

Judges 6

Aim of Lesson

To show that God provided Israel with a suitable leader to deliver them from the Midianites and to turn them back to himself; and that God responded to Gideon's plea for a sign.

Background study

Exodus 33:20; Deuteronomy 12:1-7, 29-32; Judges 2:7-23; Hebrews 11:32-34. Look into the worship of Baals and Ashtaroth.

Suggested outline of lesson

In order to explain how the people of Israel had settled in Canaan, and had become contaminated by the evil beliefs and practices of the local people, talk about the way in which the rottenness of one apple soon spreads to the good ones touching it. To keep apples from going bad, one has to be meticulous in removing the imperfect ones. In the same way, God instructed his people to be strict in eliminating from the land the idol-worshipping heathens, for fear that they themselves would be influenced by them. Remind the children about Jericho and Ai, where clear instructions were given to destroy them utterly. As the Israelites advanced through Canaan, they conquered many cities, but sometimes they made agreements with the people instead of keeping themselves separate.

Tell the children that Joshua had completed the conquest of the land, so that the people had been able to settle, by tribes, in the areas allotted to them by God. The years of wandering and living in tents were now over, and they had built houses and settled down to cultivate the rich land. Soon they were prosperous enough to trade with their neighbours and this contact led them into idolatry.

God had warned his people, through Moses, not to worship idols, and that if they did he would allow them to fall prey to their enemies; as a result they suffered at the hands of the Canaanites, the Midianites, the Philistines, etc. Whenever the people realised that their defeats were a punishment from God for their wickedness, they pleaded with God for forgiveness. Then God heard their prayers and provided them with a leader (judge) to deliver them.

A map, showing the division of the land among the twelve tribes, will reinforce the information given and can be used to show where Gideon lived (Manasseh), between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. The Midianites invaded from the east and attacked the people of Israel so cruelly that not only were they bereft of cattle and crops, they had to flee and hide in the hills. In their desperation they cried out to God.

In describing the call of Gideon by the angel, convey his despair; his feelings of inadequacy were reminiscent of Moses' reaction on Mount Horeb. As on that occasion, fire was the sign of God's power. Before his eyes, the meal that he had prepared was suddenly consumed with fire, which seemed to come out of the rock. This miraculous incident, which will excite the children with its visual impact, shocked Gideon and made him fear the consequences of so close a contact with God. God's reassurance moved him to worship and made him receptive to God's demands upon him. His first task not only required courage but also tested his loyalties. Gideon's mission to rid the land of wickedness had to begin with the destruction of the objects of idolatrous worship set up by his own father. It will be necessary to explain the practices of erecting idolatrous altars to Baal and worshipping wooden symbols (Asherah).

It appears that this one challenging act was enough to make Joash realise his error, and to inspire the Israelites to rise up against their enemies. They recognised that, in Gideon, they had a God-given leader.

Gideon was still overwhelmed by this sudden rise to prominence. Again he sought reassurance from God and asked for yet another sign that he had interpreted God's will correctly. A real sheepskin would be a powerful visual aid to introduce at this point. Children will appreciate how absorbent a fleece is, so that there could be no doubt, in each case, that God had answered his prayer.

In asking for a sign, Gideon was not lacking in faith in God, but was seeking confirmation that God really had chosen him to lead his people. He was aware that he was just an ordinary man but, with God's help, he was able to achieve great things.

Relevance to the children's lives

Although Gideon was just an ordinary farmer, God called him to work for him. Gideon believed God, and proved this by destroying the altar of Baal, as God had instructed him to do. When he felt uncertain, he prayed to God to make him sure about what he was to do, and God readily answered his prayer. When we are uncertain what we should do, how can we be helped towards making the right decision?

Worksheets

These should be self-explanatory.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, when we are unsure, help us to remember that all we need to do is to turn to you and to ask you to show us the way. Amen.

Memory verse

"Whenever the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge, and he saved them from the hand of their enemies" (Judges 2:18).