

Judges 06 - Cycle 5: Gideon; Destruction of the Altar of Baal; Gideon's Fleece

II. Failure in rescue of Israel through the seven cycles (Judges 3:7—16:31)

(5) Gideon defeats Zebah and Zalmunna and the Midianites and the Amalekites (Judges 6:1—8:28)

(A) Sin (6:1a)

(B) Suppression (6:1b-6)

(C) Supplication (6:7)

(D) Salvation (Judges 6:8—8:27)

(a) Prophet and angel of the Lord appears to Gideon (6:8-24)

(b) Gideon tears down the pagan objects; the Midianites come against Gideon; Gideon's fleece (6:25-40)

Gideon: God's Man in Manasseh

Two hundred years had passed since Joshua led the children of Israel in the conquest of the land. But because they failed to obey the Lord fully, because they failed to totally drive out the pagan people of Canaan, like a disease in remission, two centuries later the pockets of remaining Canaanites regained strength and began to dominate and regulate the lives of the people of Israel.

In Judges 6, for seven years, the Midianites raided the Israelites, right after their harvests, taking all their produce by force, leaving them destitute. The Midianites were an arrogant, brutal people—apparently among the first to develop the camel as a military advantage: its speed (100 mi/day) and mobility proved formidable.

The Midianites were descendants of Abraham and Keturah (Gen 25:1-2), and were defeated by Israel during their wilderness wanderings (Num 22:4; 25:16-18). They were a nomadic people from near the Gulf of Aqabah and apparently had subdued the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites as they crossed the Jordan into Canaan as far north as the Jezreel Valley (6:33) and as far south as Gaza (v4). This relatively brief seven-year period of oppression was sandwiched in between two 40-year periods of peace (5:31; 8:28).

At about the time for the 8th annual invasion, God called a farmer in Manasseh named Gideon to be to become a deliverer of His people: He started his career as a coward (Judges 6); then became a conqueror (7:1—8:21); and ended his career as a compromiser

(8:22-35). But more space is given to Gideon than to any other leader, and he is the only one whose personal struggles with his faith are recorded.

Gideon is a great encouragement to people who have a hard time accepting themselves and believing that God can make anything out of them or do anything with them. But before the Lord could use Gideon for His service, He had to deal with four doubting questions that plagued him and were obstacles to his faith.

(1) "Does the God really care about us?" (v1-13)

(2) "Does God know what He's doing?" (v14-24)

(3) "Will God take care of me?" (v25-32)

(4) "Does God keep His promises?" (v33-40)

Judges 6

(5) Gideon defeats Zebah and Zalmunna and the Midianites and the Amalekites

(Judges 6:1—8:28)

(A) Sin (6:1a)

(B) Suppression (6:1b-6)

1 Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD handed them over to **Midian** for seven years.

1 Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD gave them into the hands of Midian seven years.

1 Later on, the Israelis practiced what the LORD considered to be evil, so the LORD handed them over to the domination of Midian for seven years.

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.

- "...Midian" - the Midianites were descendants of Abraham and Keturah (Gen 25:2); they were involved in the sale of Joseph to Egypt (Gen 37:25-36)

— They were defeated by Israel in Num 25:6-18, but now, two centuries later, they had renewed their strength

— One branch of the Midianites was the Kenites; Moses found shelter with them and married one of them; and the Kenites journeyed with Israel into the Promised Land. But the other clans of Midian were not pro-Israel.

- To this point, Israel had experienced 43 years of suffering under the harsh rule of the neighboring nations, but they hadn't yet learned their lesson and turned away from pagan idols

— Chastening is evidence of God's hatred for sin and His love for His people

— We can't conceive of a holy God wanting anything less than His very best for His children, and the very best He can give us is a holy character like that of Jesus Christ

— God is not a “permissive parent” who allows His children to do as they please (Cf. Rom 8:29; Matt 3:17; 12:18; 17:5)

— Obedience builds character, sin destroys character; God cannot sit by and watch His children destroy themselves (Cf. Prov 3:11-12; Heb 12:5-11)

Unless our suffering leads to repentance, it accomplishes no lasting good; unless our repentance is evidence of a holy desire to turn from sin, not just escape from pain, repentance is only remorse.

2 The power of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of Midian the sons of Israel made for themselves the dens which were in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds.

2 The power of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of Midian the sons of Israel made for themselves the dens which were in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds.

2 Midian's control predominated throughout Israel, and because of Midian the Israelis went out to find temporary hiding places for themselves in the mountains, caves, and fortified places.

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.

- Talk about men becoming mice: the Israelites had descended lower than mice, they became moles, hiding in underground caves, holing up in dens, totally terrified and humiliated

— This describes the severity of the oppression from the Midianites

— The Midianites were more interested in plunder than killing; they were nomadic, and had no desire for permanent residence in the Land

— Because of the raids by the Midianites, the Israelites hid their produce in caves

3 For whenever Israel had sown, the Midianites would come up with the Amalekites and the **people of the east** and march against them.

3 For it was when Israel had sown, that the Midianites would come up with the Amalekites and the sons of the east and go against them.

3 Whenever the Israelis sowed their crops, the Midianites, the Amalekites, and certain groups from the east would come up and invade them.

3 And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them;

- The Midianites organized a coalition of nations to invade the land, and all Israel could do was to flee to the hills and hide

- "...people of the east" - included Amalekites (from the south of Judah), Edomites and Ammonites, who were nomads of the Syrian desert

— The Amalekites had already been a problem (3:13), where they allied with Eglon

4 So they would camp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel, nor a sheep, ox, or donkey.

4 So they would camp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel as well as no sheep, ox, or donkey.

4 They set up their military encampments to fight them, destroyed the harvest of the land as far as Gaza, and left nothing in Israel, whether harvested grain, sheep, oxen, or donkeys.

4 And they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass.

- What they could not carry off with them, they destroyed, leaving no sustenance for the Israelites

5 For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, they would come in like locusts in number, *and both* they and their camels were innumerable; and they came into the land to ruin it.

5 For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, they would come in like locusts for number, *both* they and their camels were innumerable; and they came into the land to devastate it.

5 They would invade with their livestock and tents, swooping in as numerous as locusts. It was impossible to count them or their camels—and they came into the land to destroy it.

5 For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; for *both* they and their camels were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it.

- Living on the land, they were compared to swarms of locusts (7:12)

— They traveled with camels, whose range and speed (as much as 100 miles/day) made them a formidable military threat. This is the first reference to camels as a military element.

— Their strategy was to swarm the land to plunder and destroy, by sheer force of numbers

6 So Israel was brought very low because of Midian, and the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD.

6 So Israel was brought very low because of Midian, and the sons of Israel cried to the LORD.

6 Because Israel was deeply impoverished due to the Midianites, they cried out to the LORD.

6 And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the LORD.

- Returning to their homes, the Israelites found only devastation; and faced another year without food

- When we cry out to the Lord, He harkens to our cry and answers our prayers. When we get to the place of total desperation and brokenness, He always responds.

(C) Supplication (6:7)

7 Now it came about, when the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD on account of Midian,

7 Now it came about when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD on account of Midian,

7 When the Israelis cried out to him about Midian,

7 And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of the Midianites,

(D) Salvation (Judges 6:8—8:27)

(a) Prophet and angel of the Lord appears to Gideon (6:8-24)

8 that the LORD sent a prophet to the sons of Israel, and he said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel says: 'It was I who brought you up from Egypt, and brought you out of the house of slavery.

8 that the LORD sent a prophet to the sons of Israel, and he said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'It was I who brought you up from Egypt and brought you out from the house of slavery.

8 the LORD sent a man who was a prophet to the Israelis and told them, "This is what the LORD God of Israel says: 'I was the one who brought you up from the land of Egypt, delivering you from the house of servitude.

8 That the LORD sent a prophet 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;

- Previously (2:1-5) an Angel of the Lord (the Son of God) came to Bochim to reprove Israel; now an unnamed prophet comes to repeat the message

— We usually call Samuel the first of the prophets (Acts 3:24), but there were unnamed prophets earlier; Deborah was labeled a prophetess

9 And I rescued you from the hands of the Egyptians, and from the hands of all your oppressors, and I drove them out from you and gave you their land,

9 I delivered you from the hands of the Egyptians and from the hands of all your oppressors, and dispossessed them before you and gave you their land,

9 I delivered you from the domination of Egypt and from the domination of all of your oppressors, expelling them right in front of you and giving their land to you.

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

- It is interesting how often the Lord points to the deliverance from Egypt as a mark of His commitment to them

10 and I said to you, "I am the LORD your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live." But you have not obeyed Me."

10 and I said to you, "I am the LORD your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live. But you have not obeyed Me.""

10 I told you, "I am the LORD your God. You are not to fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you'll be living." But you haven't obeyed what I said."

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.

- Israel's obligation was faith, loyalty and obedience, but the unnamed prophet concluded by pointing out Israel's failure in these areas

— The unnamed prophet's point was: in light of all that God did for Israel, it was not too much to ask for exclusive allegiance to Him

11 Then the **angel of the LORD** came and sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press in order to save *it* from the Midianites.

11 Then the angel of the LORD came and sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press in order to save *it* from the Midianites.

11 After this, the angel of the LORD arrived and sat down in the shade of the oak tree in Ophrah that belonged to Joash, a descendant of Abiezer, while his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a wine press in order to safeguard it from the Midianites.

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.

- Gideon was hiding behind a winepress, to hide from the Midianites. Threshing his wheat at that location implies a meager crop; normally wheat was threshed in an open area by oxen pulling threshing sledges over the stalks.

- "...angel of the LORD" - (again, a Theophany) appeared as a sojourning stranger sitting under an oak

Have you ever looked at the resumes of the men God chooses?

- Moses was 80 years old and wanted for murder
- Jacob was a schemer and a con artist
- Elijah and Jeremiah both suffered from depression
- Hosea couldn't keep his marriage together
- Amos was a farmer with no ministry training
- Peter tried to kill a man with his sword
- John Mark was a quitter
- Paul couldn't get along with his partner Barnabas, and couldn't stay out of prison

1 Cor 1:26-29:

26 For consider your calling, brothers *and sisters*, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;
 27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,
 28 and the insignificant things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,

12 And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, **valiant warrior.**"

12 The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior."

12 The angel of the LORD appeared to him and told him, "The LORD is with you, you valiant warrior!"

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

- "...valiant warrior" - used of only two men in Judges: Gideon (here); Jephthah (11:1)

— Was that title satirical or prophetic? It certainly had not been earned yet! He was threshing grain while hiding behind a winepress...

— But it's like that with us: He sees us as completed, finished products (Cf. Rom 8:28-30)

— That's a fabulous passage of Scripture. I am one of the few, throughout the history of humanity, who has been selected, elected by God to be part of His eternal family. So are you!

13 Then Gideon said to him, "O my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did the LORD not bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and handed us over to Midian."

13 Then Gideon said to him, "O my LORD, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian."

13 But Gideon replied, "Right... Sir, if the LORD is with us, then why has all of this happened to us? And where are all of his miraculous works that our ancestors recounted to us when they said, 'The LORD brought us up from Egypt, didn't he?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us over to Midian!"

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.

- Gideon's lack of faith is self-contradicting, but ours usually is also upon examination...and if he remained that way, he would not have been named among the heroes of faith in Heb 11

— Gideon's indictment of God was true: God did deliver Israel to the Midianites. The problem is, Gideon blames God for it, not Israel, where the blame belongs.

14 And the LORD looked at him and said, "Go in this strength of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?"

14 The LORD looked at him and said, "Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?"

14 The LORD looked straight at him and replied, "Go with this determination of yours and deliver Israel from Midian's domination. I've directed you, haven't I?"

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?

- Earlier, this Person was earlier called the "angel of Jehovah," now is called Jehovah

- The Lord doesn't answer Gideon's question. He simply tells him to go get going.

— "Don't philosophize, theologize, question, or analyze: just get going! There's work to be done."

15 But he said to Him, "O Lord, how am I to save Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house."

15 He said to Him, "O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house."

15 "Right..." Gideon responded. "Sir, how will I deliver Israel? Look—my family is the weakest in Manasseh, and I'm the youngest in my father's household."

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.

- Gideon's first response was to question God's concern for His people, then he questioned God's wisdom in choosing him!

— But so did Moses (Ex 3:7-12) and others... Gideon may have been an outcast among his family since he did not worship Baal as his family did! (v25-32)

- Gideon gives two reasons (excuses) why he was not qualified to fulfill the commission:

- His family was the poorest in all of Manasseh, and he was least in his father's house
- His claim to poverty seems perplexing in that he had 10 servants (v27)
- Gideon surely felt that God could do nothing because he and his family were nothing

16 Yet the LORD said to him, "I will certainly be with you, and you will defeat Midian as one man."

16 But the LORD said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man."

16 The LORD told him, "Because I'll be with you, and you'll defeat Midian—every single one of them!"

16 And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.

- God's role was to be with Gideon; Gideon's role was to "smite" the Midianites as if they were one man

- God often chooses the "weak things of this world"; but He is always ready to work patiently with us if we are willing to submit to His will (Eph 2:10; Phil 2:12-13)

17 So Gideon said to Him, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, then perform for me a sign that it is You speaking with me.

17 So Gideon said to Him, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who speak with me.

17 So Gideon asked him, "Please, if I have received favor from you, then do a miracle for me that shows that you're making this promise to me.

17 And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then shew me a sign that thou talkest with me.

- Gideon asked God for a sign; God graciously accommodated Himself to Gideon's unbelief — His request reflects his uncertainty about his own relationship with the One speaking to him, and confirmation that God will be with him and that he will receive strength to defeat Midian as if they were only one man

18 Please do not depart from here until I come *back* to You, and bring out my offering and lay it before You." And He said, "I will remain until you return."

18 Please do not depart from here, until I come *back* to You, and bring out my offering and lay it before You." And He said, "I will remain until you return."

18 And please don't leave here until I've come back to you, brought my offering, and set it down in front of you."

The LORD replied, "I'll stay until you return."

18 Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again.

19 Then Gideon went in and prepared a young goat and unleavened bread *from* an ephah of flour; 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*.

19 Then Gideon went in and prepared a young goat and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour; 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*.

19 Then Gideon went and prepared a young goat and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour. He put the meat in a basket and poured the broth into a pot, and brought them to the angel right under the oak tree. Then he made his offering.

19 And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it.

- This was a fairly large offering, a costly thing to do at a time when food was desperately scarce

— An ephah of flour (about half a bushel) could make bread for a family for several days. It would have taken him an hour to prepare it, but God waited.

20 And the angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay *them* on this rock, and pour out the broth." And he did so.

20 The angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay them on this rock, and pour out the broth." And he did so.

20 The angel, who was God, replied, "Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay them on this boulder. Then pour out the broth." So he did that.

20 And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so.

21 Then the angel of the LORD put out the end of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire came up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. Then the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight.

21 Then the angel of the LORD put out the end of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. Then the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight.

21 The angel of the LORD extended the tip of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and unleavened bread. Fire broke out from inside the boulder, consuming the meat and unleavened bread. Then the angel of the LORD vanished in front of him.

21 Then the angel of the LORD put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the LORD departed out of his sight.

- Here was the "sign" Gideon was looking for...that God consumed the meal that the worshipper brought shows that Gideon found favor in the sight of the Lord

22 When Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the LORD, he said, "Oh, Lord GOD! For I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!"

22 When Gideon saw that he was the angel of the LORD, he said, "Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face."

22 When Gideon realized that he had seen the angel of the LORD himself, he cried out, "Oh no! Lord GOD! I've been looking right at the angel of the LORD—and face-to-face at that!"

22 And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord GOD! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face.

- Gideon now realized that he had been talking to God

- They believed it was fatal for sinful man to look upon God and Gideon was sure he would die (Ex 33:20)

23 But the LORD said to him, "Peace to you, do not be afraid; you shall not die."

23 The LORD said to him, "Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die."

23 "Calm down! Don't be afraid." the LORD replied. "You're not going to die!"

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

- God reassures Gideon; he had a commission to fulfill, and he was immortal until that commission was fulfilled

24 Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and named it The LORD is Peace. To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

24 Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and named it The LORD is Peace. To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

24 So Gideon built an altar right there to the LORD and called it "The LORD is peace." (To this very day it still stands in Ophrah, which belongs to the descendants of Abiezer.)

24 Then Gideon built an altar there unto the LORD, and called it Jehovah-shalom: unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

- Recognize Gideon's situation: his family worshiped Baal. If he challenged the Midianites in the name of the Lord, it meant defying his father, his family, his neighbors, and all the others involved in paganism.

- Whenever God calls us to a task that seems beyond us, we must look to God, not ourselves:

- God asked Abraham, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Gen 18:14); and the answer comes, as it did to Mary, "For God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37)
- Job discovered that God could do everything (Job 42:2)
- Jeremiah admitted that there was nothing too hard for God (Jer 32:17)
- Jesus told His disciples, "With God all things are possible" (Matt 19:26)
- Paul testified, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13)

(b) Gideon tears down the pagan objects; the Midianites come against Gideon; Gideon's fleece (6:25-40)

25 Now on the same night the LORD said to him, "Take your father's bull and a **second bull** seven years old, and tear down the altar of Baal which belongs to your father, and cut down the Asherah that is beside it;

25 Now on the same night the LORD said to him, "Take your father's bull and a second bull seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal which belongs to your father, and cut down the Asherah that is beside it;

25 Later that very night, the LORD told Gideon, "Take the bull that belongs to your father, along with a second bull that's seven years old. Then tear down the altar to Baal that your father owns, cut down the Asherah that's beside it,

25 And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it:

- "...second bull" - an unusual construction in Hebrew; it reads, "the bull of the bullocks"

— It is intended to express a superlative, the "prime" bullock, a "high ranking" bullock

— There are not two animals here, only one, but it's a very superior animal

— The fact that it is seven years old means it was a mature bull; the age of the bull corresponds with the length of Israel's current oppression (Cf. v1)

26 and build an altar to the LORD your God on the top of this stronghold in an orderly way, and take a second bull and offer a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah which you

shall cut down."

26 and build an altar to the LORD your God on the top of this stronghold in an orderly manner, and take a second bull and offer a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah which you shall cut down."

26 and build an altar to the LORD your God on top of this stronghold in an orderly manner. Then take the second bull and offer it as a burnt offering using the wood from the Asherah that you'll be cutting down."

26 And build an altar unto the LORD thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down.

- Destroy the altar of Baal (a massive task in itself), build an altar to the Lord, sacrifice one of his father's bullocks, and use the wood of the Asherah pole for fuel! Gutsy move!

— You can't build an altar to the Lord unless you first tear down the altars to the false gods being worshipped. Our God is a jealous God (Ex 20:5).

— If God was going to use Gideon to deliver Israel, he must first remove from his own house the very element that brought on the divine judgment to begin with, which was idolatry. Then after destroying the false altar, Gideon was to build an altar to the true God.

- Gideon had every right to complete this task: this was commanded in God's law (Ex 34:12-13; Deut 7:5)

— He had the right to stone everyone involved in Baal worship (Deut 13), but that wasn't in his instructions. Yet. But this was a good beginning. "A journey of a thousand miles begins with one step."

— Before David killed the giant Goliath in the sight of two armies, he learned to trust God by killing a lion and a bear in a field where nobody saw it but God (1 Sam 17:32-37)

There were four indignities against Baal here: first, his altar was to be thrown down; second, an altar to the true God was to be built over the destroyed altar; third, a prime bull, the sacred animal in Baalism, was to be offered on this altar, being sacrificed, not to Baal, but to the God of Israel; and, fourth, the Asherah poles, which represent Baal's consort, were to be used as the firewood for the sacrifice.

27 Then Gideon took ten men from his servants and did as the LORD had spoken to him; and because he was too afraid of his father's household and the men of the city to do it by day, he did it by night.

27 Then Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the LORD had spoken to him; and because he was too afraid of his father's household and the men of the city to do it by day, he did it by night.

27 So Gideon went with ten men who were his servants and did just what the LORD had told him to do, though he did it at night because he was too afraid of his father's family and the leading men of the city to do it during the day.

27 Then Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the LORD had said unto him: and so it was, because he feared his father's household, and the men of the city, that he could not do it by day, that he did it by night.

- He followed God's instructions, but did so at night because of fear

— Gideon is still not the "mighty man of valour" (v12) that the Angel of the Lord predicted, but that is coming...

28 When the people of the city got up early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal had been torn down, and the Asherah which had been beside it had been cut down, and the second bull had been offered on the altar which had been built.

28 When the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was torn down, and the Asherah which was beside it was cut down, and the second bull was offered on the altar which had been built.

28 When the leading men of the city got up early the next morning, the altar to Baal had been torn down, along with the Asherah that had stood beside it, and the second bull had been offered on the altar that had been erected.

28 And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was cast down, and the grove was cut down that was by it, and the second bullock was offered upon the altar that was built.

29 So they said to one another, "Who did this thing?" And when they searched and inquired, they said, "Gideon the son of Joash did this thing."

29 They said to one another, "Who did this thing?" And when they searched about and inquired, they said, "Gideon the son of Joash did this thing."

29 They asked each other, "Who did this thing?" When they looked into it and asked around, they concluded, "Joash's son Gideon did it."

29 And they said one to another, Who hath done this thing? And when they enquired and asked, they said, Gideon the son of Joash hath done this thing.

- They considered this a capital offense —although they were the ones who should have been slain (Deut 13:6-9)

— Note that Gideon had taken 10 of his servants to help him in the act. A secret known to 10 men does not stay a secret very long.

30 Then the men of the city said to Joash, "Bring out your son, that he may die, for he has torn down the altar of Baal, and indeed, he has cut down the Asherah which was beside it."

30 Then the men of the city said to Joash, "Bring out your son, that he may die, for he has torn down the altar of Baal, and indeed, he has cut down the Asherah which was beside it."

30 So the leading men of the city ordered Joash, "Bring us that son of yours. He's going to die, because he tore down the altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah that stood beside it!"

30 Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die: because he hath cast down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove that was by it.

- Joash had every reason to be upset with his son: he had smashed his altar to Baal, replaced it with an altar to YHWH, sacrificed his prize bull, and used the sacred Asherah for firewood

- The fact that it was Jews who wanted to execute Gideon for tearing down the altar shows how far the people were following Canaanite gods and religious rites

31 But Joash said to all who stood against him, "Will you contend for Baal, or will you save him? Whoever will contend for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, since *someone* has torn down his altar!"

31 But Joash said to all who stood against him, "Will you contend for Baal, or will you deliver him? Whoever will plead for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because someone has torn down his altar."

31 But Joash responded to everyone who was opposing him, "Do you really intend to fight on Baal's behalf? Do you really intend to rescue him by ordering that whoever fights him will be executed by morning? If Baal is a god, let him fight for himself. After all, it was his altar that was torn down."

31 And Joash said unto all that stood against him, Will ye plead for Baal? will ye save him? he that will plead for him, let him be put to death whilst it is yet morning: if he be a god, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar.

- Joash' point was: men could save Israel, but this god could not even save his own altar. Instead of the people needing deliverance from a hostile god, this god (Baal) requires deliverance by the people.

- If Baal was truly a god, he needs no human defense; but for one to defend a false god is to bring the death penalty upon himself

— Joash seems to have been won over by his son's actions

32 Therefore on that day he named Gideon Jerubbaal, that is to say, "Let Baal contend against him," because he had torn down his altar.

32 Therefore on that day he named him Jerubbaal, that is to say, "Let Baal contend against him," because he had torn down his altar.

32 So that very day he named Gideon Jerubbaal, that is, "Let Baal fight," since he had torn down his altar.

32 Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, Let Baal plead against him, because he hath thrown down his altar.

- Jerubbaal = "Baal's antagonist"; epithets can become badges of honor:

— The "Yankee Doodles" of the Revolutionary War

— The "Quiz Kids" became the Whiz Kids at Ford

— The "Jesus Freaks" of the 70s became some of the leading pastors of the 90s

- Gideon will be referred to by this nickname in subsequent chapters

— In 2 Sam 11:21, Gideon (Jerubbaal) is called Jerubbesheth, since later Bosheth (meaning "shame") because a nickname for Baal

— Joash gave Gideon this name to reinforce his defense of his son against the men of the city seeking to kill him

33 Then all the Midianites, the Amalekites, and the people of the east assembled together; and they **crossed over** and camped in the Valley of Jezreel.

33 Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the sons of the east assembled themselves; and they crossed over and camped in the valley of Jezreel.

33 Then all the Midianites, Amalekites, and certain groups from the east gathered together, crossed the Jordan River, and set up camp in the Jezreel Valley.

33 Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel.

- The Midianites and their allies prepared for their annual invasion and plunder with more than 135,000 men (7:12; 8:10)

- "...crossed over" - they crossed over the Jordan River

— They gathered in the Valley of Jezreel, the same locale of Jabin's defeat (Judges 5), and the site of the final world battle: Megiddo overlooks this very valley

34 So the Spirit of the LORD **covered** Gideon like clothing; and he blew a trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called together to follow him.

34 So the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon; and he blew a trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called together to follow him.

34 So the Spirit of the LORD took control of Gideon, who blew a trumpet, mustering the descendants of Abiezer to follow him into battle.

34 But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; and Abiezer was gathered after him.

- "...covered" - *lavash*, means "to clothe"; Gideon was "clothed" in the Holy Spirit

— This is one of the ministries of the Holy Spirit in the OT (Judges 3:10; 11:19; 13:25; 14:6,19; 15:14); Saul (1 Sam 10:9-10); David (1 Sam 16:13)

— Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit (Zech 4:6)

- Blowing the trumpet in his home town brought the men of Abiezer rallying behind him

- This was a sound that they probably hadn't heard for 7 years!
- His stand against Baal for YHWH had begun to bear fruit

35 And he sent messengers throughout Manasseh, and they also were called together to follow him; and he sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they came up to meet them.

35 He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, and they also were called together to follow him; and he sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they came up to meet them.

35 He sent messengers to the entire tribe of Manasseh, calling them to follow him, and he also sent word to the tribes of Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, calling them to meet him.

35 And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh; who also was gathered after him: and he sent messengers unto Asher, and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali; and they came up to meet them.

- These four tribes were adjacent to the Valley of Jezreel, and 32,000 men responded

— Impressive, but what were up against a well-equipped army five times as large

Sign of the Fleece

But Gideon needed reassurance. Did God really want him to lead the army? What did he know about warfare? He was only a farmer. [God used a group of fishermen to turn the entire world upside down—but we're getting ahead of the story...]

36 Then Gideon said to God, "If You are going to save Israel through me, as You have spoken,

36 Then Gideon said to God, "If You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken,

36 Then Gideon told God, "If you intend to deliver Israel by my efforts as you've said,

36 And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said,

37 behold, I am putting a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I will know that You will save Israel through me, as You have spoken."

37 behold, I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I will know that You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken."

37 then take a look at this wool fleece that I'm placing on the threshing floor. If dew appears only on the fleece—and it's dry on the ground all around it then I'll know that you'll deliver Israel by my efforts like you've said."

37 Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said.

- The miraculous nature of the sign was that, normally, the moisture in the fleece would be absorbed into the ground beneath it

— The presence of dew shows that the rain season had ended and the dew season had begun (April). The fact that Gideon was threshing wheat would put the event in June.

- "Putting out the fleece" has become an idiom in religious circles. But it isn't necessarily an appropriate method for determining the will of God; it may be only evidence of unbelief.

— It can be an approach used by people, like Gideon, who lack the faith to trust God to do what He said He would do

— Gideon admitted—twice—what God had already said (6:36-37), and asked for a miracle to reconfirm it

38 And it was so. When he got up early the next morning and wrung out the fleece, he wrung the dew from the fleece, a bowl full of water.

38 And it was so. When he arose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece, he drained the dew from the fleece, a bowl full of water.

38 And that is what happened: When he got up early the next morning, he wrung out the fleece to drain the dew from it and extracted a bowl full of water.

38 And it was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water.

- The fact that God stooped to Gideon's weakness demonstrates that God is gracious and understands how we're made: we are but dust (Ps 103:14)

- There are a number of similar incidents in Scripture:

— Gen 24: Abraham's servant Eliezer confirms an identification of the bride for Isaac by seeing if a woman who came to the well offered to draw water for him and his camels (Gen 24:12-21)

— 1 Sam 14: Jonathan and his armor-bearer determine whether or not to take on the entire Philistine army by the sentries' response to a challenge (1 Sam 14:8-10)

— Is 7: God Himself instructed Ahaz to ask for a sign from Him

But there are some serious cautions:

- A fleece before the Lord is only valid if the Word of God has not already spoken to the issue
- A fleece should not be limiting to the Lord
- A fleece should be confirming only if you are really serious

39 Then Gideon said to God, "Do not let Your anger burn against me, so that I may speak only one *more* time; please let me put *You* to the test only one *more* time with the fleece: let it now be dry only on the fleece, and let there be dew on all the ground."

39 Then Gideon said to God, "Do not let Your anger burn against me that I may speak once more; please let me make a test once more with the fleece, let it now be dry only on the fleece, and let there be dew on all the ground."

39 Then Gideon told God, "Don't let yourself be angry with me! I want to ask you once again: please let me make a test with the fleece just once more. Cause it to be dry only on the fleece, but let there be dew all around on the ground."

39 And Gideon said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew.

- Gideon sought further assurance from God, in a moment of grave crisis; he now asks God for a more striking sign

— The miracle here was that, ordinarily, the ground would dry up more quickly than the saturated wool

40 And God did so that night; for it was dry only on the fleece, and dew was on all the ground.

40 God did so that night; for it was dry only on the fleece, and dew was on all the ground.

40 And God did it just like that later that night. It was dry only on the fleece, but dew was all around on the ground.

40 And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.

- Gideon spent two days playing the fleece game on that threshing floor

- First, it was a wet fleece on a dry floor, then it was a dry fleece on a wet floor. Gideon was now cornered...nothing left to do but confront the enemy.

This passage is not an encouragement to use tests to find out the will of God. Believers often say that they had "put out a fleece" for the purpose of determining what the will of God is in their decision-making, but that is a faulty conclusion from this passage. Gideon did not put the fleece out to determine God's will, since he already knew it; God had already told him what He wanted him to do. Gideon's use of the fleece was not a sign of his spirituality, but a sign of his very weak faith. It was not the sign of a mature believer, but a mark of an immature believer who had trouble believing what God had already told him.