



Judges - Chapter Six

II Judges 3:7-16:31 - The Downward Spiral of Israel's Apostasy (continues)

Summary of Chapter Six

The cycle continues. The people went away from God, he handed them over to a foreign oppressor, this time the Midianites who came and stole all the food products and animals and, finally after seven years, the people once again cried out to God. However, before raising up a judge to save them he rebukes the nation for their continued apostasy.

The angel of the Lord came to Gideon and said he would be the saviour of Israel for the Lord had given the Midianites into his hand. Gideon at first protested that he was not the one the Lord should choose but he wanted to show hospitality by offering the angel meat and bread. When he brought this the angel touched the stone on which it lay and it was immediately consumed by fire. Thus Gideon knew it was the Lord. He feared for his life as he had seen God but was reassured of his safety. Later, the Lord instructed Gideon to destroy his father's altar and sacred pole, making it into an altar and offering his father's bull upon it.

Gideon destroyed the altar as commanded and the people called his father to bring him out to face punishment by death, but his father replied that, if Baal were a god, he could contend for himself with Gideon. The Midianites and Amalakites then came upon across the Jordan. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon who called the Israelites to arms and several tribes responded.

The following two nights Gideon, in his human weakness, put God to the test twice with a fleece. Once testing that the fleece would be damp with dew but the ground around dry; the second was a reverse. God graciously did what Gideon asked of him.

II.e Judges 6:1-8:35 - Gideon

The fifth judge was Gideon, who fought the Midianites (6:1-6) twice, first following God's instructions (7:1-8:3), and the second time on his own initiative (8:4-21). Before Gideon, Israel's apostasy had grown worse, so when the people cried out, God sent a prophet to condemn them for their covenant infidelity (6:7-10). After Gideon defeated Midian, however, he led the people of Israel into sin (8:22-28). The Israelites turned upon each other for the first time (8:16-17 and 9:23-54), foreshadowing later, even worse dissension; refer to Judges 12:1-6 and Chapter 20. Despite God's continued intervention, and even some positive qualities in Gideon, the downward spiral in Israel's apostasy continued.

II.e.i Judges 6:1-10 - The Midianite Oppression

The familiar pattern of apostasy is resumed here (vv.1-6). When Israel cried out for deliverance (v.6), God sent a prophet, not a judge, who condemned Israel (vv.7-10). God would not be confined to a mechanical 'box,' responding to any and all Israelite appeals regardless of circumstances.

¹ The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord gave them into the hand of Midian for seven years.

Judges 6:1

The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. The forty years of rest announced in Judges 5:31 following the defeat of Sisera eventually came to an end. In their prosperity and complacency, Israel once again turned away from the Lord and worshipped other gods.

The Lord gave them into the hand of Midian for seven years. God brought Israel into bondage through the oppression of the Midianites. This was an example of God's grace and mercy to Israel because the oppression would make them turn back to God. It would have been worse if God had just left them alone.

The Midianites were related to the Israelites through Abraham and his second wife Keturah: <<She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah>> (Genesis 25:2).

² The hand of Midian prevailed over Israel; and because of Midian the Israelites provided for themselves hiding-places in the mountains, caves and strongholds. ³ For whenever the Israelites put in seed, the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the east would come up against them. ⁴ They would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the land, as far as the neighbourhood of Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel, and no sheep or ox or donkey. ⁵ For they and their

livestock would come up, and they would even bring their tents, as thick as locusts; neither they nor their camels could be counted; so they wasted the land as they came in. ⁶ Thus Israel was greatly impoverished because of Midian; and the Israelites cried out to the Lord for help.

Judges 6:2-6

The Israelites provided for themselves hiding-places in the mountains, caves and strongholds. The oppression of Midian, coming because of the sin of Israel, brought Israel into humiliation. Before they turned back to God they had to be humbled, living as cave-dwellers instead of properly civilised people.

For whenever the Israelites put in seed, the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the east would come up against them. The Midianites did not continually occupy the land, but only came at the time of harvest to steal what the Israelites grew and would leave no sustenance in Israel.

Israel's sin made all their hard work profitless. All their produce and livestock was stolen after they worked hard to bring it to fruition. Sin does this; it robs people of what they work hard to gain. There are many accomplished people who lose everything in life because they will not stop their sin. All is lost in order to gain what, in retrospect, seems like nothing.

Although unspecified, the people of the east may have been Chaldeans, Mesopotamians, or from Kedar and Hazor: <<*Concerning Kedar and the kingdoms of Hazor that King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon defeated. Thus says the Lord: Rise up, advance against Kedar! Destroy the people of the east!*>> (Jeremiah 49:28).

As far as the neighbourhood of Gaza. That is, the whole breadth of the land, from Jordan to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Thus the whole land was ravaged and the inhabitants deprived of the necessities of life.

Locusts devastated land, ate crops, and darkened the skies as they were blown in by the wind: <<*So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought an east wind upon the land all that day and all that night; when morning came, the east wind had brought the locusts. The locusts came upon all the land of Egypt and settled on the whole country of Egypt, such a dense swarm of locusts as had never been before, nor ever shall be again. They covered the surface of the whole land, so that the land was black; and they ate all the plants in the land and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left; nothing green was left, no tree, no plant in the field, in all the land of Egypt*>> (Exodus 10:13-15), and: <<*What the cutting locust left, the swarming*

locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten>> (Joel 1:4).

Neither they nor their camels could be counted. The Midianites were a desert-dwelling people and they dominated Israel because of their effective use of camels. It is clear that the use of this angular and imposing beast struck terror in the hearts of the Israelites.

The Israelites cried out to the Lord for help. After the long season of humiliation, fruitless labour, poverty, and domination by an oppressive power, Israel finally cried out to the Lord. Prayer was their last resort instead of their first resource.

⁷ When the Israelites cried to the Lord on account of the Midianites, ⁸ the Lord sent a prophet to the Israelites; 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 pay reverence to the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.” But you have not given heed to my voice.’

Judges 6:7-10

The delivering judge will appear later. Before Israel could receive and respond to the work of the judge, they first had to be prepared by this unnamed prophet. The message of the prophet represents the first time God rebuked the people when they called upon him during this period in their history. The prophet reminded the Israelites of God’s faithfulness and their own apostasy: <<*He opens their ears to instruction, and commands that they return from iniquity*>> (Job 36:10), and: <<*Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, all of you according to your ways, says the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions; otherwise iniquity will be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel?*>> (Ezekiel 18:30-31).

I led you up from Egypt. God spoke through the prophet, reminding Israel of all he did for them in the past. To face their current crisis, Israel needed a reminder of what God did before.

This reminded them of the love of God. The God loving enough to deliver his people from Egyptian slavery still loved them enough to now deliver them from the Midianites. This reminded them of the power of God. The God powerful

enough to deliver them from Pharaoh and his armies was still powerful enough to deliver them from the Midianites.

But you have not given heed to my voice. God sent this messenger to tell them where the real problem was. It was not that the Midianites were so strong; it was that Israel was so disobedient.

Israel thought the problem was the Midianites but the real problem was their own hearts and their refusal to follow the ways of the Lord. It is human nature to blame others for problems that they cause themselves. The message of the prophet also shows that when Israel cried out to the Lord, they did not understand that they were the problem. Their cry to God for help did not mean that they recognised or repented of their sin.

II.e.ii **Judges 6:11-40 - Gideon's Call**

God's call of a reluctant Gideon is the focus of the next three accounts. First, the angel of the Lord appeared to him (vv.11-24); then, Gideon destroyed an altar of Baal (vv.25-35); finally, Gideon's wavering faith is on full display (vv.36-40). Gideon's reluctance recalls that of Moses in Exodus Chapters 3-4.

II.e.ii.1 **Judges 6:11-27 - The Calling of Gideon**

The angel of the Lord appears to Gideon to instruct him to lead Israel against the Midianites. There is dialogue showing Gideon's reluctance and the Lord's reassurance. When Gideon provides a meal for the Lord, it is consumed by fire.

Gideon was then instructed to destroy his father's altar to Baal and the associated sacred pole, making an altar to the Lord and offering his father's bull as a burnt-offering upon it using the wood from the destroyed altar and pole.

¹¹ Now the angel of the Lord came and sat under the oak at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press, to hide it from the Midianites.

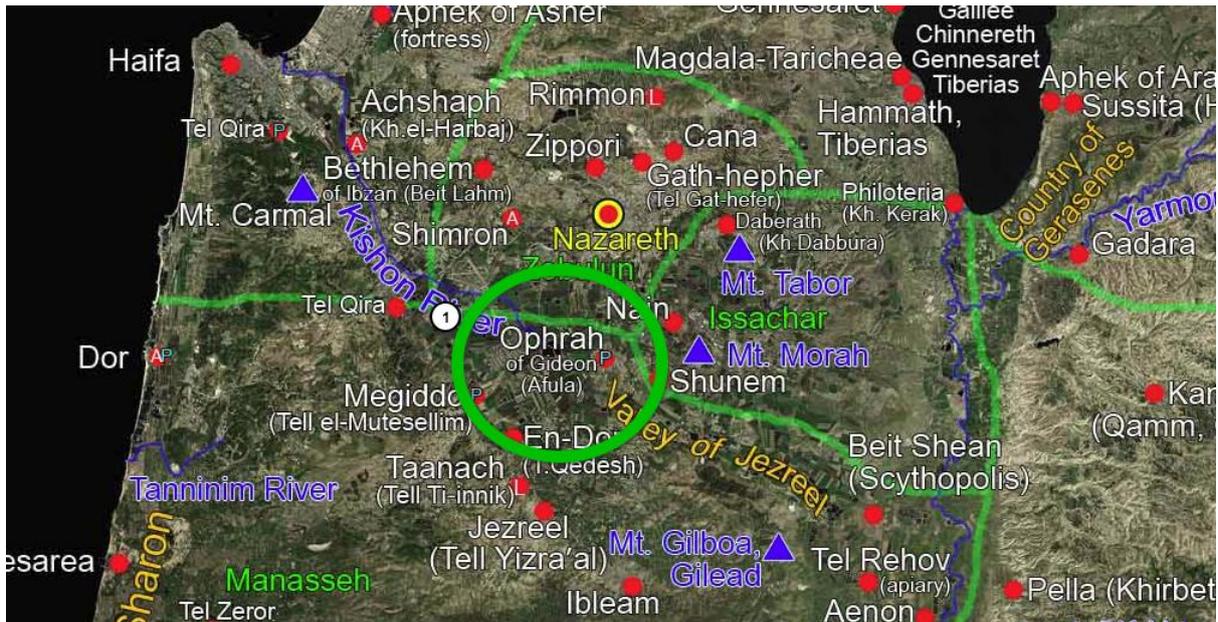
Judges 6:11

The angel of the Lord. When the Angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, it is often recognised as a theophany, an OT appearance of Jesus Christ, in human, bodily form, but before his incarnation in Bethlehem. The description of the encounter with the angel of the Lord shows that this is not merely an angel speaking on behalf of God. It shows that God himself, appearing in human form, spoke to Gideon.

Since no man has seen God the Father at any time according to John 1:18 and 5:27, and by nature the Holy Spirit is a spirit without bodily form, it is reasonable to accept this as an appearance of the Second Person of the Trinity,

as an appearance of God the Son. However, this is not the incarnation in the same sense that Jesus was as a baby in Bethlehem. At Bethlehem Jesus was truly and fully human while also being truly and fully God. Here, it is more likely that Jesus took on the mere appearance of humanity, doing so for a specific purpose.

The oak at Ophrah is also described as a terebinth tree. The town is fully known as Ophrah of the Abiezrites in Manasseh to avoid confusion with Ophrah located in the land occupied by the tribe of Benjamin; refer to Joshua 18:23.



Most likely location of Ophrah in Manasseh

Beating out wheat in the wine press. Grapes were normally trodden in a wine press, a square or circular pit carved into rock: <<*Joy and gladness are taken away from the fruitful field; and in the vineyards no songs are sung, no shouts are raised; no treader treads out wine in the presses; the vintage-shout is hushed*>> (Isaiah 16:10), and: <<*Gladness and joy have been taken away from the fruitful land of Moab; I have stopped the wine from the wine presses; no one treads them with shouts of joy; the shouting is not the shout of joy*>> (Jeremiah 48:33), whereas wheat was usually threshed on open threshing-floors, where the wind could carry away the chaff in the winnowing process: <<*That day Gad came to David and said to him, 'Go up and erect an altar to the Lord on the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite'*>> (2 Samuel 24:18). Gideon's secret threshing inside a wine press, when he already had access to a true threshing-floor (v.37), shows the desperate straits because of Midianite oppression.

¹² The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, 'The Lord is with you, you mighty warrior.' ¹³ Gideon answered him, 'But sir, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all

his wonderful deeds that our ancestors recounted to us, saying, “Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?” But now the Lord has cast us off, and given us into the hand of Midian.’

Judges 6:12-13

The Lord is with you, you mighty warrior. This was a strange greeting to Gideon. It did not seem like the Lord was with him and it did not seem that he was a mighty man of valour. Gideon might have turned to see if there was another person to whom the angel spoke.

But sir. The term is literally ‘my Lord’, Hebrew *’Adoni*. This was a polite form of address. In Judges 4:18, Jael spoke the same words to Sisera. Gideon uses the same term to refer to God in v.15, translated sir but meaning Lord, (Hebrew *’Adonay*).

If the Lord is with us, Hebrew *YHWH*, uses the personal name of God; refer to the comment made on Genesis 2:4, where *YHWH* was first introduced in Scripture.

Where are all his wonderful deeds that our ancestors recounted to us? Gideon heard about the great works of God in the past yet he wondered why they did not see the same great works in his day. Gideon thought the problem was with God, i.e. now the Lord has cast us off, and not with him and with the nation of Israel as a whole. In truth, Israel forsook God, God did not forsake Israel.

The people did not remember that God had promised that it would appear he had abandoned them if they left him for other gods: <<My anger will be kindled against them on that day. I will forsake them and hide my face from them; they will become easy prey, and many terrible troubles will come upon them. On that day they will say, “Have not these troubles come upon us because our God is not in our midst?”>> (Deuteronomy 31:17).

¹⁴ Then the Lord turned to him and said, ‘Go in this might of yours and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian; I hereby commission you.’ ¹⁵ He responded, ‘But sir, how can I deliver Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.’ ¹⁶ The Lord said to him, ‘But I will be with you, and you shall strike down the Midianites, every one of them.’ ¹⁷ Then he said to him, ‘If now I have found favour with you, then show me a sign that it is you who speak with me.’ ¹⁸ 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 until you return.’

Judges 6:14-18

It is hard to see that Gideon had any might to go in. Yet the Angel of the Lord did not mock Gideon when he told him, Go in this might of yours. Gideon indeed had might, but not as the reader might normally think. Gideon had the might of:

- The humble, threshing wheat on the wine press floor.
- The caring, because he cared about the low place of Israel.
- Knowledge, because he knew God did great things in the past.
- The spiritually hungry because he wanted to see God to great works again.
- The teachable, because he listened to what the Angel of the Lord said.
- The weak, knowing that God's strength is perfected in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

But sir, how can I deliver Israel? Gideon had might to go forth in, but he could not see himself as someone who could do great things for God. He thought of himself as insignificant, from the smallest clan in his tribe, and that he was the least in his own family. At the same time, Gideon was correct: he could not save Israel. However, a great God could use a small and weak Gideon to rescue Israel.

I am the least in my family. Moses and Jeremiah had similar objections when God called them: <<*But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?'*>> (Exodus 3:11), and: <<*Then I said, 'Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy'*>> (Jeremiah 1:6).

I will be with you. God's assurance to Gideon was not to build up his self confidence, but to assure him that God was indeed with him. Gideon did not need more self confidence, he needed more *God*-confidence. This promise of God's presence had also been given to Moses and Joshua: <<*He said, 'I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain'*>> (Exodus 3:12), and: <<*No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you*>> (Joshua 1:5), putting Gideon in the same lineage of leaders, with the same guarantee of success. Nevertheless, Gideon had his doubts and fears, especially in vv.36-40.

Jesus, of course, gives the same assurance to all Christians: <<And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age>> (Matthew 28:20b).

Then show me a sign that it is you who speak with me. It was not wrong for Gideon to ask for a confirming sign. It made sense to ask God to confirm some area of direction that was not specifically detailed in his Word, and in regard to something as life-or-death as leading Israel into battle against an enemy. For example, Christians do not need a special sign that God loves them because he

forever demonstrated his love at the Cross according to Romans 5:8. This is true for many other things specifically detailed in God's Word. Yet when it comes to guidance in things not specifically detailed in God's Word, it is possible to look for and expect confirmation in various ways.

¹⁹ So Gideon went into his house and prepared a kid, 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 oak and presented them. ²⁰ The angel of God said to him, 'Take the meat and the unleavened cakes, and put them on this rock, and pour out the broth.' 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. ²² Then Gideon perceived that it was the angel of the Lord; and Gideon said, 'Help me, Lord God! For 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.

Judges 6:19-24

Fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes. The miraculous sign alone should not have persuaded Gideon because there are miraculous deceptions. Yet this miracle of fire together with the other aspects of this whole experience should have persuaded Gideon that all this was from the Lord.

Then Gideon perceived that it was the angel of the Lord. This demonstrates that before this, Gideon believed that this person was simply a man. The appearance of the angel of the Lord was completely human in its character.

Perceived is literally 'saw', Hebrew *ra'ah*, and translated 'seen' later in the verse. Gideon feared for his life because he had encountered God's angel face to face: <<*So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, 'For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved'*>> (Genesis 32:30), and: <<*'But', he said, 'you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live'*>> (Exodus 33:20).

Peace be to you; do not fear, you shall not die. Once Gideon realised the identity of the angel of the Lord, he was terrified. The angel of the Lord brought this comforting word to the terrified Gideon.

Then Gideon built an altar there to the Lord. Gideon did this as an act of worship and consecration unto the Lord, whom he had just encountered face-to-face. He was no longer terrified of God, as demonstrated by the title given to the altar: **The Lord is peace.**

To this day. This expression is common in Joshua and Judges, e.g. Joshua 4:9, 5:9, 6:25, and 7:26, and Judges 1:21, 1:26, and 15:19. It indicates that it was written down at some point in history after the events described rather than at the time they actually occurred.

The Abiezrites were part of the tribe of Manasseh that settled west of the Jordan River: <<*Then allotment was made to the tribe of Manasseh, for he was the firstborn of Joseph. To Machir the firstborn of Manasseh, the father of Gilead, were allotted Gilead and Bashan, because he was a warrior. And allotments were made to the rest of the tribe of Manasseh, by their families, Abiezer, Helek, Asriel, Shechem, Hopher, and Shemida; these were the male descendants of Manasseh son of Joseph, by their families*>> (Joshua 17:1-2).

²⁵ That night the Lord said to him, ‘Take your father’s bull, the second bull seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal that belongs to your father, and cut down the sacred pole that is beside it; ²⁶ and build an altar to the Lord your God on the top of the stronghold here, in proper order; then take the second bull, and offer it as a burnt-offering with the wood of the sacred pole that you shall cut down.’

²⁷ So Gideon took ten of his servants, and did as the Lord had told him; but because he was too afraid of his family and the townspeople to do it by day, he did it by night.

Judges 6:25-27

That night the Lord said to him. This happened later the same day. When Gideon made himself responsive to God, God guided him. Perhaps it happened as soon as Gideon built the altar; with the altar built, now God commanded him to sacrifice something on it.

Take your father’s bull, the second bull. There is some debate as to whether this refers to one bull or two. The Hebrew joins the two clauses with ‘and’ but is not reflected in the NRSVA. The word translated ‘and’ may also be translated ‘namely,’ such that the Lord is not indicating a second animal but specifying more clearly to Gideon which bull should be used to tear down the altar and then be sacrificed. Either way, Gideon is instructed to use a bull to topple the altar of Baal, whose symbol was the bull. The need to make such an instruction explicit again shows Gideon’s reluctance and slow response (v.17).

Pull down the altar of Baal that belongs to your father. In Gideon's community, Baal was worshipped right alongside Yahweh. God called Gideon to get his own house in order first.

The sacred pole is literally **Asherah** and may function as both the divine name for a particular goddess or, as in these verses, refer to sacred wooden poles erected at places where she was worshipped: <<**He also removed his mother Maacah from being queen mother, because she had made an abominable image for Asherah; Asa cut down her image and burned it at the Wadi Kidron**>> (1 Kings 15:13). Most frequently, these sacred objects are called 'Asherim' as reflected on many instances in the ESV and NASB translations.

Offer it as a burnt-offering with the wood of the sacred pole that you shall cut down. Ironically, Gideon's sacrifice was to be offered using the very wood of the image that he was to tear down.

He did it by night. Gideon probably did this at night and under the cover of secrecy because he was too afraid of his family and the townspeople, who would prevent him from doing what needed to be done.

II.e.ii.2 Judges 6:28-35 - Gideon Destroys the Altar of Baal

The townspeople were furious that the altar and sacred pole had been destroyed and they knew that it is Gideon who had done it. They called for his father to bring him forth so that he could be punished by death. His father responded that a god can bring his own judgement.

When the Midianites and the other peoples from the east crossed over Jordan to attack Israel the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon to lead the Israelite army into battle. He called them to arms and four tribes responded.

²⁸ When the townspeople rose early in the morning, the altar of Baal was broken down, and the sacred pole beside it was cut down, and the second bull was offered on the altar that had been built. ²⁹ So they said to one another, 'Who has done this?' After searching and inquiring, they were told, 'Gideon son of Joash did it.' ³⁰ Then the townspeople said to Joash, 'Bring out your son, so that he may die, for he has pulled down the altar of Baal and cut down the sacred pole beside it.' ³¹ But Joash said to all who were arrayed against him, 'Will you contend for Baal? Or will you defend his cause? 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 pulled down.' ³² Therefore on that day Gideon was called Jerubbaal, that is to say, 'Let Baal contend against him', because he pulled down his altar.

Judges 6:28-32

Gideon son of Joash did it. They did not have a hard time figuring out who was responsible for the destruction of the altar. Gideon was found out immediately. What he did could not be hidden.

Bring out your son, so that he may die, for he has pulled down the altar of Baal and cut down the sacred pole beside it. This shows just how powerful Baal worship was in Israel at this time. The heresy had become the main religion and the punishment for failing to observe it properly was punishable by death.

Ancient Israel worshipped Baal because he was thought to be the god of weather, and they relied on the weather for agricultural prosperity. In the hard economic times because of the Midianite oppression, people worshipped Baal all the more, not understanding that they only made things worse by not turning to God.

If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because his altar has been pulled down. Gideon's father made a very logical argument for preserving his son's life. Since Baal was the offended party, he could defend himself.

This is similar to what happened during a great move of God in the South Seas in the 19th Century. One tribal chief was converted to Christianity and he gathered up all the idols of his people. He told the idols he was going to destroy them, and then he gave them the chance to run away. He destroyed all the ones that sat there like dumb statues which, of course, was all of them.

Gideon's new name, Jerubbaal, meant 'Let Baal contend,' echoing Joash's mockery of those who trusted in Baal. With this name, Gideon became a living reminder of Baal's impotence. It was a badge of honour for a man of God. He is referred to by this name in a later account of the Judges: <<*And the Lord sent Jerubbaal and Barak, and Jephthah, and Samson, and rescued you out of the hand of your enemies on every side; and you lived in safety*>> (1 Samuel 12:11).

³³ Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the east came together, and crossing the Jordan they encamped in the Valley of Jezreel. ³⁴ But the spirit of the Lord took possession of Gideon; and he sounded the trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called out to follow him.

Judges 6:33-34

But the spirit of the Lord took possession of Gideon. Took possession of is also reflected in 2 Chronicles 24:20. Other terms for the Spirit's activity in Judges include 'came upon' (Judges 3:10 and 11:29; and 1 Chronicles 12:18), and 'rushed

on' (Judges 14:6, 14:19, and 15:14). This follows the familiar pattern of the Spirit's work upon men under the Old Covenant. The Holy Spirit comes upon specific people for specific reasons, usually for divinely empowered leadership. Under the New Covenant, a broad and generous outpouring of the Holy Spirit is promised upon all flesh: <<Then afterwards I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit>> (Joel 2:28-29), which Peter quotes on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:17-18.

He sounded the trumpet. Because of this divine empowering, Gideon was able to gather an impressive number of troops at short notice. Judges 7:3 reveals that 32,000 men came to follow him into battle.

³⁵ He sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, and they too were called out to follow him. He also sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they went up to meet them.

Judges 6:35

Gideon sent messengers to four northern tribes adjacent to each other – Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali – prior to the first military encounter in Judges 7:1-8:3.

Throughout all Manasseh may indicate that both half tribes, who settled in land east and west of the Jordan, were summoned.

II.e.ii.3 Judges 6:36-40 - The Sign of the Fleece

Before the actual military engagement, Gideon again displays his reluctance to be a leader, for he asks for confirmatory signs from God. On the one hand, Gideon's fears are understandable: the task he is preparing to do is difficult and dangerous. On the other hand, the angel's appearance and promise in vv.11-24 already included a confirmatory miracle (v.21), and Gideon had already begun to obey (vv.25-27), and to see God's protection (v.31). In any event, God stoops to Gideon's level and grants the requested signs.

³⁶ Then Gideon said to God, 'In order to see whether you will deliver Israel by my hand, as you have said, ³⁷ I am going to lay 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 deliver 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. ³⁹ Then Gideon said to God, 'Do not let

your anger burn against me, let me speak one more time; let me, please, make trial with the fleece just once more; let it be dry only on the fleece, and on all the ground let there be dew.’⁴⁰ And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground there was dew.

Judges 6:36-40

In order to see whether you will deliver Israel by my hand, as you have said. God already gave Gideon a sign (vv.17-21). Here, Gideon asked God to perform a second miracle to confirm his word, and then a third miracle to confirm it again. Sometimes Christians talk about putting out a fleece before the Lord. This phrase refers back to what Gideon did here. He used a literal fleece in asking God to confirm his word with a sign.

Despite all the miraculous works of Jesus there were those who kept asking him for a sign to confirm who he was. These were not party tricks and Jesus refused: <<*When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, ‘This generation is an evil generation; it asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so the Son of Man will be to this generation’*>> (Luke 11:29-30), which was a reference to the three days he would spend in the tomb before his resurrection. The signs already performed by God for Gideon here and by Jesus should always be enough without asking for further confirmation: <<*Jesus answered them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent’*>> (John 6:29), and: <<*If those to whom the word of God came were called “gods” – and the scripture cannot be annulled – can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, “I am God’s Son”? If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father’*>> (John 10:35-38).

Then I shall know that you will deliver Israel by my hand, as you have said. Gideon showed that he had a weak, imperfect faith. For such a bold, life-endangering mission, one might understand and even encourage his request for one sign, already fulfilled in vv.17-21, of course. However, asking for second and third signs showed that his faith was weak.

Let me, please, make trial with the fleece just once more. Ironically, trial is the same word, Hebrew *nasah*, used of God earlier, when he ‘tested’ Israel (Judges 2:22 and 3:1). Gideon’s desire to test God was in direct violation of the Mosaic Law, which prohibited humans from testing God: <<*Do not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah*>> (Deuteronomy 6:16). Gideon himself

was aware that he was doing something unwise, if not sinful, since he asked God not to be angry with him. Gideon already knew God's will (vv.14-16), calling him to service on behalf of God's people, so Gideon's requests reveal his weak faith. Despite this lack of faith, God accommodated both of Gideon's requests. More constructive examples of responses to God's call are Isaiah: <<*Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I; send me!'*>> (Isaiah 6:8), and Jesus' disciples: <<*As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up and followed him*>> (Matthew 9:9), <<*And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him*>> (Mark 1:18-20).

The test was wrong because it was essentially a trick, and it had nothing to do with fighting the Midianites. Gideon probably did not understand that he was actually dictating his terms to God. Sometimes God shows his displeasure with such requests. In Luke 1:18, when Zechariah, John the Baptist's father, asked for a confirming sign, the Lord made him mute until the birth of his son John.

Gideon also did not keep his word. God fulfilled the sign once and Gideon said that would be enough for him. However, he went back on his word after God fulfilled the first sign. Yet the Lord was still merciful and gracious to Gideon. This is an outstanding example of God's gracious patience with a troubled child. Yet before being too critical of Gideon, one should consider the challenge that was ahead of him. Many people would immediately refuse such a call, without even considering allowing God to confirm it. Gideon's weak faith was still greater than no faith. For this reason, Gideon is rightly included in the register of great men and women of faith in Hebrews 11:32.