keep His promises.

