

Gideon (Judges 6-8)

This story is another story from the time of the judges. During this time, every time the Israelites stopped following God and began doing bad things and worshipping other gods, He allowed other nations to take over. At this time, the Midianites had been ruling the Israelites for the last 7 years. They were very mean to the Israelites and many of them went into hiding in the mountains. Their crops and herds were destroyed and stolen and they Israelites were soon starving. Finally, they turned to God for help and, in response, He sent a prophet. The prophet told them all about the Lord and how he had been faithful to them, he told the people to stop worshipping other gods and to come back to Him.

God wanted to help his people now that they had asked Him for help. So he sent an angel to a man names Gideon. The angel appeared and said, "Mighty hero, the Lord is with you!" But Gideon knew he wasn't a hero. His family was part of one of the smallest tribes of Israel. Not only was his families tribe small, he was also the weakest of his family. The angel told him that the Lord would be with him and that he would easily destroy the Midianites with God's help. Gideon wasn't going to be convinced too easily though. He wanted proof that this angel really was from God and that God really was going to help him. Gideon asked the angel to wait for him while he went home to get an offering to give the Lord, the angel agreed and Gideon left. When he brought the offering back the angel instructed him on what to do and when the angel touched the offering, fire flamed up and consumed it and the angel disappeared. When Gideon saw all of this he realized that this really had been an angel from God and he was afraid but the Lord told him not to be scared and to go home in peace.

When Gideon returned home, the Lord instructed him to remove the altars that had been built to the other gods, to build an altar to God and to make a sacrifice. Gideon did as he was told at night because he was scared of how his family and neighbours would react.

Some time later, the Midianites were camped in a valley, ready to attack the Israelites. God gave Gideon special power and he sent messages to the tribes to send men to fight and they all did. But Gideon still didn't trust God to do what He said He would do and asked for another sign. He told God he would put a fleece on the ground and, by morning, if the fleece was wet but the ground was dry he would know that God really was going to rescue Israel. Sure enough, when Gideon went to check on the fleece it was wet and the ground was dry. Instead of trusting God, he asked for another sign. This time he wanted the fleece to be dry and the ground to be wet and God did as he asked again.

Finally, Gideon believed that God really was with him and that He really would save them from the Midianites. So he took his army and camped in a valley near where the Midianites were camped. But God had another surprise in store for Gideon, He told him that there were too many men in his army. God wanted the people of Israel to know that it was because of God that they defeated the Midianites not because of anything they did. So Gideon told the men to go home if they were afraid to fight and 22,000 left. Gideon now had 10,000 men in his army but God told him that there were still too many! God told Gideon that he was going to test the men and when the test was over there were only 300 men left. The Lord told Gideon that "with these 300 men I will rescue you and give you victory over the Midianites."

That night, the Lord told Gideon, "Get up! Go down into the Midianite camp, for I have given you victory over them!" God also told him that if he still wasn't sure about God's plan, to go down

into the camp and listen to what the Midianites were saying. So Gideon did as God told him and saw just how huge the army was. Gideon crept up to some of the men while one of the men was telling his friend about a dream he had. His friend said that the dream must mean that God had given victory to the Israelites. Gideon was amazed and thanked God, he returned to his camp and woke his men, telling them that God had given them victory. He gave each of his men a ram's horn and a clay jar with a torch inside, then he divided them into 3 groups. He told them, on his signal, to blow their horns and shout, "For the Lord and for Gideon!"

Just after midnight, they blew their horns, dropped their clay jars, they held the torches in one hand and shouted, "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!" As they stood watching, the Midianite camp rushed around in a panic, shouting and trying to escape. They blew their horns again and the Lord caused the Midianites to fight each other.

The Midianites all ran away and Gideon and the Israelites chased and fought with them until they were all out of Israel. God gave them victory over a huge army with just 300 men! Everyone was amazed and asked Gideon to become their King, but he refused, telling the people that the Lord was to be their ruler.

Craft: Trumpet and torch

Here's a craft you can do at home with your family.
You will need:

Card-stock or construction paper
Toilet paper tube
Tissue paper
Markers
Scissors
Glue (glue stick) or tape

To make the horn:

The horn is really easy to make, all you need is a piece of paper, some scissors and a glue stick. You could also decorate your horn with stickers, or markers. Roll up the piece of paper so it's narrow at one end and really wide at the other end. Glue or tape your 'horn' together and cut away the rough edges and you're all done.

To make the torch:

For the torch you will need a toilet paper tube for the base of the torch and tissue paper or construction paper for the 'flames.' First, cut out pieces of your tissue paper or construction paper into flames. Then you can glue the your 'fire' into the tube so you can see the 'flames' coming out of the base. You can decorate the toilet paper however you want.

