

Helps for the Teacher: Gideon

My goal in this overview of the Gideon lesson from Judges 6-7 is to show the key verse, the theme, and the overall structure that I would use if I were teaching it, and also I would like to highlight a few useful facts from the passage.

I'm assuming that you have already read the passage on your own, and maybe even done some of your initial study. **Let's get started.**

The key verse in the passage is **Judges 6:12**, when the angel of the Lord appears to Gideon and says to him: "The Lord is With You, O mighty man of valor!"

It highlights the **two underlying themes** that unfold in the story details:

1. The Lord is with you.
2. Mighty man of valor!

Four times in the story we see Gideon's FEAR come to the forefront. That seems at odds with being called a mighty man of valor, but we begin to realize that courage is not the absence of fear, rather, it is taking action to do what is right in spite of our fear.

And four times in the story we see Gideon also receives a SIGN from God. Notice that each time, the SIGN is not to show Gideon WHAT to do...Gideon already knows what to do. And the SIGN is not to change Gideon from an unbelieving doubter into someone of faith...because Gideon is already a man of faith.

EACH of the four signs is given for the same outcome...to reassure Gideon that GOD IS INDEED WITH HIM!

When you put those two threads together, what we see is that it was because Gideon absolutely knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that it was GOD who was with him that made him a mighty man of valor.

Let's look at the structure.

I've divided the story into 4 sections—

The story begins with

- **Israel is oppressed by the Midianites.**
- **God gives Gideon two sets of instructions that provoke fear!**
 - A. "Go defeat the Midianites."
 - B. "Go tear down your father's Baal and Ashtoreh pole."
- **Gideon Follows God's Instructions.**
 - A. He tears down his father's Baal and Asherah pole.
 - B. He gathers the army to go fight the Midianites.
- **God defeats the Midianites.**

Here are some useful facts to have as you study this passage:

First, the Midianites were a nomadic tribe that in Scripture usually were in opposition to Israel. They would swoop down on the land like a locust swarm and take food and a lot of the livestock, and then

move out of the area. The Amalekites were always enemies of the Israelites and, in this instance, they join with the Midianites and have a combined force of 135,000 warriors. This marauding band coming into the land had gone on for 7 years before Israel cries out to God for help.

Second, we find Gideon in a winepress, but he is threshing barley. Why in a winepress?! Threshing floors were usually out in the open where the wind could catch the chaff and blow it away as the wheat and barley were being winnowed, but Gideon now is in a winepress because he is fearful that there might be a marauding band of Midianites showing up at any moment.

Third, when the angel appears to Gideon and says: **“The Lord is with you, o mighty man of valor!”** Gideon starts saying that he wishes God would do something really GREAT and deliver them like the stories they had heard in the past. Notice, Gideon is already a man of faith.

Fourth, there are **two things** that would block God receiving the credit if He did something great. One is that the people, because they were steeped in Baal worship at this time, would give the credit for any victory to Baal. And the other is that, if they had a great army that could muster themselves up to defeat the Midianites—they would take the credit. In both of these things, God is going to remove—first of all the Baal altar is what He says to get rid of, and then He is going to reduce the army size so that neither one of those things is going to get the credit for His battle and His victory. But that comes out of Gideon’s heart desire: “God, show Yourself great!”

Fifth, we see Gideon’s fear a second time when he goes to go pull down his father’s altar, because he is going at night! But, notice that he DOES do what God has said. We have this contrasting: He’s afraid! ...but then he acts. He’s afraid! ...but he takes action.

Sixth, when he puts out the fleece, notice that he has already gathered the army and his best recruiting efforts have only mustered 32,000 troops; compared to 135,000 that’s not going to do well! He puts the fleece out, not to find out what to do, but rather to find out: “God is this indeed really from You?” We find that in Judges 6:36—*“If you will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken...”* Now, this idea of putting out a fleece is often done when trying to find God’s will. “God if You have this happen, then I will know I’m supposed to do this, or if it goes this way, then I will know.” That is not at all what is happening in this story. Gideon already knows what to do. He is making sure in his own heart and mind that what he has heard is really from God, because there is nothing from what his eyes can see that would make this a logical thing to do apart from God.

Finally, in the conclusion of the story, God defeats the Midianites through Gideon, just like the angel had said at the beginning of the story. This is one of my favorite parts when God said, “If you are still afraid, go down to the Midianite camp, listen to what THEY are saying!” and we see for the fourth time, Gideon’s fear is there, because he goes! He takes his servant with him and goes into the camp. He listens to one man relating a dream to his friend: He sees this barley loaf coming down into the camp, rolling in, and hits the tent and the tent falls down flat. And the friend knows immediately, “That’s Gideon!” Notice what it says in Judges 7:14—“GOD has given the whole camp of Midian into his hand!” So even the enemy knows that God is the One doing it; God is the One getting the credit for it.

When the soldiers surround the Midianite camp, there is a panic that ensues, they start killing each other, and then they start to flee. Gideon's soldiers that had just been sent home earlier are summoned to help with the fleeing army. Other tribes come to help as well and the fleeing army is completely routed! Israel is delivered MIGHTILY, like in the days of old, by Gideon? No! By GOD, who was with a mighty man of valor, willing to act, because he knew that it was GOD who was with him.

As you prepare this lesson to teach, take a minute to ask yourself where God has put you. Do you feel afraid of the task? Does it seem impossible by what you are looking at in front of you? Well, who is with you? Is there anything that would take the credit away from Him? Look at those things and then ask yourself: What is God doing **through** you, because He is **with** you?

Many blessings as you teach God's Word!