
Lesser Known Bible Stories series

Dear God,

Thank you for stories that help us understand our world and your dream for us.

Amen .



This book belongs to

Your Name: _____

Judges of Ancient Israel



Othniel



Ehud



Deborah



Gideon



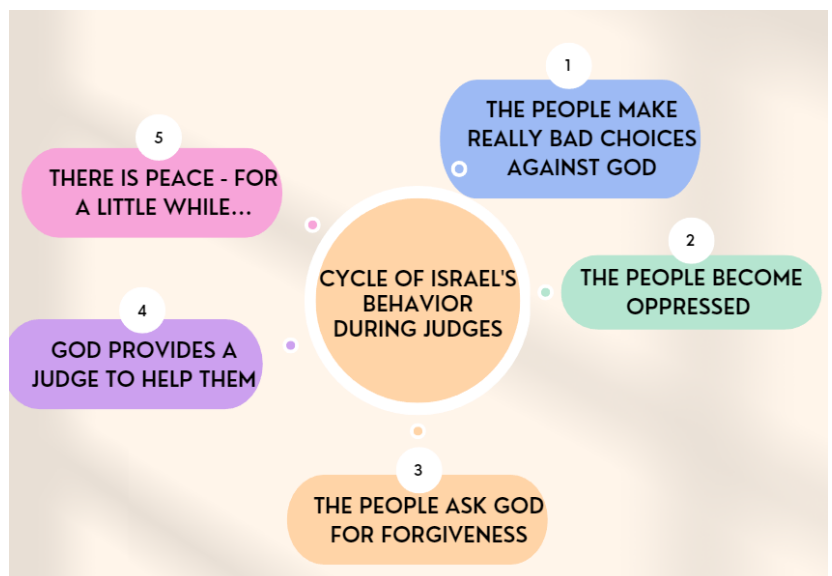
Jephthah



Samson

The book of Judges tells about a time in the history of ancient Israel when the people did not have a king and they had to figure out how to govern themselves. During this time (which was about 400 years) the Israelites kept repeating the same behavior (which wasn't very good, by the way). They would make bad choice, get into trouble, ask God for help, God would choose a person (or a "judge" to lead them and give them help, and there would be peace. But that peace only lasted a little while until they would start making bad choices and forgetting how God would like them to behave.

Gideon was one of the people that God chose to help Israel. Gideon was a young and fearful Israelite who didn't do anything heroic or smart or special. Nothing that is, until Gideon realized God's super powers and became a mighty warrior.



Intro to the Story

After the death of Joshua (remember him from the Battle of Jericho?) the people of Israel now have no single ruler. Instead, they are governed by a succession of “Judges” or wise officials elected to lead in battle, solve disputes, and keep order. And they mostly live in peace.

But slowly as the years go by, a few people and then more forget about God and turn away from him. And then idols become a thing. Eventually, they begin getting trouble from the Midianites who raid their crops and steal their cattle and sheep. This becomes a big problem and the Israelites again live in oppression, fear, and hunger.

One day while doing his chores, a young farm boy named Gideon is visited by a stranger who tells him, “You are a mighty warrior. God has chosen you to save his people.”

Gideon said, “Me? I am the least in my father’s house.” The stranger gave Gideon a sign that he was in fact an Angel sent by God and he disappears. Amazed and in shock, Gideon realizes that he has seen an angel of God.

God tells Gideon to destroy the altar of Baal. Gideon obeys, but he’s afraid of the townspeople, so he destroys the altar secretly and at night. And because he is afraid of what God might ask of him, he asks God to send him a sign. He really does NOT want to be the one to be called upon by God. God sends a sign and Gideon even more afraid. So Gideon asks for another sign—just to be double double sure. Maybe he thought he could ignore the whole thing and make it go away.

But God sends another sign and now Gideon can’t deny that God has called him to do to save the Israelites from the Midianites. God has given Gideon a challenge.

Gideon calls all the leaders of Israel and together they raise an army of 32,000 troops. They have a lot of good strong men and enough camels and equipment that they feel they have a pretty good chance to win against the Midianites.

And then God makes the challenge harder: He instructs Gideon to tell anyone who is afraid to fight to go home. Most of the troops high tail it home and that leaves only and about 10,000 soldiers remain.

And then God makes the challenger harder still: God tells Gideon to send more soldiers home. When they come to a river, God instructs Gideon to send home everyone who takes a drink from the river by kneeling down, and bringing water to their mouths by cupping their hands together. Anyone who laps up water straight from the river (like a puppy drinks from a bowl) will stay to fight.

This leaves only 300 soldiers. A much much, ***much*** smaller number than the Midianites. (Imagine all of the kids in your school against all of the people at an OSU game!) Sound impossible? It absolutely was!

God told Gideon that He was making the task impossible for Gideon and the Israelites to do on their own. He wanted the Israelites to know they couldn't get through this battle or any of life’s tough challenges on their own, without the power and strength and love of God.

God is our superpower.

When it came time for battle, Gideon had a plan. When Gideon gave the signal, instead of attacking the Midianites with swords, the 300 soldiers blew their horns, waved their torches, smashed their pitchers, and such a huge and confusing ruckus that the Midianites thought they were outnumbered. The Midianites panicked and in their confusion and chaos began to fight with each other.

Within a short time the Midianites defeated themselves and the Israelites won their freedom and once again lived in peace. For a little while....

The Story-

Gideon

Judges 6-7

The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. 2 Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds. 3 Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. 4 They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. 5 They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count them or their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it. 6 Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the Lord for help.

7 When the Israelites cried out to the Lord because of Midian, 8 he sent them a prophet, who said, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. 9 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. 10 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."

¹¹Then the LORD's messenger came and sat under the oak at Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite. His son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to hide it from the Midianites. ¹²The LORD's messenger appeared to him and said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior!" ¹³But Gideon replied to him, "With all due respect, my Lord, if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his amazing works that our ancestors recounted to us, saying, 'Didn't the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and allowed Midian to overpower us." ¹⁴Then the LORD turned to him and said, "You have strength, so go and rescue Israel from the power of Midian. Am I not personally sending you?" ¹⁵But again Gideon said to him, "With all due respect, my Lord, how can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I'm the youngest in my household." ¹⁶The LORD replied, "Because I'm with you, you'll defeat the Midianites as if they were just one person." ¹⁷Then Gideon said to him, "If I've gained your approval, please show me a sign that it's really you speaking with me. ¹⁸Don't leave here until I return, bring out my offering, and set it in front of you." The Lord replied, "I'll stay until you return."

¹⁹So Gideon went and prepared a young goat and used an ephah of flour for unleavened bread. He put the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot and brought them out to him under the oak and presented them. ²⁰Then God's messenger said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened bread and set them on this rock, then pour out the broth." And he did so. ²¹The LORD's messenger reached out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread. Fire came up from the rock and devoured the meat and the unleavened bread; and the LORD's messenger vanished before his eyes. ²²Then Gideon realized that it had been the LORD's messenger. Gideon exclaimed, "Oh no, LORD God! I have seen the LORD's messenger face-to-face!" ²³But the LORD said to him, "Peace! Don't be afraid! You won't die." ²⁴So Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and called it "The LORD makes peace." It still stands today in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

²⁵That night the LORD said to him, "Take your father's bull and a second bull seven years old. Break down your father's altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah that is beside it. ²⁶Build an altar to the LORD your God in the proper way on top of this high ground. Then take the second bull and offer it as an entirely burned offering with the wood of the Asherah that you cut down." ²⁷So Gideon took ten of his servants and did just as the LORD had told him. But because he was too afraid of his household and the townspeople to do it during the day, he did it at night.

²⁸When the townspeople got up early in the morning, there was the altar to Baal broken down, with the asherah image that had been beside it cut down, and the second bull offered on the newly built altar! ²⁹They asked each other, "Who did this?" They searched and investigated, and finally they concluded, "Gideon, Joash's son, did this!" ³⁰The townspeople said to Joash, "Bring out your son for execution because he tore down the altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah that was beside it." ³¹But Joash replied to all who were lined up against him, "Will you make Baal's complaint for him? Will you come to his rescue? Anyone who argues for him will be killed before morning. If he is a god, let him argue for himself, because it was his altar that was torn down." ³²So on that day Gideon became known as Jerubbaal, meaning, "Let Baal argue with him," because he tore down his altar.

³³Some time later, all the Midianites, Amalekites, and other easterners joined together, came over, and set up camp in the Jezreel Valley. ³⁴Then the LORD's spirit came over Gideon, and he sounded the horn and summoned the Abiezrites to follow him. ³⁵He sent messengers into all of Manasseh, and they were also summoned to follow him. Then he sent messengers into Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali too, and they marched up to meet them.

³⁶But then Gideon said to God, "To see if you really intend to rescue Israel through me as you have declared, ³⁷I'm now putting a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece but all the ground is dry, then I'll know that you are going to rescue Israel through me, as you have declared." ³⁸And that is what happened. When he got up early the next morning and squeezed the fleece, he wrung out enough dew from the fleece to fill a bowl with water.

³⁹Then Gideon said to God, "Don't be angry with me, but let me speak just one more time. Please let me make just one more test with the fleece: now let only the fleece be dry and let dew be on all the ground." ⁴⁰And God did so that night. Only the fleece was dry, but there was dew on all the ground.

7 Then Jerubbaal, that is, Gideon, and all of the people with him rose early and set up camp beside the Harod spring; Midian's camp was north of theirs, in the valley by the Moreh hill.

²The LORD said to Gideon: "You have too many people on your side. If I were to hand Midian over to them, the Israelites might claim credit for themselves rather than for me, thinking, We saved ourselves. ³So now, announce in the people's hearing, 'Anyone who is afraid or unsteady may return home from Gideon's mountain.'" At this, twenty-two thousand people went home, and ten thousand were left.

⁴The LORD said to Gideon, "There are still too many people. Take them down to the water, and I will weed them out for you there. Whenever I tell you, 'This one will go with you,' he should go with you; but whenever I tell you, 'This one won't go with you,' he should not go." ⁵So he took the people down to the water. And the LORD said to Gideon, "Set aside those who lap the water with their tongues, as a dog laps, from those who bend down on their knees to drink." ⁶The number of men who lapped was three hundred, and all the rest of the people bent down on their knees to drink water, with their hands to their mouths. ⁷Then the LORD said to Gideon, "With the three hundred men who lapped I will rescue you and hand over the Midianites to you. Let everyone else go home." ⁸So the people gathered their supplies and trumpets, and Gideon sent all the Israelites home, but kept the three hundred. Now Midian's camp was below Gideon in the valley.

⁹That night the LORD said to him, "Get up and attack the camp, because I've handed it over to you. ¹⁰But if you're afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah, ¹¹and you'll hear what they are saying. May you then get the courage to attack the camp." So he went down with his servant Purah to the outpost of the armies that were in the camp. ¹²The Midianites, Amalekites, and other easterners were spread across the valley like a swarm of locusts; their camels were too many to count, like the grains of sand on the seashore. ¹³Just when Gideon arrived, there was a man telling his friend about a dream. He said, "Get this! I had a dream that a loaf of barley bread was rolling into the Midianite camp. It came to a tent and hit it, and the tent collapsed. In fact, it rolled the tent over upside down, so it fell flat." ¹⁴His friend replied, "Can this be anything other than the sword of the Israelite Gideon, Joash's son? God has handed over Midian and its entire camp to him!"

¹⁵When Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its meaning, he worshipped. Then he returned to the Israelite camp and said, "Get up! The LORD has handed over the Midianite camp to you." ¹⁶He divided the three hundred men into three units and equipped every man with a trumpet and an empty jar, with a torch inside each jar. ¹⁷"Now watch me," he ordered them, "and do what I do. When I get to the outpost of the camp, do just what I do. ¹⁸When I blow the trumpet, along with all who are with me, then you blow the trumpets, all of you surrounding the whole camp. And then shout, 'For the LORD and for Gideon!'"

¹⁹Gideon and one hundred of his men moved to the outpost of the camp at the middle watch of the night, when they had just changed the guards. Then they blew the trumpets and smashed the jars that were in their hands. ²⁰So the three units blew their trumpets and broke their jars, holding the torches with their left hands and blowing the trumpets in their right hands. And they called out, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!" ²¹Each man stood fast in his position around the camp, and the entire camp took off running, shouting, and fleeing. ²²When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the LORD turned the swords of fellow soldiers against each other throughout the whole camp. The camp fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, to the border of Abel-meholah, beside Tabbath. ²³The Israelites from Naphtali, Asher, and all of Manasseh were called out, and they chased after the Midianites.

²⁴Then Gideon sent messengers into all of the Ephraim highlands, saying, "Go down to meet the Midianites and take control of the Jordan's waters as far as Beth-barah." So all the Ephraimite men were called out, and they took control of the Jordan's waters as far as Beth-barah. ²⁵They also captured two Midianite officers, Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at Oreb's Rock, and killed Zeeb at Zeeb's Winepress. Then they went on chasing the Midianites, and they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon on the other side of the Jordan.

The Story

Words to Know

Use this space to write down the words you don't know and look up their definitions:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Questions to think about

1. ***What words could you use to describe Gideon?***
2. ***Why do you think God would choose him over everyone else?***
3. ***Why did God levelled up Gideon's challenge by making his army smaller?***
4. ***Can you think of another story where the main character is asked to do something that seemed impossible to do? How did they solve their problem?***
5. ***Have you ever had to do something that seemed impossible to do by yourself? What did you do about it?***

Story Map

Characters:

Setting:

Beginning:

Middle:

End:

What do you think about this story?

What is your favorite part?

Can you think of reasons God would want us to remember this story?



Illustrate the story

Use this space to retell the story of Gideon in pictures: