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Judges 6

(2020)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



Learn the Bible with Friends

Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

Judges 6

Topics.

- Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.
- The angel of the LORD appears to Gideon and calls him to deliver Israel.
- Gideon breaks down the altar of Baal and the Asherah beside it.
- With stones Gideon builds an altar and sacrifices a bull.
- The Midianites and Amalekites camp in the Valley of Jezreel.
- Selected tribes gather with Gideon to deliver Israel.
- Twice Gideon lays a fleece on the floor asking God for a sign miracle.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF JUDGES

The Israelites forgot the LORD, and worshipped false gods, so the LORD removed His protection and blessings from them, which resulted in them being oppressed by their enemies and crying to the LORD for deliverance. In answer to their prayer the LORD raised up twelve Judges to deliver them, but not Judges as we think of Judges today or preachers of righteousness, but rather military leaders and fighters, that led Israel to triumph over their enemies and delivered them from their wicked behaviour. Most suppose that Samuel (considered by some to be the last Judge) wrote some parts of the book, while other parts were written at a later time by someone of his generation or a later generation. The primary purpose of the Judges is best articulated in the following words, "The LORD raised up Judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. (Judges 2:16). For an overview of the entire book see the title:

- Overview of the Book of Judges (at the beginning of the index).

THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER

Covers the Song of Deborah.

ISRAEL DOES EVIL BEFORE THE LORD

JUDGES 6:1-2

- **Judges 6:1-2:** The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD gave them into the hand of Midian seven years. ² And the hand of Midian overpowered Israel, and because of Midian the people of Israel made for themselves the dens that are in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds.

During the life of Deborah and Barak Israel remained faithful, but after their death, they not only returned to their evil wicked ways, but based on the following verse, it appears that they had even turned to worshipping the gods of the Amorites:

- And I said to you, 'I am the LORD your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell.' But you have not obeyed my voice." (Judges 6:10).

Midian was the son of Abraham and Keturah (Gen. 25:1-2), Moses had lived amongst the Midianites for forty years.

- Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. (Exod. 3:1).
- Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel his people, how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt. (Exod. 18:1).

Midianites were not only remarkable for the vast number of cattle, sheep, donkeys and camels (Judges 6:5), but also for their great wealth in gold, silver, bronze and other valued metals (Num. 31) used for crafting costly armlets, bracelets and signet rings etc., and for weapons of war. Israel had been commanded to maintain hostility against the Midianites because of the shameful worship of Baal-peor. (Num. 25:1-18).

They were wandering herdsmen, called "children of the East," because they occupied the territory east of the Red Sea, neighbouring Moab. The vast horde of Midianites that overran Canaan made them one of the greatest scourges to have afflicted the Israelites.

Although the majority of the Midianites had been cut off by Moses about two hundred years ago, many of them would have fled into the neighbouring countries, and later returned to their own land, and during that time grown to be a very great number again, especially since God broadened their increase, so that they would be a scourge for Israel when they violated His commandments. This principal is clearly seen throughout the Scriptures, whether it is individuals or nations that act wickedly before God all should expect to suffer consequences accordingly.

The hand of Midian overpowered Israel: (v2) The Israelites, were now condemned to a greater state of misery and oppression, compared to what they suffered under Jabin, for then the people of Israel were able to openly and publicly bring their cases to Deborah who was permitted to sit under a grove of Palm trees and hear the people's cases. In contrast to this freedom, they were now not only destitute of a judge, but were often without homes and forced to seek for refuge among caves and caverns in rocks, in strong holds and in fortresses.

- The hand of Midian overpowered Israel, and because of Midian the people of Israel made for themselves the dens that are in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds. (Judges 6:2).

Added to this misery, when they were able to sow their lands, their enemies plundered the fruits of their labour.

Israel made for themselves dens, caves and strongholds: (v2) this does not mean they excavated caves to shelter and take refuge in, for the limestone hills of Palestine abound in caves, catacombs and ravines hollowed out by torrents of rain water, which they made fit for habitation and places suitable to retreating to with their possessions for shelter and safety from their enemies.

MIDIANITES AND AMALEKITES COME AGAINST ISRAEL

JUDGES 6:3-5

- **Judges 6:3-5:** For whenever the Israelites planted crops, the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them. ⁴ They would encamp against them and devour the produce of the land, as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel and no sheep or ox or donkey. ⁵ For they would come up with their livestock and their tents; they would come like locusts in number—both they and their camels could not be counted—so that they laid waste the land as they came in.

At this time the Midianites were allies of the Amalekites and of the Arabian tribes collectively called, "the children of the East."

They would encamp against them: (v4) meaning the Midianites, Amalekites and the people of the East, would build their camps of tents around the outskirts of Israel's towns, villages and farmlands and when Israel's livestock, vineyards, farmlands etc., were thriving they would invade their land and plunder their goods.

It is not implied that there were any major battles, for the Israelites would be far too wretched and helpless to offer any resistance, especially since their oppressors would have stripped them of all weapons of warfare.

As far as Gaza: (v4) these words show that the Midianites, Amalekites and the people of the East, practically destroyed the whole land of Israel, for the land they covered was from the East from where they came, to the west, where Gaza was located on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. This means that all Israel's fruits of the earth and livestock was pillaged from the east (where the marauders came out from) and on through the whole land to the west, which means that no food was left for Israel, except what was stored up in their caves and stronghold.

They came like locusts: (v5) locusts often symbolise armies that cannot be numbered. In the book of Joel God likens the vast powerful army of Babylon to locusts and calls them, "His great army" (Joel 2:25). When Israel broke GOD'S covenant and turned to idols and pagan gods the LORD used the armies of secular nations as His servant to bring judgment upon rebellious and disobedient Israel. Locusts are the perfect symbolism for powerful and vast armies that cannot be numbered, for the following three reasons;

1. Locust fly in numbers that cannot be counted
2. In such vast numbers they spread over the land and destroy everything in their path
3. They are enormously difficult to destroy and kill.

The characteristics of the locust: the locust is one of over five thousand species of grasshopper specially adapted for long migratory flights. They must flap their wings and jump high to get airborne, because of the weight of their bodies, but once in flight they are able to fly long distances. There are numberless swarms of locust, particularly the species that infests oriental countries. The locust will eat almost anything; they travel in huge numbers capable of destroying entire fields of cultivated plants and any nearby vegetation. Their wings make a clattering sound as they travel and in approaching swarms, they create an ominous hum. There are times when the swarms are so large, they block out the sunlight.

Locusts are normally shy, solitary creatures, but in a swarm, they are an unstoppable moving cloud of millions of flying grasshoppers capable of stripping fields of crops in a matter of hours. For these reasons the locust is a fitting symbol for the power and destructive might of armies and their allies. The Oxford team has found that "hot-spots" on the hind legs of the locusts are stimulated when they group together turning the relatively harmless insects into destructive pests. Even today millions of locusts have swarmed across several countries presenting major problems in the Middle East and many South African Nations. In the town of Eilat (a popular place with British tourists) thousands of dead locusts were found piled up in swimming pools.

In chapter seven we read:

- The Midianites and the Amalekites and all the people of the East lay along the valley like locusts in abundance, and their camels were without number, as the sand that is on the seashore in abundance. (Judges 7:12).

Their camels could not be counted, without number in KJV: (v5), (meaning so many that it was not easy to number them). To have such a vast number of camels in the land of Israel, they had to be brought in by the invaders from the Eastern deserts, because camels were very

uncommon in Palestine. Midian was a place famous for camels (Isaiah 60:60) as was Arabia who joined the Midianites in these raids. The purpose Israel's oppressors bought such a vast number of camels with them was most likely to load them up with plunder pillaged on these raids and carry it back to their own camps.

ISRAEL CRIES TO THE LORD

JUDGES 6:6-10

- **Judges 6:6-10:** And Israel was brought very low because of Midian. And the people of Israel cried out for help to the LORD.⁷ When the people of Israel cried out to the LORD on account of the Midianites,⁸ the LORD sent a prophet to the people of Israel. And he said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I led you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of slavery."⁹ And I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you and gave you their land.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 dwell.' But you have not obeyed my voice."

The Midianites, Amalekites and the people of the East, had so completely destroyed the increase of Israel's grain, corn, vines, olives, orchards, fruit trees and livestock etc., that they had no sustenance left for them to eat. Now being so extremely afflicted and humbled they finally cry out to the LORD for help. Consistent to the nature and character of God, whose mercy never ceases (Lam. 3:22), He sends them a prophet. Before the prophet makes any mention of deliverance, he highlights the following two truths:

1. The God of Israel led Israel up from Egypt and brought them out of the house of slavery, which is a clear reference to:
 - I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. (Exod. 20:2).

4

The idea carried here is that, had Israel remained faithful God would have delivered them from the Amorites.

2. God told them not to fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land they dwell. Here the prophet is highlighting the fact that Israel had rebelled against God in the worst possible ways, instead of trusting in the God of Israel, they feared the gods of the Amorites and instead of destroying their idols they embraced them.

The prophet is highlighting these two events to reprove them and bring them to repentance. The prophet is left nameless, there are ideas of who he may have been, but these can only be considered human reasoning and speculations, which means its best to leave him nameless, especially since it's his message that is important, not who the prophet is.

The gods of the Amorites: (v10) were Asherah (v26) and Baal (v28, 30), who they believed to be a god (v31), since the Amorites were a principal people in the land, they are here put forth for all the Canaanites. Israel prepared sacrifices and offered them to Baal that should have been offered to God, and now God justly sends an enemy to take away the fruits of their labour and of their land.

THE ANGEL OF THE LORD APPEARS TO GIDEON

JUDGES 6:11-12

- **Judges 6:11-12:** Now the angel of the LORD, came and sat under the terebinth at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites.¹² And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor."

An angel of the LORD now appears to Gideon, there are no grounds to suppose (as some have) that this is a prophet. Following are three reasons this Angel cannot be a prophet:

1. He touches a rock with his staff and the meat and unleavened cakes are consumed by fire. (v21).
2. He instantly vanishes from Gideons sight. (v21).
3. Gideon himself confesses the angel was the angel of the LORD. (v22).

After hearing the prophet's message, it appears the people of Israel laid the prophet's message to heart, were convicted and repented, and in response to their repentance God had compassion upon them, and sent an Angel to appoint them a deliverer. When Gideon first saw the Angel, he most likely considered him to be a human traveller or a shepherd for the following six reasons:

1. He sat under the shade of a tree, ready for a friendly conversation. (v11).
2. Gideon spoke to him and he spoke to Gideon as we would speak to each other. (v13-18).
3. The first time Gideon sees him, he refers to him as, "sir." (v13).
4. Gideon offers to give him a gift. (v18).
5. Gideon prepares a meal for him to eat. (v19).
6. The Angel appeared with a shepherd's staff in his hand. (v21).

At the time of the Angels appearance Gideon was busy beating out wheat in the winepress, so it's quite likely the Angel sat for some time under the oak, watching Gideon work, for it is the Angel who first speaks to Gideon, which clearly shows Gideon did not consider him to be anybody unique, because he obviously never took much notice of him.

Under the terebinth at Ophrah: (v11) refers to some well-known oak tree still standing in the writer's days. There were two cities with the name Ophrah spoken of in Scripture, one in Benjamin.

- Now the cities of the tribe of the people of Benjamin according to their clans were Jericho, Beth-hoglah, Emek-keziz, ²² Beth-arabah, Zemaraim, Bethel, ²³ Avvim, Parah, Ophrah, (Josh. 18:21-23).

The other was a city in the tribe of Manasseh, about sixteen miles north of Jericho, in the district belonging to the family of Abiezer (of which Joash was the head), who was one of the families of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh.

Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress: (v11) normally grain would be trodden out by oxen as they walked in a circle in places in the open fields, not in the confined space of a winepress. The primary reason Gideon was treading out grain in a winepress was to keep it hidden from the Midianites and prevent discovery. (v11). Two other possible reasons maybe, that the amount of grain they did have was so small that they did not need oxen to tread it out and secondly, Midianite raiding parties may have taken all Israel's oxen back to their own camps. The fact the people had to tread it out in winepresses reveals the extreme dread and distress Israel was living under at this time.

The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valour: (v12) these words, carry the idea that the LORD'S favour and presence is with Gideon, and that the LORD will guide, strengthen and support him. Following are two thoughts concerning this greeting, some feel that it implies that Gideon had already distinguished himself as a man of bravery in war, while others

believe the Angel of the LORD, knowing Gideons future is firstly, speaking prophetically, and secondly, this was said to encourage Gideon to do what he was about to be sent to do, for Gideon could not bring about such a massive defeat of Israel's enemies without the favour and presence of God being with him.

GIDEON SPEAKS TO THE ANGEL OF THE LORD

JUDGES 6:13

- **Judges 6:13:** And Gideon said to him, "Please, sir, (Oh my Lord, in KJV), if the LORD, is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds (miracles in KJV) that our fathers recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the LORD, bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD, has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian."

Please, Sir, (Oh my Lord in KJV): (v13) this title is only one of courtesy, for at this time Gideon only saw the Angel as a relaxed man sitting under the shade of an oak tree.

Gideons questions no doubt stem from his gloomy thoughts because of the widespread misery throughout his country and the extreme poverty of the people, which it is certain greatly grieved his heart.

If the LORD, is with us, why then has all this happened to us? (v13), this question is Gideons response to the Angels statement, "The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valour." (v12), considering the troubles, calamities and oppression the Midianites had afflicted upon Israel, it is a very logical question to ask, especially when it is considered, that Gideon most likely understood what the Angel had said to him in his greeting, concerned the entire nation and not just himself, and therefore could not comprehend, how the LORD could be with them, when the thousands of Israel were suffering such hardships. Added to this, Gideon at this time has no idea that he is speaking to the Angel of the LORD and that he is speaking prophetically, meaning the favour of the LORD is now with Gideon to miraculously deliver the people of Israel from the bondage of their oppressors.

6

THE LORD SPEAKS TO GIDEON

JUDGES 6:14

- **Judges 6:14:** And the LORD, turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?"

The Angel now speaks as the voice of the LORD, which is in perfect harmony with Scripture, for this Angel is the Angel of the LORD and therefore, whatever he speaks are the words of the LORD, for he speaks as the mouth of God.

NOTICE: the LORD does not answer the questions Gideon asked in the previous verse, but rather tells him what He has called him to, which is to deliver Israel.

Go in this might of yours and save Israel from Midian: (v14) the change of the title from, "The Angel of the LORD" to "the LORD," is only noticeable to the reader, for Gideon himself, would not be aware of such a change, however, it is almost certain there would have been a noticeable change in the authority that the Angel spoke with, for this is no longer a conversation, but a command.

The words, "go in this might of yours," firstly refers to the Angels words, "The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valour," (v12), this is

the might Gideon is to go in, it is the might of the LORD'S favour and presence that will guide and be with him, for by himself he would have no hope of defeating the vast and mighty armies of the Midianites, but with the LORD on his side, victory is certain.

GIDEON SPEAKS TO THE LORD

JUDGES 6:15

- **Judges 6:15:** And he said to him, "Please, Lord (Oh my Lord in KJV), how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest (poor in KJV) in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house."

Gideon is still unaware of who he is talking to. He thinks that his tribe is the weakest of all twelve tribes, and that he is the least in his father's house, but this makes little difference to the LORD, because when the LORD calls a person, He is not dependent upon their strength, but their willingness to be obedient to His word and trust in Him. It is no proof that a person is unfit for an important work, because they think they are. God often chooses to do great things by those who are considered little, especially in their own eyes, for then no flesh is able to boast or glory in His presence.

THE LORD SPEAKS TO GIDEON

JUDGES 6:16

- **Judges 6:16:** And the LORD, said to him, "But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man."

Though we know that the LORD is speaking to Gideon by this Angel, Gideon is still unaware of who this mysterious man that he is talking to is. The LORD is basically telling him that he will destroy the Midianites as easily as if they were all one man, which he did. The Midianites, the Amalekites and all the people of the East were gathered against Israel like locusts in abundance, and their camels were without number, as the sand that is on the seashore, yet when Gideon with only three hundred men, with torches in their hand, broke jars and sounded their trumpets, this vast army fled. (Judges 7:8-25).

GIDEON ASKS FOR A SIGN

JUDGES 6:17-18

- **Judges 6:17:** And he said to him, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, then show me a sign that it is you who speak with me. ¹⁸ Please do not depart from here until I come to you and bring out my present and set it before you." And he said, "I will stay till you return."

Here it seems that Gideon is beginning to realise that this mysterious man he is talking to, is more than a mere man. From a sense of humility, or an overwhelming bewilderment at the thought of undertaking a task of such massive magnitude (probably both), Gideon desires some kind of assurance that the message he has received was from God, for he saw no qualifications in himself, or in his family or his tribe, to be appointed as saviour of the people.

Wanting to continue their conversation he asks his mysterious visitor to remain under the oak tree until he returns with a gift (i.e., prepared a meal). Considering the enormity of what he was being asked to do, his request was reasonable, so the Angel remained. (v18).

JUDGES 6:19

- **Judges 6:19:** So Gideon went into his house and prepared a young goat and unleavened cakes from an ephah of flour. The meat he put in a basket, and the broth he put in a pot, and brought them to him under the terebinth and presented them.

This gift was not a sacrifice or offering to God (as some suppose) for the following three reasons:

1. Gideon was not a priest.
2. This was not a place for sacrifices and there was no altar.
3. Gideon does not yet fully understand who he is talking to, and would certainly be fully aware that it would be a blasphemy before God to offer a sacrifice to a mysterious stranger.

Rather this was a meal for the Angel who Gideon thought was a man, for he does not yet fully comprehend that he is speaking to an angel until later in his visit as the following verse shows:

- Then Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the LORD. And Gideon said, “Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face.” (Judges 6:22).

THE ANGEL OF THE LORD VANISHES

JUDGES 6:20-21

- **Judges 6:20-21:** And the angel of God, said to him, “Take the meat and the unleavened cakes, and put them on this rock, and pour the broth over them.” And he did so.²¹ Then the angel of the LORD, reached out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes. And fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes. And the angel of the LORD, vanished from his sight.

Broth: was a type of soup.

After preparing the meat, the cakes and the broth, Gideon brings them out of his or his father's house, most likely intending to set them out on a table ready to eat, but no doubt to Gideon's bewilderment, the Angel tells him to place them on a rock, and pour the broth over them. Though Gideon had not yet discovered that this unknown mystery person was an angel, it is certain by this time that he had developed a very high and godly opinion of him, and therefore readily obeyed his strange command. He places the meat and cakes on the rock and pours the broth all over the entire meal, which means everything would be saturated and sodden with liquid soup, making this miracle similar to the miracle of Elijah on Mount Carmel.

- Elijah put the wood in order and cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood, and he said, “Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood.” (1 Kings 18:33).

Fire sprang up from the rock: (v21) the Angel of the LORD put forth the end of his staff by which he appeared as a traveller, which would have been one of the reasons Gideon thought to prepare him a meal, before he proceeded on in his journey, but to Gideon's, unexpected surprise, the Angel touched the meat and the cakes with the tip of his staff and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and cakes, and then immediately vanished from Gideon's sight. These two miracles fully convinced Gideon that this mysterious person was the Angel of the LORD speaking to him as the voice of God.

SNAPSHOT: during the Old Testament era a sign or miracle was often used as one proof (among many others) and sufficient evidence and that a person was sent from God. All New Testament believers should know that they have an abundance of evidence and proof that gives them good reason to be satisfied and assured that the ground of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is established and built on a solid foundation, for his approval of God was evidenced by signs, miracles and wonders in the sight of multitudes of witness, that no man could do, without God being with them.

GIDEON PERCEIVES THE ANGEL OF THE LORD

JUDGES 6:22-24

- **Judges 6:22-24:** Then Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the LORD. And Gideon said, "Alas, O Lord GOD! For now, I have seen the angel of the LORD, face to face."²³ But the LORD, said to him, "Peace be to you. Do not fear; you shall not die."²⁴ Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD, and called it, The LORD Is Peace. To this day it still stands at Ophrah, which belongs to the Abiezrites.

During the Old Testament era, the belief that death would be the result of looking on any Divine being was universal among the Jews as the following verses show:

After Jacob had seen God face to face, he said:

- I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered." (Genesis 32:30).

After seeing the thunder, the flashes of lightning and the mountain of Sinai smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and standing far off said to Moses:

- You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die. (Exodus 20:19).

After Moses asked the LORD, to show him His glory the LORD told him that He would make all His goodness pass before him (Exod. 33:17-19) and then said:

- You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." (Exod. 33:20).

After the LORD had spoken with a loud voice to all the assembly at Mount Sinai out of the midst of fire, cloud, and the thick darkness, and written on the two tablets of stone and given them to Moses (Deut. 5:22-23) all the heads of the tribes, and the elders said:

- Behold, the LORD our God has shown us his glory and greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire. This day we have seen God speak with man (Moses), and man still live.²⁵ Now therefore why should we die? For this great fire will consume us. If we hear the voice of the LORD our God any more, we shall die. (Deut. 5:24-25).

After Gideon realised it was the Angel of the LORD that was speaking to him, the LORD said to him:

- Peace be to you. Do not fear; you shall not die." (Judges 6:23).

After Manoah had seen the angel of the LORD he said to his wife:

- We shall surely die, for we have seen God. (Judges 13:22).

After Mary had given birth to her firstborn son the Angel of the LORD appeared to came to shepherds during the night and the glory of the LORD shone around them, which filled them with great fear (Luke 2:6-9) and the angel said to them:

- Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. (Luke 2:10).

After John had seen the angel that God sent to him, to give him a revelation of Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:1-20), he fell at his feet as though dead and the angel said:

- Fear not, I am the first and the last. (Rev. 1:17).

These verses show that when people saw an angel of the LORD their second response was one of fear, I say second, because the first was a sense of uncleanness, which was naturally followed by fear.

After Isaiah saw in his vision the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and seraphim above him calling to each other: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" (Isaiah 6:1-4) Isaiah said:

- Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" (Isaiah 6:5).

After Jesus told Simon Peter to let down his nets for a catch and his nets caught a large number of fish (Luke 5:1-7) Peter realised it was Jesus and fell on his knees before Jesus' saying:

- Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord. (Luke 5:8).

Fear and uncleanness, mingled with a sense of awe, and even of terror, is the natural response of humans when they perceive they have seen a divine man or angel sent from God. This is because everyone deep down knows that God is Holy and they are not. Likewise, when Gideon perceived he had been talking to the Angel of the LORD, it gave him a deeper sense than before of the grandeur of the messenger who had come to him and of his own sinfulness.

It is the silent path of conscious unworthiness that leads to a sense of guilt and unworthiness, without this consciousness there would only remain wide-open spaces of happy peace, for if there was no sin there would be no fear before the LORD. In the new eternal world to come those resurrected will have pure hearts with no trace of sin, and be to all those around them as a sweet fragrance of love bringing tranquillity and life to all, as sunbeams bring life to flowers when it shines upon them.

Gideon built an altar to the LORD: some have supposed this altar to be an altar of sacrifice, but it should never be presumed that just because a thing is called an altar, it is an altar of sacrifice, for there are two types of altars in Scripture:

1. An altar of sacrifice.
2. A memorial altar.

Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar, and his kinsmen gathered stones and made a heap, to be a witness to the covenant Jacob had made with Laban. (Genesis 31:44-49).

- After the LORD said to Isaac, "I am the God of Abraham your father, fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham's sake," Isaac built an altar, and called on the name of the LORD. (Gen. 26:24-25).
- After Joshua had defeated Amalek, the LORD said to Moses, "I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." Then Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The LORD Is My Banner. (Exodus 17:13-15).
- The people of Reuben and of Gad built an altar and called it "The altar witness," because it was to act as a witness that, the LORD is God. (Joshua 22:34).

- **Gideon's altar:** (v24) Gideon stacks random stones found on the hillside and build an altar, not for the purpose of offering sacrifice, but for a monument in commemoration to the fact the Angel of the LORD had appeared to him and called him to be saviour and deliverer of Israel and in remembrance of the words that he had spoken to him.

To this day it is yet in Ophrah: (v24) meaning the altar that Gideon built was in the city of Ophrah, which belonged to the family of the Abiezrites, who were of the tribe of Manasseh.

Gideon named the altar, "The LORD is Peace," which in Hebrew is, "Jehovah-shalom," the author and giver of peace. We find similar names in the following verses:

Jehovah-jireh, "The LORD will Provide."

- Abraham called the name of that place, "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided." (Genesis 22:14).

Jehovah-nissi, "The LORD My Banner."

- Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The LORD Is My Banner, (Exodus 17:15).

Jehovah-tsidkenn, "The LORD Our Righteousness."

- In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.' (Jer. 23:6).

THE LORD SPEAKS TO GIDEON

JUDGES 6:25-26

11

- **Judges 6:25-26:** That night the LORD, said to him, "Take your father's bull, and the second bull seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal that your father has, and cut down the Asherah (the grove in KJV) that is beside it ²⁶ and build an altar to the LORD your God, on the top of the stronghold here, with stones laid in due order (the ordered place in KJV). Then take the second bull and offer it as a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah (grove in KJV) that you shall cut down."

At this time the angel of the LORD, had vanished from Gideons sight (v21), so the words the LORD now spoke to Gideon was probably:

- By inward suggestion or an unseen impulse upon his spirit.
- By an audible voice from heaven or a dream.

All of these are speculations since we are not told in what way the LORD spoke, which means it is best for us to simply accept what we are told, with the confidence, when Scripture says, "the LORD spoke," those who He is speaking to clearly understand that it is the LORD speaking to them. The LORD revealed to Gideon that before he could be a deliverer, he must first destroy their idols.

Take your father's bull, and the second bull: (v25), it will be noticed that from here on nothing is said concerning the fathers bull, for we only read of the second bull being offered on the altar. (v28). This can be easily explained in the following way. We are told that the altar of Baal was broken down and the Asherah beside it was cut down (v28), which implies that the Asherah was made of wood, while the altar of Baal was a very large and solid structure made of stone (similar to the massive statues of Budda in India), which is why Gideon would need the strength of two bulls to pull it down. The reason only the second bull is mentioned after this is because once the altar was destroyed the first bull had served its purpose, whereas the second bull was to be sacrificed and offered to God, so of course it is the only bull spoken of.

The second bull seven years old: (v25) it is not by accident that seven years is mentioned here, for the Midianites held Israel in extreme oppression and misery for a period of seven years which is about to come to an end, so it is very fitting that the bull offered to God would be seven years old.

Destroy the altar of Baal: before Gideon can be a deliverer of Israel to which the Angel of the LORD had called him, God commands him to destroy of the altar of Baal, for two reasons, firstly, idol worship was the reason all this oppression and misery had come upon them and secondly, before God could pardon them of their wickedness, idolatry must be abolished and a sacrifice offered. It is called Joash's altar because, though it was used by the whole city Joash was the head of the Abi-ezrites.

The first law of God, before true worship can begin, is that all forms of idols and pagan gods must be abolished from the land and from the mind of the worshipper, for there is only one God, and He will never share His throne with any other.

How amazing is this: Joash, Gideons very own father had not only joined with other Israelites in this great apostasy, but it also appears he personally owned the altar of Baal and made it available for his own family and the common use of the whole city (v28-30), which shows that Joash had fully embrace the Midianites religion, yet out of this idol worshipping family and city the Angel of the LORD called Gideon to be a deliverer of Israel.

The wood of the Asherah (grove in KJV): (v26) the English Standard Bible says Asherah, while the King James Bible says grove, this does not mean that one is right and the other is wrong, for the following reason, a grove refers to a large group of leavy trees that give shade, while an Asherah refers to an idol erected on flat ground with these trees surrounding it. In ancient times many pagan religions never had church buildings scattered everywhere as we do today, so they would establish places of worship amongst a circular group of leafy trees that would give them shade as they came before their idol and worshipped. It was these trees and this idol that Gideon was to cut down and use for firewood for the offering of the second bull.

The image of Astarte was probably carved out of blocks of wood or maybe a large pole, similar to an Indian totem pole, placed in the centre of the surrounding trees. It was common in the ancient world as it is today for religions in many countries to believe in multiple deities, which are usually assembled into a pantheon of gods and goddesses.

When speaking of idols, the Living Bible says:

- Foolish man you chop down a tree and use some of the wood to build your homes, some to cook your food, some to warm your hands and some you carve into an idol and bow down before it to worship it, can't you see it's just a block of wood (Isaiah 44:19).

The service of idols is so absurd and illogical that it is enormously difficult for a person with a sane mind to understand how anyone in their right mind chooses the service of idols before the service of God. It is common for cultic religions to be heavily laden with ritualism. This is because a heavy focus and adherence to outward ritual and ceremony gives the worshipper a sense of reverence and a close connection and adoration to their god. These rituals may involve candles, occultist symbols, mystical rites, drinking the blood of bull, chicken-beheading, prayers, songs and such like things, but the most seductive is sexual ritual that involves all sorts of sexual immorality since this type of ritual appeals to the lowest level of the flesh (i.e., the lower nature of mankind).

One of the reasons people do choose a false faith is because idols and false gods do not put demands upon their outward lifestyle, as long as the believer adheres to their ceremonial rituals and outward religious practises they are accepted by their god and free to live as they please.

Build an altar to the LORD, on the top of the stronghold (rock in KJV): (v26) the English Standard Bible translates it stronghold, while the King James Bible says rock, this does not mean one is right and one is wrong, for it was common to use rocks as a stronghold, and it is most likely that the altar was on the top of one of these rocks.

With stones laid in due order (the ordered place in KJV): (v26), this means, the stones should be laid on top of the stronghold of rocks in a plain and smooth part of the rock, where an altar could be conveniently built and in such an order that they would be suitable for an altar to burn the bull on, and perhaps, laid in such manner as God had appointed. Some point out the following facts concerning this burnt offering:

1. It was not at Shiloh.
2. It was not offered by a priest.
3. It was offered at night.
4. The fire was kindled with the unhallowed materials of an idol.

At this time these facts mattered little, for God's Divine command was more than sufficient to justify these irregularities and rituals. Added to this during these violent times of extreme oppression with the country being in the hands of the heathen, the Levitical order of worship was impossible at this time, and though it would be totally wrong for us to do away with what God has set in place, God Himself, can as He chooses dispense with His own institutions, which under these circumstances He did, by giving Gideon authority to sacrifice this bull.

SNAP SHOT: in this chapter we see the power of God's grace and kindness, in that He raised up a reformer and deliverer out of a family whose leader was practising idolatry. Israel was to make peace with God before they went to war against Midian. Gideon was not to worship at his father's altar, but rather cast it to the ground and offer his sacrifice on another altar built solely for God, for a sacrifice had to be offered for sin to be pardoned, for without it no favour could be expected. Though Joash had previously worship Baal, he did stand up and support his son against the advocates of Baal who stood against him. Joash challenge, "if Baal is a god, let him contend for himself, because his altar has been broken down." convinced his worshippers of their foolishness of praying to a god to help them, that could not avenge himself. (v31).

GIDEON BREAKS DOWN THE ALTAR OF BAAL

JUDGES 6:27-29

- **Judges 6:27-29:** So Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the LORD, had told him. But because he was too afraid of his family and the men of the town to do it by day, he did it by night. ²⁸ When the men of the town rose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was broken down, and the Asherah (the grove in KJV) beside it was cut down, and the second bull was offered on the altar that had been built. ²⁹ And they said to one another, "Who has done this thing?" And after they had searched and inquired, they said, "Gideon the son of Joash has done this thing."

Then Gideon needed the ten men, because he had to:

- Destroy the altar of Baal.
- Cut down the grove or idol.
- Build an altar suitable to sacrifice a bull on.
- Sacrifice the bull.

Due to the fact Gideon's father's family, and the inhabitants of the city of Ophrah, were all idolaters and worshippers of Baal and fear of being prevented from doing what the LORD had called him to do Gideon with

the help of his trusted men and the two bulls pulled down the altar of Baal, and cut down the Asherah beside it during the night and built and sacrificed the bull on the altar erected on the appointed spot. When the people of the town rose (v28) they would have observed the following three things:

1. The demolished altar of Baal.
2. The stump of the destroyed Asherah.

A new altar, with the remains of the burnt offering smoking upon it, for it is very likely that the place, where the new altar was erected was not far from where the altar of Baal had stood. We are not told how they knew it was Gideon who had destroyed the idols, except that they made an inquiry, however, it is very likely someone saw them, added to this Gideon would have stood out amongst such an apostate people, because of his prominent stand for the LORD.

THE LORD SPEAKS TO GIDEON

JUDGES 6:30-31

- **Judges 6:30-31:** Then the men of the town said to Joash, "Bring out your son, that he may die, for he has broken down the altar of Baal and cut down the Asherah (grove in KJV) beside it." ³¹ But Joash said to all who stood against him, "Will you contend for Baal? Or will you save him? Whoever contends for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because his altar has been broken down."

Joash, appears to be the chief magistrate of Ophrah. The principal men of the town went to meet him and demand that he brings his son out so, they could put him to death. But, Joash, rather than give his son up, defends him and quietens the mob. It is possible, that Gideon had told his father that the LORD had come to him and told him to destroy the Midianites idols and that God would raise him up to be a deliverer of Israel, so his father being made aware that his son was acting under Divine guidance stood up for him.

Will you plead for Baal? : (v31) Joash is basically saying, "why are you so zealous in pleading for Baal, when it is because of your worship before him that all this great suffering, misery and oppression has come upon us. It is plain that Joash had joined the people in worshipping Baal, we know this because the altar of Baal was on his estate. It appears that after hearing that the Angel of the LORD had come to his son, and of the divine commission that he had received, he was most likely convicted of his sin and the foolishness of worshipping man-made idols.

By his stand, Joash clearly declares himself on the side of the God of Israel, and when the people demanded that his son should be put to death for casting down the altar of Baal, he boldly demands, according to the law of Moses, that whoever pleads and stands on the side of Baal should be put to death, for death was the punishment for idolatry.

If he be a god, let him contend for himself: (v31) as the God of Israel had often done in the following way, when His people bought disgrace and dishonour to His name, He brought enemies against them, and when they walked faithfully, He destroyed their enemies . Joash strong stand against his son's accusers and adversaries was necessary to stop the people's fury becoming violent, and set his son free from extreme danger. It is very likely the eyes of the people were opened and their minds convicted to their own foolishness when they saw the strong and bold stand of Joash and heard his defence. It is also likely that the majority of the Abiezrites sided with Joash against "the men of the city," and based upon the following verse may have already felt drawn toward Gideon as their national and religious leader:

- The Spirit of the LORD clothed Gideon, and he sounded the trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called out to follow him. (Judges 6:34).

JUDGES 6:32-33

- **Judges 6:32:** Therefore on that day Gideon was called Jerubbaal, that is to say, "Let Baal contend against him," because he broke down his altar.

Following are the various meanings given for Jerubbaal:

- Let Baal strive or let it be striven with Baal
- Baal's antagonist or let Baal plead.

Which one is correct matters little for they all carry the same meaning, which is, "let Baal plead against Gideon, because he has thrown down his altar." The name Jerubbaal that his father had given him (v31-32) became the name commonly used for Gideon. Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Joseph, Esther, Daniel and the apostle Paul are other instances of Scriptural characters who have two names.

MIDIANITES, AMALEKITES CAMP IN THE VALLY OF JEZREEL

JUDGES 6:32-33

- **Judges 6:33:** ³³ Now all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the East came together, and they crossed the Jordan and encamped in the Valley of Jezreel.

Jezreel, in some contexts, refers only to the Valley of Jezreel which is that part of the plain that encompasses the valley between Mount Gilboa and the Hill of Moreh and Mount Tabor, at the eastern end of the vast Plain of Jezreel. In other contexts, Jezreel is used in a general sense to refer to the entire flat and fertile plain that stretches across Central Palestine from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. Even today, as in ancient times, this area is the most fertile agricultural land in Palestine, which is reflected in the name Jezreel, which means "God sows."

- The earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel. (Hosea 2:22).

In ancient times, this area had great strategic value as well, since the Jezreel/Esdraelon plain was the only east-west access between the coast and the Jordan Valley. There was so much bloodshed on these plains that both Jezreel and Megiddo became synonyms for violence and bloodshed. The Mountain of Megiddo, in Hebrew is "har Megiddo" which became a common symbol for Armageddon, and the ultimate symbol for warfare and conflict. This vastly large and fruitful level plain was a very suitable place for the vast number of Midianites Amalekites and the people of the East to camp on, and settle Israel's livestock on and store the fruits that they plunder and the possessions they pillage prior to them returning to their own land.

The Midianites, Amalekites and people of the East (the Arabians) (Judges 6:3) crossed the Jordan River, not because Gideon had destroyed the altar of Baal, but because it was their usual custom at harvest time (as appears by the fact Gideon was threshing out the wheat), to come into Canaan to plunder the land and pillage Israel's possessions. But this time the Israelites, instead of hiding in dens and caves, and leaving all their substance for the invaders to take as plunder, now stand alongside Gideon their leader ready to go to war against them.

JUDGES 6:34-35

- **Judges 6:34-35:** But the Spirit of the LORD, clothed Gideon, and he sounded the trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called out to follow him. ³⁵ And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, and they too were called out to follow him. And he sent messengers to

Gideon's call was two-fold:

1. First destroying the Baal-worship at Ophrah
2. Secondly, to deliver his country from tyranny.

The Spirit of the LORD clothed Gideon: (v34) means that the Spirit of the LORD:

- Filled him with extraordinary, fortitude, courage, wisdom, zeal, strength and might.
- Inspired him with an overwhelming inward passion to rise up in the face of life threatening danger to lead the armies of Israel and deliver God's people from tyranny.
- Stirred and inspired him with such great faith that his only goal in life was to vindicate God's name and deliver His people from oppression to freedom.

It means, God's Spirit clothed Gideon with all these things, as a king's robe gloriously clothes him with royal authority and majesty.

Gideon sounded the trumpet: (v34) and the Abiezrites came out to follow him. The Abiezrites were one of the families of the tribe of Manasseh, of which tribe Gideon and his father were. It is very likely that after seeing Joash's stand for his son against the idol worshippers and Gideon's zeal for the LORD, manifested by his destruction of Baal that they not only turned from idol worship to follow the Lord God of Israel, but now willingly offer themselves to follow Gideon.

They came up to meet them: (v35) Gideon sent messengers to Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, which were the four tribes nearest to him on the north, but not to the tribe of Ephraim, which lay to the south. Sometime later, this caused some tension between Ephraim and Gideon.

- Then the men of Ephraim said to him, "What is this that you have done to us, not to call us when you went to fight against Midian?" And they accused him fiercely. (Judges 8:1).

Inhabitants of these four tribes came up from the places of habitations to meet Gideon and those that were already with him at the place of rendezvous.

Manasseh: Gideon's own tribe, since the tribe of Manasseh were on both sides of the river Jordan, some feel this only refers the half tribe on Gideon's side of the river, but it does say messengers were sent to all Manasseh.

Asher: was a tribe near to Gideon and near to the enemy (Judges 6:33) therefore it was only natural that they should be called upon to join with Gideon's forces.

Zebulun and Naphtali: these two tribes are highly honoured in the Song of Deborah because of their bravery in the war against Jabin the king of the Canaanites.

- Zebulun is a people who risked their lives to the death; Naphtali, too, on the heights of the field. (Judges 5:18).

- **Judges 6:36-38:** Then Gideon said to God, “If you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said,³⁷ behold, I am laying a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece alone, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said.”³⁸ And it was so. When he rose early next morning and squeezed the fleece, he wrung enough dew from the fleece to fill a bowl with water.

Gideons question to God, “If you will save Israel by my hand,” (v36), shows that he was fully aware that by human strength alone he would be utterly helpless to defeat such a countless number of trained and fierce warriors, especially accompanied with 900 iron chariots of war.

The fleece of wool: (37) was most likely and entire sheepskin,

The threshing floors were usually circular and out in the open air. At sunset Gideon places a dry fleece on the threshing floor where he had previously been threshing (Judges 6:11-12), and the place the Angel of the LORD first appeared to him. Ponder for a moment Gideons eager excitement as he rose early in the morning (if he was able to sleep) to see if his request had been granted, and then picking it up and squeezing out a bowl of water, while the floor all around remained dry.

Following are the two most common thoughts concerning this miracle:

1. The fleece and all the earth of the country became wet with dew, and only the threshing floor surrounding the fleece remained dry.
2. The threshing floor surrounding the fleece and all the earth of the country remained dry, and only the fleece became wet with dew.

It matters little which one of these is correct, because both fulfil what Gideon asked of the LORD and both could only be achieved by the power of God and the main point is that the fleece was to be made different from the floor around it.

17

Symbolism of dew: dew falls during the darkness of night and refreshes wilting plants, which makes it a fitting symbol of God’s grace that refreshes a thirsty and lifeless soul as the following verse shows:

- I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily; he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon. (Hosea 14:5).

Here we see the wonderful patience of God, an Angel of the LORD had come to Gideon, Gideon proved his obedience and faith by destroying the altar of Baal, and now asks God for an even greater sign and God graciously allows him to dictate the nature of the sign. The wet fleece on dry ground was a sign that God’s power would go with Gideon. Gideon takes the fleece up, and wrings a bowl full of water out of it. The LORD very clearly granted Gideons request for his encouragement and the encouragement of those with him.

GIDEON LAYS A SECOND FLEECE

JUDGES 6:39-40

- **Judges 6:39-40:** Then Gideon said to God,, “Let not your anger burn against me; let me speak just once more. Please let me test just once more with the fleece. Please let it be dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground let there be dew.”⁴⁰ And God, did so that night; and it was dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground there was dew.

Gideons words, “Let not your anger burn against me,” show that he was conscious that by asking God for second miracle sign he was acting with great presumption, especially after God had already given him a very clear sign. Nevertheless, in humble supplication he does ask, which on another level manifests two things:

1. Great boldness.
2. He truly cared about the safety of those who had volunteered to go with him up against the powerful armies of the Midianites, the Amalekites and the people of the East. For he was fully aware that without God on their side they had no hope of winning the war.

This conversation is very similar to the conversation Moses had with God when he pleaded for the people of Israel. There is no doubt when a faithful believer approaches God in this manner with a humble heart, that is seeking the wellbeing of His people God perceives the good motivation and understands. Gideon ask for the absolute reversal of the first miracle, let the fleece remain dry and the surrounding ground wet with dew. Some feel this second sign, would be even more convincing than the first sign, because it is the nature of fleeces of wool to drink up water and retain moisture.

God did so that night: (v40), here the graciousness of God is manifested, without any hesitation or delay He grants Gideon his request that very night. Some may wonder, why did Gideon choose this particular form of miracle, maybe the simple answer is that it was practical for the circumstances he was in. However, if we were to look for some form of symbolism maybe we could begin with the knowledge, dew symbolises Gods favour and blessing as the following verses show:

- I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily; he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon. (Hosea 14:5).
- Then the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples like dew from the LORD, like showers on the grass, which delay not for a man nor wait for the children of man. (Micah 5:7).

Based upon these verses, we could conclude that the dew did exactly what Gideon requested, indicating that God will likewise do exactly what He has promised. For anyone who thinks Gideons questions show a lack of faith, it should be mentioned that the author of Hebrews lists him in the Hall of Faith, with those who are commended for their great faith.

- What more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets (Hebrews 11:32).

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.
