

# Gideon - Introduction

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[ 0 : 00 ] Okay, let's look at Judges, and I'm just going to barely get into Judges chapter 6.

! The first judge was Othniel. The second judge, Ehud. The third one, Shamgar. One little verse on Shamgar.

The fourth one, Deborah. Remember Deborah. And now, who? Gideon. And we're pretty familiar with Gideon. Perhaps one of the more famous of the Judges.

At least his story is such an interesting story, and that we remember it well. And a lot of lessons in these few chapters that deal with Gideon.

And so we'll kind of get into the introduction of it, because we're going to find out that something is a little bit different here.

[ 1 : 29 ] Before we're actually even introduced to Gideon, there's some in chapter 6 that's kind of the same, same kind of deal, as was true of all the Judges.

And then there's something different here that I want us to take note of. All right, so the author of Judges has given us four, actually four full chapters to deal with Gideon.

Although the fourth chapter is not about Gideon at all, but about someone else. And so chapters 6 through 8 deal directly and pretty, in a very detailed way, even more detailed than the other Judges that we've had so far.

A detailed description of the ministry, the call and ministry of Gideon. And chapter 8 will end with his death.

All right, and with nearly all of the Judges, we have had some statement about that Judge dying. And then we kind of move on with the story. And so at the end of chapter 8, we'll have the death of Gideon.

[ 2 : 45 ] But then chapter 9 deals with an incident that involved his son, one of Gideon's offspring.

And his name is Abimelech. Abimelech. And so we'll treat that one kind of separately, though really all of this together is part of the account of this fifth judge, Gideon.

Now, just why we have this included in Judges is a bit of a mystery to scholars. In fact, it has led some to speculate that it didn't belong there.

It doesn't belong there. The chapter 9 was added sometime later. And maybe, you know, there's just kind of a mistake here. Now, of course, you know that I don't go that way with it. And we'll talk about that.

And they kind of point to the style of chapter 9, the writing style. And they say, you know, look here, this is just different. And there are those scholars that just really like to do that.

[ 3 : 47 ] They like to look at writing style, literary techniques. And they say, well, this is a different author, you know, just based upon that. And so we'll talk something about that when we get to it.

And it's going to probably take us several Sundays before we do that. It's going to take us several Sundays to deal with these four chapters. Now, when we start reading here in chapter 6, we find right off it's the same old thing.

Just the same old thing. And like I said last week, history just keeps repeating itself with the Jews. And it's the same kind of scenario over and over again.

When you look at the closing verse of chapter 5, the Bible says, So the land had rest for 40 years. So after Deborah's judgeship, we call it that, then God granted rest for the land for a whole generation, for 40 years.

But then when you get to the opening verses of chapter 6, then you have the same old thing. You have that sad conjunction. Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord.

[ 5 : 01 ] So the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years. So there it is. We expected that, didn't we? Because that's kind of the routine, kind of the formula here.

And not that Israel had to fit into that formula. They didn't have to, but that's exactly what they did. But this time, the oppressor is, the Bible says, the Midianites or Midian.

And the Midianites were not a group of people or a nation of people that inhabited any part of the promised land.

In fact, they were a, most scholars would call a semi-nomadic. That means they didn't really stay put in one place. In some sense, you could have called Israel a, not just semi, but out-and-out nomadic tribe before they finally came into the promised land.

The Midianites were nomadic. But they did have a land or a country that they called their own. And it was found in the Sinai Peninsula and also Western Arabia, that part of the world, if you can picture that in your minds.

[ 6 : 15 ] And really, this is kind of interesting when you think about it and do a little research on the Midianites. Prior to the Judges, the book of Judges, the Midianites were not seen as enemies.

As a matter of fact, there's quite a bit of history with the Midianites. A very, very important history for the Jews. Moses, you might remember, when he fled Egypt because Pharaoh sought his life, where did he go?

He went to Midian, the land of Midian. Moses' wife was the daughter of a Midianite priest named Jethro. Moses received his call to be the deliverer of God's people while he was living in exile in Midian.

It was there that he saw the burning bush and had that meeting with God. And so it was there that Moses received his call, his call to be the deliverer.

It was also the land of Midian that Israel received. It was in the land of Midian that Israel received the law, the Ten Commandments. And they did so on Mount Sinai.

[ 7 : 31 ] Mount Sinai is there in that region of the world. And it was the Midianite Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, who counseled Moses in civil organization.

A new way of organizing society. Exodus 18. Rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, rulers of tens.

You remember that story. Moses' father-in-law just came to do it. Moses said, this is going to kill you. The way you're trying to operate. You're trying to do this all by yourself. And so he gave him some very sound advice on how to organize the civil life of Israel.

All right. So Midian was not really considered an enemy for a long, long time. But something changed. And so now we have them coming.

And they are now the enemies. And they are the aggressor. They are the oppressors. And a little bit later in this chapter, in fact, just in a few verses on into the chapter, chapter 6, we're going to discover that the Amalekites were also involved in this thing.

[ 8 : 43 ] They had joined with the Midianites. And the Bible mentions also, without really identifying them, a people from the east or Easterners. And whoever they were, we don't really know for sure.

Anyway, these other two nations or groups of people also joined, united with the Midianites, in their oppression of Israel. By the way, Israel had dealt with the Amalekites before.

And you might remember, shortly after, they crossed over the Red Sea, miraculously, by the power of God. They were attacked by the Amalekites.

And it was a very difficult time for them. And that's where you have the story of Moses lifting the rod. And Joshua, excuse me, Aaron on one side and her on one side.

And they're holding up the rod. And they prevailed against the Amalekites. All right, so these were some of these known enemies, some a new enemy for Israel.

[ 9 : 46 ] And the key to understanding the effect of God's punishment of His people. And that's what we have here, right? Because Israel had sinned.

Once again, they had turned from God. They rebelled against their God. They had violated their covenant with Him. And so God then delivered them into the hands of the Midianites.

And one of the effect, the key to understanding the effect of that is found in verse 6. So Israel was greatly impoverished.

That's a really interesting description. Greatly impoverished because of the Midianites. And that's an interesting description. And it means that not only had they become poor because of this oppression, but they had become desperately poor.

Desperately poor. They were at the very end of their rope. And that's the idea behind the word. Now, how did that happen? Well, we read about it starting with verse 2, if you have your Bibles

open there.

[10:51] The hand of Midian prevailed against Israel. Why? Because God allowed them to. They were God's instrument of judgment or punishment, discipline for His people.

Because the Midianites, it says there in verse 2, The children of Israel made for themselves the dens, the caves, and the strongholds which are in the mountains.

All right, so because of the Midianites, in league with the Amalekites, and in league with these Easterners, whomever they may have been, the people of Israel had to go into hiding.

That's the idea here. Hiding up into the mountains so that they, you know, they actually made dens or, you know, probably dug out holes in the sides of the mountains where they could live and hide and protect themselves.

And they lived in caves and strongholds. And I'm assuming that would be some fortresses that they had built themselves, perhaps around the opening of a cave, maybe on a high cliff or some high ground.

[11:58] It was a place where they could hold up and be safe there in the mountains. So they had to go into hiding. They had to flee to the mountains. And verse 3 says, And so it was, when Israel had sown or planted their crops, Midianites would come up, also Amalekites and the people of the east would come up against them.

Then they would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza. I say it's pretty easy to understand the description here.

They just destroyed all their crops, all their means of providing food for themselves. This was one method of their enemy to conquer them, to oppress them, to destroy all of their crops.

And to leave no sustenance, it says here, for Israel. But not only their crops, but also their livestock, sheep, nor ox, nor donkey. For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, coming in as numerous as locusts.

And this gives you just an indication of how many Midianites and Amalekites and these easterners, how many there were. A numberless group of people.

[13:11] And they were like, you know, like trying to count locusts in a locust swarm. And both they and their camels were without number.

Just think about how many camels that would be. That you couldn't look and say, well, I'd say there's maybe a couple of hundred there, a couple of thousand. You couldn't even number them.

But so many camels and the people, and they would enter the land to destroy it.

And really, at this point, there's nothing said about them destroying the people, though I think that's implied here. But their method was to destroy their means of self-support, their means of sustenance and so forth.

That was their method. They would destroy it. And so Israel then, as you could imagine, was greatly impoverished. Greatly impoverished. And it's an interesting term.

And I think you can easily see how serious this was. Israel was in the worst possible state. They were on the verge of starvation. That's implied here. And so they were starving.

[14:14] They were penniless because they couldn't sell any goods. They were penniless. They were impoverished. They were powerless. There wasn't anything they could do against this great number of people and their camels and so forth.

Now, the fact is that the Hebrew word that is translated impoverished literally means to become small. And that's why I say this is an interesting way to describe Israel at this point.

They become small. I think some versions even use the word low. They brought them down low.

And that's the idea. They've become small. And when you think about it, what a change has taken place with Israel because of their sin, because of their rebellion.

I mean, think about it. The once mighty Israel who saw God stop up or part the Red Sea, stop up the Jordan River and destroy Jericho before their very eyes.

The once mighty Israel, the Israel that had conquered these cities and such, and the Israel that had struck fear in the hearts of the Canaanites, that their courage just melted away because of the mighty nation of Israel.

[15:32] And so they're great in the eyes of the people. And now they have been made very small. And who made them small? Who was responsible for that?

Well, you'd have to say God was. God was. And how fitting. Because they had diminished God in their own eyes and in their own hearts and lives. They had minimized him, diminished him.

And so what did God do? He diminished them. He diminished the people of God. And so they're in a desperate, desperate situation. And after eight years of this, Israel finally cried out to their God. I don't know why it took them so long. But verse 6 says, And the children of Israel cried out to the Lord. It's the same old thing, right? And really so far in the account, this account of Israel at this point in the book of Judges, everything's happening just like it has been happening prior to every one of the judges that God has raised up.

And yet this time there's something different. Something quite different. And in this difference there is a lesson for us. And this is really what I want us to focus on tonight.

[16:45] What we have here is instead of God sending a deliverer right away, what does he do? He sends a prophet. He sends a prophet.

And this is different. This breaks the mold, breaks the routine, the formula. And because he didn't do that with the others before he sent his deliverer, Israel cried out and God raised up a deliverer. But this time instead of sending the deliverer right away, God sends a prophet. That's what verse 7 says. And it came to pass when the children of Israel cried out to the Lord because of the Midianites, that the Lord sent a prophet to the children of Israel.

And there's a lesson here. You know, sometimes, maybe many times in our lives, we'll find ourselves in a tight spot, tough spot, maybe some point of suffering or some point of discouragement or whatever it may be.

And we'll find ourselves hurting, in trouble. And what do we do? We cry out to God and rightfully so. We should cry out to him for relief. To cry out to him for deliverance.

[17:49] Some answer, some provision. Cry out to God, literally, to do some divine work in our behalf. And so we cry out to him for that.

And what do we get? Well, sometimes instead of a work of God, we get a word from God. We just get a word. And, you know, maybe it's some reminder.

Reminder of the past. Or maybe a reminder of some decision we've made in life that moved us in a different direction. A direction that God does not want us to go in.

Maybe it's also a point or a word of rebuke. You know, that we've allowed some sin to creep into our lives. And God gives us a word about that.

Or maybe it's a word about a word of encouragement. To trust him. That maybe he's not going to come and deliver us in the way we think he should or the way we want him to.

[18:48] Maybe he's not going to do that right away. And so we get a word from his word in that regard. And so we're to be patient. We're to be faithful. We're to stay steadfast.

And not be discouraged. Not lose heart. Not faint. Maybe it's a word of instruction. Maybe it's anything. God, instead of God doing a work at that point. The work we want him to.

And we have asked him to do. Instead he gives us a word. And what do we say? Well, God, can we just skip the word and get on to the work? You know, all right, we'll get the word later. Fine.

You want to do that? But right now I need help. You know, so sometimes, in fact, oftentimes we react that way. And God wants to do another kind of work in our hearts and in our minds.

And he allows us then to continue under the press or in that point of suffering or whatever it may be. He allows us to continue in that. And he gives us a word instead.

[19:48] A word that is meant to help us, to encourage us. And maybe even to discipline us and redirect us and so forth. All right, so God sends a prophet then before he sends a deliverer.

God sends a word before he sends a work. And so verse 7 again says, And it came to pass when the children of Israel cried out to the Lord because of the Midianites.

By the way, when I read that, I wonder if they cried out to the Lord for any other reasons. Or was it always just because they were in trouble? And when I wonder that, I wonder then, how about me? How about you? Do we really cry out to the Lord in earnest prayer at other times? Or is it always associated in some way with our need and our desperation?

I don't know. You'll have to answer that for yourself. Here they are crying out to the Lord because of the Midianites. Because they are in deep trouble. And so when the children of Israel cried out to the Lord because of the Midianites.

[20:51] And here's where we would expect him, the author, to go on to tell us about a judge that's going to be raised up. And instead, we have this. That the Lord sent a prophet to the children of Israel who said to them, Thus says the Lord God of Israel.

That is, I've got a word for you. Okay? I know you've cried out to me. I know you're in deep trouble. And you're hurting. And you're starving. And you've been brought down low. And I've got a word for you that you need to hear. And here's his word. It's really a two-part word. He says, I brought you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of bondage. And though it doesn't say this, I can just insert, don't you remember that? But, and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of all who oppressed you. Don't you remember that? And drove them out before you and gave you their land. So, what's God doing? He's giving them a word of a reminder.

[ 21 : 55 ] Reminder of his faithfulness, of his power. Reminder, really, of his covenant with them. God hasn't broken that covenant. They broke it. But God is not breaking his covenant with them.

They are still his people. And he wants to remind them of all of those things he had done for them in their behalf over those years. And so, this is the first part of what he wants to say to them.

And then also, as we go on in the text, Also I said to you, I am the Lord your God. Do not fear the gods of the Amorites.

And you think they were fearing the gods of the Amorites? Or maybe this word fear really points to something else. Maybe it points to a reverence that they had for the gods of the Amorites.

And you can't have fear or reverence for false gods without believing to some extent that they're real or that there's some credence in them.

[ 23 : 00 ] And so, what are they doing? What have they been doing? They have been putting some kind of worth or value on these false gods that were not gods at all. And he said, I told you.

Don't you remember? Don't fear. Don't reverence. Don't give any heed to. Don't even give any credence to. Don't even give any lip service to these false gods.

The false gods of the Amorites. Or the gods of the Canaanites. In whose land you dwell. But you have not obeyed my voice. This is his word to the people.

I guess you could call this a prophetic scolding. A royal scolding. From God. So, not only did God remind them of all the great things he had done in their behalf.

But he also reminded them of what he had said in the past. About what would happen to them if they dishonored or violated their covenant with him. Which is what they had done.

[ 24 : 01 ] And so, he doesn't have to include this in here. He's just reminding them. Don't you remember what I said? What happened to you? You did not listen to me. In fact, we don't have to really go back very far in Judges.

We can go back to Judges chapter 2. And you can turn to it if you want to. And listen to the account of what Joshua told them. Or really what God said to them. In Judges chapter 2 verses 1 through 5.

And the angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim. And said, I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers.

And I said, I will never break my covenant with you. So, this is what he was reminding them of over there in chapter 6. Where am I?

My page turned. Thank you. And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land. You shall tear down their altars.

[ 25 : 05 ] And by the way, just to give you a little heads up. That's exactly what Gideon is going to do a little later in the story. You're to tear them down. You shall tear down the altars.

But you have not obeyed my voice. Why have you done this? Therefore, I also said, I will not drive them out before you. But they shall be thorns in your side.

And their gods shall be a snare to you. And indeed they were. So it was when the angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the children of Israel that the people lifted up their voices and wept.

Then they called the name of the place Bachim. And they sacrificed there to the Lord. Bachim means weeping. Named the place weeping. So they were under deep conviction here.

But all that's, you know, passed. And, of course, centuries have passed as well. And they've had a number of occasions already to revisit these things that God said and promised that he would do if they did not obey him, did not hear him.

[ 26 : 07 ] And indeed that's what's happening here. And God is reminding them of that. Now, after reading what God said through this prophet, if you can just forget that you have read the rest of the story.

And maybe you're reading this for the very first time and you've been reading through the book of Judges and you've seen how things have been working and how God has been working this and

kind of the formula, the routine that has developed in the book.

When you get to this place and this happens and it's different, you might be wondering about what's going to happen next. After God says this through his prophet, you might be thinking that, you know, you might be expecting that something even worse is going to happen to Israel.

Because though it's been bad, but, you know, haven't had any word about bloodshed or anything like that yet. The killing of Israelites. And so God says what he says.

You did not obey my voice. And so we might be expecting then to have God send something else, you know, something even far worse than the Midianites and the Amalekites and these Easterners.

[ 27 : 18 ] And so, at the very least, we might be expecting silence from God. You know, of sort of, you made your own bed, now lie in it. That might be what we would expect. And yet what happens next is meant to surprise the reader.

And though we're not surprised because we've read the story. We know how it goes. But it's meant to surprise. And we're meant to be surprised by grace.

And it isn't a shame that we are so relaxed in our faith and so confident in things that we're never surprised by the grace of God anymore.

And there's meant, there's, surprise is meant to be experienced here. God then sends a deliverer, even after what he said. God then, about his people.

And he sends a word to them. You did not obey. And yet God still sends a deliverer to come and rescue his sinning people.

[ 28 : 23 ] His unfaithful people. And this is perhaps, I think, the most amazing feature of the entire book of Judges. I think I've mentioned this before. I mean, we see it over and over again.

Kind of the repeated response of God. The repeated response of grace and mercy for his people.

They are unfaithful. And yet he is always faithful.

They are forgetting all about God. Their God. Yahweh God. But God never forgets them. Never forgets them.

They love their sin. Their idolatry. They love the fertility religion of the people that they've allowed to exist around them. And yet God always loves them.

He never, ever abandons them. And this is a lesson for us. It's not an excuse to sin. I mean, you know, Paul said, should we sin so that grace would abound even more?

[ 29 : 25 ] And he says, God forbid. So it's not an excuse to sin. Or it's not an alibi for sin. Or it's not something to give us some amount of peace and comfort when we sin.

We just know what God will forgive. That's not the point. Rather, it is to focus upon the grace and mercy of God. Even though we're unfaithful.

God is always faithful. He can't be anything else but that. Faithful. And he loves us. Even though we're not loving him in an outward, active way.

He never forgets us. Even though many times every day we forget all about him. And so, you know, it's meant to surprise us.

This surprise of grace. And though in a sense it shouldn't be a surprise to us. That God is a gracious and merciful God. And that he's faithful and always faithful.

[ 30 : 27 ] And he never forgets his people. And always loves his people. And no matter how far we fall and fail. God will always love us. And will always restore us.

Now, he may restore us in a way that we don't like. Like he did his people here. And sometimes his way to restore us. To write fellowship with him is very painful.

Sometimes it involves loss. Losses that can never be recovered. Many, many ways. But God, even in that, is expressing his infinite grace.

Thank you.