

## The Call of Gideon

**Y**ou have to read those books and write a paper on each of them by when?" asked Marcel.

"In three weeks," replied Ian. It was a Saturday morning and Marcel had found Pastor Ian Green in his office.

Ian was working on one of his papers for his Doctor of Divinity degree. The 50-year-old pastor, who held a bachelor's and two master's degrees, had enrolled in an online degree program last month.

The new pastor at Peace Fellowship Community Church for the past year, Ian had already begun to have "buyer's remorse," so to speak. Why had he decided to go after a Doctor of Divinity degree?

"You're a smart pastor," said Marcel. "I wouldn't think any more or less of you if you didn't have the degree. You already have several anyway, right?"

"It doesn't have anything to do with trying to impress others," Ian said. "I believe it will help me be a better pastor and counselor. I also believe God is pleased with my endeavor."

"Hasn't the Lord always been with you? Hasn't He brought you through other educational efforts?" asked Marcel. "Hasn't He blessed you, Sister Green, and your children in countless ways? Hasn't He blessed our church since you've been here?"

Ian's eyes became piercing. He smiled, "Yes."

"Then, Pastor, you ought to know that the Lord's got you in whatever situation you find yourself in."

**1.** *Do you keep a record of God's good works in your life? Explain your answer.*

**2.** *Why is it important to remember what God has done in the past?*

**3.** *What keeps us from always remembering what God has done for us?*

## The Israelites' Dire Situation

*Judges 6:1-2, KJV*

1 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years.

2 And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds.

*Judges 6:1-2, NIV*

<sup>1</sup>The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. <sup>2</sup>Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds.

Like their predecessors, a new generation of Israelites was guilty of practicing idolatry. Judges 6:1 says God's people were doing what was "evil" in His "sight" (KJV).

After the Israelites settled in Canaan, they were constantly tempted to compromise the worship of the one true God and follow the worship of the Canaanites, who believed in many gods. Therefore, the Lord "gave them into the hands of the Midianites" (vs. 1), a confederation of desert peoples, who were at times either in alliance or at war with Israel. God's people were so overwhelmed by this foe that they were forced to evacuate the low-lying regions of their homeland to seek shelter in the clefts of mountains, caves, and other places of refuge.

### 4. *What brought about Israel's dire situation?*

## The Prophet's Declaration

*Judges 6:7-10, KJV*

7 And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of the Midianites,  
8 That the LORD sent a prophet

*Judges 6:7-10, NIV*

<sup>7</sup>When the Israelites cried out to the LORD because of Midian, <sup>8</sup>he sent them a prophet, who said, "This is

unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage;

9 And I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drave them out from before you, and gave you their land;

10 And I said unto you, I am the LORD your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but ye have not obeyed my voice.

what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. <sup>9</sup>I rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians. And I delivered you from the hand of all your oppressors; I drove them out before you and gave you their land. <sup>10</sup>I said to you, 'I am the LORD your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.' But you have not listened to me."

Judges 6:3-6 indicates that the Midianites conducted raids against Israel, most often when God's people tried to plant their crops. Eventually, they became so poor that they "cried out" (vs. 7) to God for help and relief.

But the Lord did not immediately appoint a deliverer. Instead, He first dispatched an unnamed "prophet" (vs. 8) to speak directly to the people. He reminded the Israelites about the remarkable things God had done for them. This included freeing them from slavery in Egypt, driving out the powerful Canaanite nations, and giving the Israelites the promised land (vs. 9). God upheld His covenant with Israel, and He expected His people to do the same. Tragically, they did not. Instead, they venerated the pagan deities of the Amorites (vs. 10), one of the Canaanite peoples.

**5.** *How did the Lord respond to the Israelites' pleas for help?*

**6.** *How had God aided His people in the past?*

**7.** *In what way did the Israelites disregard the Lord's will?*

## The Ambivalence of Gideon

*Judges 6:11-16a, KJV*

11 And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites.

12 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.

13 And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.

14 And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?

15 And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.

16a And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee.

*Judges 6:11-16a, NIV*

<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 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>16a</sup>The LORD answered, "I will be with you."

When the “angel of the LORD” (vs. 11) arrived and sat down under a prominent “oak” tree in Ophrah, he saw Gideon, the son of Joash, threshing wheat in a winepress, likely a pit hacked out of rock or dug out of the ground.

Gideon did this to stay out of the sight of the Midianites. Normally, harvested grain was spread out in the open on a threshing floor and trampled by oxen to separate the kernels of grain from the worthless chaff, which the wind would then blow away. If Gideon had done this, the Midianites would have spotted him and seized his grain.

God was aware of His people’s dilemma. This is why He dispatched His heavenly emissary to Gideon to declare that the Lord was with him, a valiant “warrior” (vs. 12). Gideon was familiar with the great miracles the Lord performed to rescue His people from slavery in Egypt. Gideon, however, could not find any evidence that God was still willing to work in that way. In fact, Gideon believed the Creator had deserted His people.

The angel did not debate the matter. Instead, he turned to Gideon and said that God had given Gideon the “strength” (vs. 14) to deliver the Israelites from their oppressors. Gideon was told to carry out this important task, for the Lord commissioned his servant to do so.

In response, Gideon said not only that his “clan” (vs. 15) was the feeblest among all the people in the tribe of Manasseh, but also, as the youngest member in his father’s household, Gideon claimed to be the “least” important.

Gideon’s lack of status among his people was not an obstacle for the Lord. He could use anyone to accomplish His will. This truth is evident in God’s response to Gideon. The Creator not only promised to be with Gideon, but also that through him, the Midianites would assuredly be struck down (vs. 16; see Isa. 9:4; 10:26).

**8.** *How did the Lord’s angel address Gideon?*

**9.** *How did Gideon initially respond to the Lord’s angel?*

**10.** *What counter-response did Gideon receive from the Lord’s angel?*

## Breaking the Cycle

The Israelites did evil in God's sight by practicing idolatry. Their Canaanite neighbors tempted them to stray from worshiping God alone as the one true God. The attitudes and actions that accompanied their idolatry were repulsive to God, and He allowed the Midianites to oppress them. Jesus said the greatest commandment is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matt. 22:37). God's people are to trust only in Him for salvation. Although we're not surrounded by "Midianites" today, Christianity is not the only religion in the world. God wants us to keep our faith focused solely on Him.

This contrasts with the cycle the Israelites got caught in concerning their relationship with God. Over and over, they wandered from God, followed the ways of the world, experienced God's discipline at the hands of an oppressor, and repented and cried out to Him for deliverance. So often Christians today get caught in this same cycle. With one step and then the next, people stray from God and His ways, experience His discipline, then repent and plead for deliverance. The Israelites sank farther into spiritual darkness each time. The same can happen to anyone who chooses not to follow the Lord.

God provided judges and deliverance from oppressors when the Israelites repented. We too must remember God's past works to trust in the future. We no longer live in the days of the judges; rather, we look back on what God has done in sending Jesus to be our deliverer (Gal. 5:1)

**11.** *Why is idolatry repulsive to God?*

**12.** *What forms of idolatry might people be tempted to practice today?*

**13.** *How do we respond when someone reminds us of God's past work on our behalf?*

## Moving Forward with God

An important verse in the lesson this week is God's promise, "I will be with you"—now and into the future. What God has done in the past sheds light on what He will do in the future. When we face a current crisis, we can remember one He brought us through before, which gives us hope for the future.

► *One way we can respond to God's promise to be with us now and in the future is to create a "blessings jar." Write Bible verses that describe God's past works and blessings for His children on slips of paper. Include slips describing how God has been there for you in the past. Place the papers in a container to remember what God has done when you need hope for the future. Right now, list here some of the verses you could use on the provided slips of paper.*

### KEY VERSE

And the LORD said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die. —Judges 6:23, KJV

But the LORD said to him, "Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die." —Judges 6:23, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of October 17 through October 23

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** 1 Samuel 3:1-10—Speak for Your Servant Is Listening.
- Tue.** 1 Samuel 8:1-9—A Desire to Be Like Others.
- Wed.** Revelation 11:15-19; 15:2-4—God Is the King of Nations.
- Thu.** Psalm 93—The Lord Is Clothed in Majesty.
- Fri.** 1 Samuel 9:3-17—God Chooses Saul.
- Sat.** 1 Samuel 9:27-10:8—God's Spirit Will Possess You.
- Sun.** 1 Samuel 10:17-27—Behold Your King!