

Judges 6 • From Farmer to Warrior

Introduction

³²And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, ³³who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. (Hebrews 11:32–34)

Gideon heads the lists of judges in Hebrews' "Hall of Fame of Faith". In the recorded account of his life in the Old Testament, it might appear as if he was someone whose faith began on shaky ground, but it helps to understand that when God called Gideon, he was neither a prophet nor a soldier—he was a farmer. God will both call and use **anyone** for His purposes. And like other everyday figures in Scripture like Gideon who were called up in extraordinary times to perform extraordinary deeds, each calling and background is different, but applicable particularly to those of us who identify simply as "ordinary folk".

¹Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD gave them into the hands of Midian seven years. ²The power of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of Midian the sons of Israel made for themselves the dens which were in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds. ³For it was when Israel had sown, that the Midianites would come up with the Amalekites and the sons of the east and go against them. ⁴So they would camp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel as well as no sheep, ox, or donkey. ⁵For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, they would come in like locusts for number, both they and their camels were innumerable; and they came into the land to devastate it. ⁶So Israel was brought very low because of Midian, and the sons of Israel cried to the LORD.

[Read v.1-6]

Q: What is the main theme of Judges which provides the overall context for each successive period of a judge's rule?

A: Israel reached such a low point spiritually that God temporarily suspended working through the nation to instead work through chosen individuals.

¹⁸When the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them. (Judges 2:18)

Q: What is the history of the Midianites where Israel is concerned?

A: Although descended from Abraham through his second wife Keturah, when they are first encountered as a nation in the Exodus Narrative, they sheltered Moses from Pharaoh and Moses even married a Midianite, (Ex. 2:15-22) and initially brought the entire nation out to Midian. But once Israel departed from their lands in the Sinai, they came to be aligned with the Moabites against Israel. (Num. 22:7) They are willing agents of Balaam and his counsel for implementing the spiritual seduction of Israel (Num. 25 & 31), and we now find them aligned with the Amalekites and "the sons of the east" against Israel.

Point: Spiritual and even literal enemies often keep returning with different allies to attempt yet another attack.

Q: What has literally happened to Israel where the land is concerned?

A: First they were driven off from living on it, then they were denied a living from it.

Q: What was the ancillary effect on Israel's food source? How did this have an impact on them spiritually?

A: By consuming all of the produce, it was not just denying the Israelites food, but food for their livestock as well. This had spiritual repercussions because livestock was not just a source of food, but essential for their religious practices.

Q: How is this framed in the text so as to sound like a familiar working of God?

A: Their coming into the land “*like locusts*” with the ensuing devastation replays the character of a plague effected by the hand of God.

Q: What might be revealing about the use of the phrase, “Israel was brought low” in v.6?

A: This is the condition which God previously warned would inevitably come upon Israel because of sin. This was one of the curses for disobedience.

⁴³“*The alien who is among you shall rise above you higher and higher, but you will go down lower and lower. (Deuteronomy 28:43)*”

Q: What might be lacking when it states, “the sons of Israel cried to the Lord”?

A: Desperation, pain and frustration are present, but there is at most only a hint of actual repentance.

¹⁵*I will go away and return to My place
Until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face;
In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me. (Hosea 5:15)*

Application: *This is not purely a test of faith, but far more the consequences of sin.*

⁷Now it came about when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD on account of Midian, ⁸that the LORD sent a prophet to the sons of Israel, and he said to them, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘It was I who brought you up from Egypt and brought you out from the house of slavery. ⁹I delivered you from the hands of the Egyptians and from the hands of all your oppressors, and dispossessed them before you and gave you their land, ¹⁰and I said to you, “I am the LORD your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live. But you have not obeyed Me.’””

[Read v.7-10]

Q: How do we know God heard their cry?

A: He sends a prophet with a message.

Q: How do we know for sure that the Israelite’s cry to God was unaccompanied by repentance?

A: The message God sent through the prophet is, “*But you have not obeyed Me*”. (v.20)

Q: Why doesn’t God immediately rescue them from the Midianites?

A: Without repentance, rescue is not just unwarranted, but useless.

Q: How does God’s brief history lesson parallel what is needed in their current situation?

A: God’s reminder that “*I delivered you*” (v.9) coincides with their present need for a deliverer.

Q: How does v.10 explain the exact definition of the evil v.1 states Israel transacted in the eyes of the Lord? What was their specific sin?

A: “*...you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites...*” They had forsaken the One True God for false gods.

Point: *This is why it especially noteworthy that they have cried out because of the punishment which has come at the hands of the Midianites, but not repented from following their gods.*

Application: *When it comes to reconciliation of sin for the backslidden, immediate relief from the consequences is not guaranteed. The first stage may be reproof on the issue of sin.*

Judges 6 • From Farmer to Warrior, Page 2 of 7

¹¹Then the angel of the LORD came and sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press in order to save it from the Midianites. ¹²The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, “The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior.”

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

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

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

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

[Read v.11-16]

Q: How do we know that “the angel of the LORD” is a Christophany—that is, an Old Testament appearance of Jesus?

A: In v.14 the text specifically states, “The LORD looked at him...” without qualifying it as “the angel of the LORD”.

Q: If Gideon was but a farmer, why does the Lord greet him as, “O valiant warrior”? (v.12)

A: Jesus is known to address people as He sees them ultimately becoming. This same thing occurred when He first met Peter.

⁴²He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter). (John 1:42)

Q: In v.13, what does Gideon specify would be needed if divine intervention was going to rescue Israel from their present situation?

A: It is revealed in a somewhat rhetorical question, “And where are all His miracles...?”

Q: How is this directly contrasted in v.14 by the Lord’s response?

A: “Go in this **your strength** and deliver Israel...” The miracle Gideon expected was not going to come about as he imagined.

Q: According to v.14, What would be enough when it comes to God’s working through someone?

A: “Have I not sent you?”

¹¹So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
It will not return to Me empty,
Without accomplishing what I desire,
And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:11)

Q: What is indicated about Gideon’s character by his response in v.15?

A: He is aware of his lowly place within his family, the lowly place of his family within his overall tribe, and the lowly place of his tribe—which is divided into two halves and often called a “half-tribe”, as compared to the overall nation.

Q: How is this an ironic characteristic found in this one man when compared to what we learned about the whole nation in the opening section in v.6?

A: Because of sin the whole nation has been brought low, and yet the Lord chooses to deliver them by someone who sees themselves as the lowest of the low. It is especially ironic in how they are spiritual opposites of each other.

Q: What is all the assurance the Lord deems is needed for Gideon to carry out his calling? What is the only miracle Gideon actually needs?

A: “Surely I will be with you...” (v.16)

Application: The called of God may need to first be awakened to trusting in themselves as a prelude to trusting God.

Judges 6 • From Farmer to Warrior, Page 3 of 7

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

¹⁸Please do not depart from here, until I come back to You, and bring out my offering and lay it before You.”

And He said, “I will remain until you return.”

¹⁹Then Gideon went in and prepared a young goat and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour; he put the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot, and brought them out to him under the oak and presented them. ²⁰The angel of God said to him, “Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay them on this rock, and pour out the broth.” And he did so. ²¹Then the angel of the LORD put out the end of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. Then the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight.

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

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

[Read v.17-23]

Observation: This author discounts the many commentators’ position that Gideon is either acting unfaithfully or as a coward. When such sin or at least questionable motives are present, Scripture always specifies their presence. We need to pay attention to the fact that Gideon is never reprimanded for a lack of faith or cowardice.

Q: What appears to be a very important step which shows that Gideon was not testing God in the way so often attempted?

A: He does not begin without first bringing an offering.

Application: In all requests of any kind, an accompanying offering acknowledging the sovereignty and authority of God distinguishes what is being offered in faith.

Q: What is a second confirmation that this is, in fact, Jesus?

A: He accepts Gideon’s offering made to him. Offerings can only be made to and accepted by the Godhead, not even the most powerful angelic being.

Q: How might the way the sacrifice was processed be a demonstration to Gideon personally?

A: Gideon previously stated that it would take miracles from God to deliver Israel, and here the Lord confirms His calling to Gideon by the miraculous consumption and acceptance of his offering.

Q: What is the third confirmation that “the angel of the LORD” is in fact Jesus?

A: By Gideon’s statement, “I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face”. (v.22) Scripture dictates that no one can see the face of God and live. Jesus confirms this is the case when He assures Gideon, “you shall not die”. (v.25)

²⁰But He said, “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!” (Exodus 33:20)

Observation: Even in the extra-biblical commentaries of Orthodox Judaism, it was recognized that “the angel of the LORD” was a third Person of the triune Godhead, whom they referenced as the “Metatrone”.

Q: Why is Gideon’s reaction not actually something which is not new to us in Scripture?

A: It parallels what took place between Moses and God when Moses was called at the burning bush. (Ex. 3:11-12)

Application: The called of God approach Him in faith in all matters of faith. They are quick to render to God that which is due God.

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

²⁵Now on the same night the LORD said to him, “Take your father’s bull and a second bull seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal which belongs to your father, and cut down the Asherah that is beside it; ²⁶and build an altar to the LORD your God on the top of this stronghold in an orderly manner, and take a second bull and offer a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah which you shall cut down.” ²⁷Then Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the LORD had spoken to him; and because he was too afraid of his father’s household and the men of the city to do it by day, he did it by night.

[Read v.24-27]

Q: What is different about this altar from most of those recorded in Scripture as being built by someone?

A: This is one of those times when it was not built first in order to give the offering as recorded in the previous section, but is built afterward as a memorial of that offering and encounter.

Q: How is this then contrasted to the next altar?

A: The removal of an altar to a false god is required so that an altar to the One True God can be established.

Q: What is the difference in the type of sacrifices specified here vs. those previously presented by Gideon?

A: That which Gideon personally offered might be best characterized as a “freewill offering”; here the Lord is specifying what is essentially a “sin offering”.

Point: *Gideon’s first offering was voluntary and given in recognition of Christ’s superiority; the second offering is required in order to return to Christ’s authority and a place of right standing.*

Q: How would you describe what is taking place here in the overall sequence of this story so far?

A: It would appear that the Lord is first addressing the local issues of sin in Gideon’s family and immediate area before moving on to the same, greater issue within the whole of Israel.

Q: What might be gleaned from the location of this event? How might it be the first stage of something greater to come?

A: This is a high place called “*this stronghold*”. Like the whole of Israel, it was dedicated to a false god. Through Gideon the Lord establishes His own dedicated stronghold from which to initiate the greater work to come.

Application: *The repentance and reconciliation of the whole is repeatedly demonstrated throughout Scripture as always beginning with the few, or even the one. It always begins with repentance as exemplified by the altar.*

²⁸When the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was torn down, and the Asherah which was beside it was cut down, and the second bull was offered on the altar which had been built. ²⁹They said to one another, “Who did this thing?”

And when they searched about and inquired, they said, “Gideon the son of Joash did this thing.”

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

³¹But Joash said to all who stood against him, “Will you contend for Baal, or will you deliver him? Whoever will plead for

[Read v.28-32]

Q: What is particularly interesting about Joash’s response?

A: Both the altar to Baal and the Asherah, as well as the bulls sacrificed, belonged to Joash.

Q: What do Gideon’s God-directed actions seem to have accomplished where Joash is concerned?

A: It would appear that repentance and reconciliation have come to Gideon’s father.

Application: *God saved Noah and his family, Lot and his family, Rahab and her family, and on the day of Pentecost, Peter specified that salvation through Christ is “for you and your children and for all who are far off”. (Acts 2:39)*

Q: What seems to be the proof of Joash’s sincere change of heart?

A: He is actually prepared to enforce the Mosaic Law when it comes to worshipping false gods.

Judges 6 • From Farmer to Warrior, Page 5 of 7

him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because someone has torn down his altar.”³²Therefore on that day he named him Jerubbaal, that is to say, “Let Baal contend against him,” because he had torn down his altar.

³³Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the sons of the east assembled themselves; and they crossed over and camped in the valley of Jezreel. ³⁴So the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon; and he blew a trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called together to follow him. ³⁵He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, and they also were called together to follow him; and he sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they came up to meet them.

³⁶Then Gideon said to God, “If You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken, ³⁷behold, I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I will know that You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken.”³⁸And it was so. When he arose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece, he drained the dew from the fleece, a bowl full of water.

³⁹Then Gideon said to God, “Do not let Your anger burn against me that I may speak once more; please let me make a test once more with the fleece, let it now be dry only on the fleece, and let there be dew on all the ground.”⁴⁰God did so that night; for it was dry only on the fleece, and dew was on all the ground.

Q: What does Gideon gain through his earthly father which reflects spiritually where his heavenly Father is concerned?

A: Gideon’s earthly father renames him “*he will contend with Baal*”—that is, to take on the chief spiritual influence which is at the heart of Israel’s current, sinful dilemma.

Point: *The Lord called Gideon a “warrior”, but it was not solely to deal with an earthly problem, but the greater spiritual one.*

Application: *Those authentically called by God often preface their greater global work by first setting things right locally. It prepares them for the greater work to come.*

[Read v.33-35]

Q: Was Gideon acting on his own when he sounded the call and sent the messengers?

A: No, it specifically states in v.34, “*the spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon*”.

Q: Why is Gideon only calling these few tribes, and not the whole of Israel?

A: Geographically, these are the closest to the valley of Jezreel where the enemy is encamped. He calls those who are closest to the problem.

Point: *What began with Gideon personally, first won over his family, then his town and clan (the Abiezrites), and not just his tribe of Manasseh, but the neighboring tribes as well.*

Application: *Those called by God in turn are used by God to call others to God.*

[Read v.36-40]

Q: How does Gideon’s character of humility come through again at this particular time?

A: In Judges 7:3 we will learn that 32,000 men responded to Gideon’s call. However, Gideon did not glory in what some might believe was their ability to draw such a large number, but still sought the Lord in this matter even after such a response.

Q: What makes us uncomfortable about Gideon requesting a repeat of the sign?

A: It probably stems from the fact that we are all too aware of the biblical mandate not to test God.

¹⁶“*You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested Him at Massah. (Deuteronomy 6:16)*

⁷Jesus said to him, “*On the other hand, it is written, ‘YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.’*” (Matthew 4:7)

Q: However, why should we resist classifying this as an act of disbelief?

A: Because Gideon is never rebuked by God for doing so. The absence of such in Scripture shows that God regarded Gideon’s dual test as being sincere.

Judges 6 • From Farmer to Warrior, Page 6 of 7

Q: But since we know the whole story (as divulged in the upcoming chapters), how does God in turn do the same kind of thing to Gideon in return?

A: Having initially given Gideon 32,000 volunteers, they are first whittled down to 10,000 (Jg. 7:3), and in an ultimate test of faith, further reduced to just 300. (Jg.7:6)

Point: *Gideon tested God twice and God tested Gideon thrice.*

Application: *Those called by God may certainly seek confirmation from God, which he will most assuredly affirm by a test of faith in Him.*

Overall Application

- *It begins with the singular calling of an individual.*
- *The first work is an individual sacrifice and offering to God. (Rom. 12:1-2)*
- *This is closely followed by cleaning up the immediate area of influence to establish a spiritual stronghold in the Lord.*
- *It then influences those closest, always involving true repentance combined with a return to the Word.*
- *There will be tests of faith along the way.*
- *The individual calling always results in the greater glory of God.*