

Bi235 Old Testament 2

Lesson Bi235-8 Gideon the Leader

God is full of surprises. He surprised Abraham with a big family move. He surprised Sarah with a baby in her old age. He surprised Jacob with a different wife than he bargained for. He surprised Moses with a voice out of a burning bush. And he surprised Gideon hiding for his life.

Once again the Israelites had turned away from Yahweh. Again he had allowed Israel to be punished by pagan neighbors. This time it was the Midianites and Amalekites, tribes from east of the Jordan River. They were raiders. Riding their camels, they would terrorize the Israelites at harvesttime. They would destroy all their crops and try to starve the Israelites.

The people were in poverty. In their suffering they cried out to Yahweh. He answered them by speaking through an unnamed prophet. (A prophet is a man or woman who speaks for Yahweh.) “I brought you up out of Egypt. I delivered you from the hand of all your oppressors. I drove them out before you and gave you their land. I told you not to worship the gods of the Canaanites, but you have not listened to me” (Jud 6:8-10).

God heard their cry, however, and prepared an unlikely deliverer. Sometime later the Angel of Yahweh appeared in the form of a man. He found an Israelite named Gideon hiding from the raiders. He was threshing wheat when he heard a voice, “Yahweh is with you, mighty warrior.” Gideon turned around and saw a man, he thought.

“Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but if Yahweh is with us, why has all this suffering happened to us? Where are all his miracles that our ancestors told us about? Now Yahweh has abandoned us to these raiders.” Gideon had no idea he was talking with a messenger from God.

Yahweh said to him, “Use the strength you have to deliver Israel from Midian. I am sending you, am I not?”

“How can I save Israel,” complained Gideon. “My clan is the weakest in our tribe, and I am the weakest in my clan.”

Yahweh answered through his angel, “I will be with you, and you will strike down every one of the raiders.”

Gideon asked for a sign, since he was still afraid. “Please stay here while I go prepare a present for you.”

“I will wait for you,” said the angel. When Gideon brought the food, the angel told him to set the food on a rock. The angel then touched the food with his staff. Fire flared out from the rock and burned up the food. And the angel disappeared. This was the sign Gideon needed. He knew that he had been visited by God himself (Jud 6:11-21).

Following Yahweh’s instructions, Gideon broke down a pagan altar his family had erected. He did it that same night. The local Israelites had been worshiping the pagan god, Baal, and they got

angry. They wanted to kill Gideon. His father defended his actions, saying, “Let the Baal-god defend himself, if he can.”

It was harvesttime, and the Midianite raiders were on the move against Israel. This time the Spirit of Yahweh came upon Gideon. He called for fighters from four nearby tribes. They responded and followed Gideon to the valley where the raiders were camped. Yahweh again assured Gideon that he was with him.

Before the battle, Gideon heard God’s voice again. “You have too many fighters. I myself want the honor in this battle. I don’t want Israel to think they won the battle themselves. Tell every fighter who is afraid to go home.” Two of every three fighters went home. Only 10,000 remained of the 32,000.

Yahweh said, “There are still too many fighters. Take all of them down to the spring for a drink. Watch how they drink. Separate those who lap the water like a dog from those who kneel down to drink.” Gideon watched them drink. Yahweh said, “With the 300 who drank from cupped hands, lapping like dogs, I will give you victory.”

During the night Yahweh said to Gideon, “Go down to their camp to hear what they are saying.” He and his servant snuck down to the camp. They heard one of the raiders telling a friend his dream. In the dream a round loaf of bread rolled down into the camp and collapsed a tent.

His friend replied, “This must refer to Gideon, the Israelite. God has given him victory over the whole camp.”

Gideon hurried back to his fighters. “Get up! Yahweh has given the raiders’ camp into your hands.” He divided his men into three groups. Each fighter had a trumpet and a jar with a lighted torch inside. No one could see the lights. “Watch me,” he told them, “when I get to the edge of the camp, do what I do.”

They surrounded the camp. At the signal, suddenly they all blew their trumpets and broke their jars to expose the torches. They shouted, “For Yahweh and for Gideon!” The Midianites were confused and terrified. They turned on each other with their swords and then ran for their lives. Israelite fighters were in hot pursuit. Gideon sent out messengers, calling for other fighters to guard the fords of the Jordan, so the raiders could not escape to their own territory (Jud 7:2-24).

The Israelites chased the raiders across the Jordan and up onto the eastern plateau. Several Israelite towns refused to join in the chase or feed Gideon’s fighters. They didn’t respect Gideon. They later were punished by Gideon, who was changing from a humble servant of God to a vengeful commander.

Some of the Israelites wanted to make Gideon their ruler. At first he refused, but he was tempted by the raiders’ gold. He asked for all the gold. From the gold he made a forbidden religious object. He set it up in his home town. There the people again moved away from Yahweh. The raiders didn’t bother Israel again, but Gideon lived to see Israel drop back into pagan ways. As soon as he died, the Israelites relapsed and began to worship the Baal-gods again.

This story is **important** because it tells the story of the rise and fall of an Israelite leader. No one was more surprised than Gideon himself when God’s angel appeared to him. He began as a

reluctant but humble servant of God. The Spirit of God empowered him and led him to victory. But pride led to revenge. Greed led to idolatry.

The **main truth** of this lesson is God was willing to use men like Gideon and women like Deborah, who listened to him and obeyed his word. Some of the deliverers, however, like Gideon and Samson, are not persons for us to imitate.

To **review** this lesson, answer these questions:

1. Can you list again the four elements of the spiritual life of Israel? [Pause]
A. If you said, "Sinfulness, punishment, repentance, deliverance," you are correct.
2. Why was Gideon reluctant to obey the angel? [Pause]
A. If you answered, "Because he was afraid of the raiders, and didn't think he was qualified to be a leader," you answered correctly.
3. Why did Yahweh demand that Gideon send most of his fighters home? [Pause]
A. If you said, "God wanted to make sure that he himself received honor for the victory, rather than Gideon or anyone else," you are right.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to the story at least three times. As you hear the story each time, imagine how it happened. See the events in your own mind. Then tell the story in your own words as you remember it. You should spend at least 45 minutes in learning the story. You may need to have someone check that you are telling the story correctly.

Ask a friend who has never heard this story to listen to it. A major lesson of this story is that God wants to use men and women to do his work in this world. No one deserves to be used by God. It is a great privilege to be used by God. Spend some time in prayer asking God what he would have you to do for him.