

Judges

Chapter 6

Gideon

Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. ² Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds. ³ Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. ⁴ They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. ⁵ They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count the men and their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it. ⁶ Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the LORD for help. ⁷ When the Israelites cried to the LORD because of Midian, ⁸ he sent them a prophet, who said, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ⁹ I snatched you from the power of Egypt and from the hand of all your oppressors. I drove them from before you and gave you their land. ¹⁰ I said to you, 'I am the LORD your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.' But you have not listened to me." ¹¹ The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. ¹² When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior." ¹³ "But sir," Gideon replied, "if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian." ¹⁴ The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?" ¹⁵ "But Lord," Gideon asked, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." ¹⁶ The LORD answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together." ¹⁷ Gideon replied, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me. ¹⁸ Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you." And the LORD said, "I will wait until you return." ¹⁹ Gideon went in, prepared a young goat, and from an ephah of flour he made bread without yeast. Putting the meat in a basket and its broth in a pot, he brought them out and offered them to him under the oak. ²⁰ The angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened bread, place them on this rock, and pour out the broth." And Gideon did so. ²¹ With the tip of the staff that was in his hand, the angel of the LORD touched the meat and the unleavened bread. Fire flared from the rock, consuming the meat and the bread. And the angel of the LORD disappeared. ²² When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the LORD, he exclaimed, "Ah, Sovereign LORD! I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!" ²³ But the LORD said to him, "Peace! Do not be afraid. You

are not going to die.”²⁴ So Gideon built an altar to the LORD there and called it The LORD is Peace. To this day it stands in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.²⁵ That same night the LORD said to him, “Take the second bull from your father’s herd, the one seven years old. Tear down your father’s altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it.²⁶ Then build a proper kind of altar to the LORD your God on the top of this height. Using the wood of the Asherah pole that you cut down, offer the second bull as a burnt offering.”²⁷ So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the LORD told him. But because he was afraid of his family and the men of the town, he did it at night rather than in the daytime.²⁸ In the morning when the men of the town got up, there was Baal’s altar, demolished, with the Asherah pole beside it cut down and the second bull sacrificed on the newly built altar!²⁹ They asked each other, “Who did this?” When they carefully investigated, they were told, “Gideon son of Joash did it.”³⁰ The men of the town demanded of Joash, “Bring out your son. He must die, because he has broken down Baal’s altar and cut down the Asherah pole beside it.”³¹ But Joash replied to the hostile crowd around him, “Are you going to plead Baal’s cause? Are you trying to save him? Whoever fights for him shall be put to death by morning! If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar.”³² So that day they called Gideon “Jerub-Baal,” saying, “Let Baal contend with him,” because he broke down Baal’s altar.³³ Now all the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples joined forces and crossed over the Jordan and camped in the Valley of Jezreel.³⁴ Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him.³⁵ He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, calling them to arms, and also into Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, so that they too went up to meet them.³⁶ Gideon said to God, “If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised—³⁷ look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said.”³⁸ And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew—a bowlful of water.³⁹ Then Gideon said to God, “Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece. This time make the fleece dry and the ground covered with dew.”⁴⁰ That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew.

6:1–9:57 The Gideon and Abimelech narratives are a literary unit and constitute the center account of the judges. They are bracketed by the stories of Deborah (from Ephraim, a son of Joseph; west of the Jordan) and Jephthah (from Manasseh, the other son of Joseph; east of the Jordan)—which in turn are bracketed by the stories of the heroes Ehud (from Benjamin) and Samson (from Dan). In this center narrative, the crucial issues of the period of the judges are emphasized: the worship of Baal, and the Lord’s kingship over his covenant people Israel. (CSB)

6:1 *Midianites.* See notes on Ge 37:25; Ex 2:15. Since they were apparently not numerous enough to wage war against the Israelites alone, they often formed coalitions with surrounding peoples—as with the Moabites (Nu 22:4–6; 25:6–18), the Amalekites and other tribes from the east (v. 3). Their defeat was an event long remembered in Hebrew history (see Ps 83:9; Isa 9:4; 10:26; Hab 3:7). (CSB)

Descendants of Abraham by his wife Keturah following the death of Sarah (Gn 25:1–2). Midianites are mentioned as one of the caravan traders that took Joseph as a slave into Egypt (Gn 37:28–36). Moses' wife was a Midianite (Ex 2:15–22). They were quite prosperous when Israel conquered them (Nu 31:32–54); archaeologists associate the Qurayyah pottery found in northwest Arabia with the Midianites. They did not continue as a national people after the rise of the Israelite kings. (TLSB)

amalekites. See note on Ge 14:7. Normally they were a people of the Negev, but they are in coalition here with the Midianites and other eastern peoples, who were nomads from the desert east of Moab and Ammon. (CSB)

6:2 *dens ... caves ... strongholds*. Dry ravines, valleys, and caves in the clefts of the mountains carved by water erosion were refuges of last resort. (TLSB)

6:3 Normally living farther south in the Negev, the Amalekites allied with the Midianites in making raids into Israelite territory. These desert dwellers would have found the fertile, well-watered Israelite lands attractive to raid. (TLSB)

6:4–5 *devour the produce*. Bringing their livestock and tents with them, the raiders set up camp at strategic locations all the way to Gaza, on the Great Sea shore. (TLSB)

6:5 *swarms of locusts*. A vivid picture of the marauders who swarmed across the land, leaving it stripped bare (see 7:12; Ex 10:13–15; Joel 1:4). (CSB)

camels. The earliest OT reference to the use of mounted camels in warfare. (CSB)

Not typical livestock of the Israelites. A single camel could carry a load of up to 400 lb, plus its rider, and travel for up to a week without water. (TLSB)

6:7 *cried to the LORD*. The Israelites' cries of distress occurred in each recurring cycle of the judges (see Introduction: Literary Features). (CSB)

6:8 *prophet*. See notes on 2:1; 10:11. The unnamed prophet rebuked Israel for forgetting that the Lord had saved them from Egyptian bondage and had given them the land (vv. 9–10). (CSB)

This unnamed male prophet was a counterpart to Deborah (4:4). Using covenant language (cf Ex 20:2), the prophet reminded Israel of the blessings God had showered on Israel: freedom from slavery in Egypt and rescue to the land of Canaan. (TLSB)

6:10 *Amorites*. Probably here includes all the inhabitants of Canaan (see note on Ge 10:16). (CSB)

6:11 *angel of the LORD*. See note on Ge 16:7. (CSB)

terebinth. Also known as the turpentine tree, which grows over 32 ft tall. (TLSB)

Ophrah. To be distinguished from the Benjamite Ophrah (Jos 18:23). (CSB)

Uncertain location, possibly 8 mi NW of Beth-shean. (TLSB)

Abiezrite. The Abiezrites (v. 24) were from the tribe of Manasseh (Jos 17:2). (CSB)

threshing wheat in a winepress. Rather than in the usual, exposed area (see note on Ru 1:22). Gideon felt more secure threshing in this better protected but very confined space. (CSB)

Fearful and demoralized, Gideon was beating out the grain with a stick, under cover of the walls of a wine vat. (TLSB)

6:12 *angel of the LORD*. At first, Gideon assumed he was talking only to another man. This messenger spoke as the Lord Himself. (TLSB)

mighty warrior. Apparently Gideon belonged to the upper class, perhaps a kind of aristocracy (see v. 27), in spite of his disclaimer in v. 15. (CSB)

Given the pitiful circumstances in which Gideon found himself, the angel's greeting may have seemed ironic, even sarcastic. But this greeting foreshadowed Gideon's future. Because the Lord was with him, Gideon would become a man of valor. (TLSB)

6:13 *if the LORD is with us*. Though outwardly polite, Gideon's response expressed skepticism and his demoralized spirit. (TLSB)

6:14 *LORD turned*. See vv. 22–23. Apparently this appearance of the “angel of the LORD” (v. 11) was a theophany (a manifestation of God). *Go...* (CSB)

To face Gideon, who was complaining about the Lord's inaction. (TLSB)

Am I not sending you? Gideon was commissioned to deliver Israel as Moses had been (see Ex 3:7–10). (CSB)

Go in this might of yours. Foreshadowing Gideon's future success, it is expressed, however, with sarcasm. (TLSB)

6:15 *how can I ... ?* The Lord usually calls the lowly rather than the mighty to act for him (see notes on Ge 25:23; 1Sa 9:21). (CSB)

Gideon felt not only his own inadequacy but also that of his clan. The clan was the basis of the military unit called a “thousand.” (TLSB)

6:16 *as one man*. As if they were a single man, echoing the promise to Joshua (Jsh 23:10). (TLSB)

6:17 *give me a sign.* See vv. 36–40; cf. the signs the Lord gave Moses as assurance that he would be with him in his undertaking (see Ex 3:12; 4:1–17). (CSB)

Gideon then realized he may have been speaking with more than a mere mortal. He will continue asking for signs, however, and his response to the Lord's signs demonstrates his reluctance and insecurity in answering the Lord's call. (TLSB)

6:19 *presented.* Gave a sacrificial gift. Gideon's gift is lavish. Even in times of plenty, people did not eat meat every day. (TLSB)

6:21 *consuming the meat.* Indicating that Gideon's offering was accepted (see Lev 9:24). (CSB)

Evidence that the Lord accepted Gideon's gift. (TLSB)

6:22 Gideon could see that his visitor was the Lord, and he became convinced he would die, as Moses (Ex 33:20) and Isaiah (Is 6:5) also feared. (TLSB)

6:23 *But the LORD said to him.* Gideon now spoke with the Lord directly, as Abraham and Moses had done in the past. (TLSB)

not going to die. See 13:22 and notes on Ge 16:13; 32:30. (CSB)

6:24 *built an altar.* Cf Gn 8:20; 12:7–8; 13:18; 26:25; 35:7. Offerings were typically to be made at the tabernacle. (TLSB)

The LORD Is Peace. Relieved that his life had been spared, Gideon expressed his newfound safety and security in the name he gave to the altar. (TLSB)

To this day. Until c 1000 BC, when Jgs was written. (TLSB)

6:25–26 *bull ... second bull.* Gideon likely yoked them together to pull down the altar. (TLSB)

seven years old. How long Midian had oppressed Israel (v 1). (TLSB)

Baal ... Asherah. Growing up in pagan surroundings, Gideon may not have known much about the Lord until this appearance. (TLSB)

build an altar. Gideon's construction of an altar to the Lord posed a direct challenge to the community and to his father. (TLSB)

stronghold. A community fort. (TLSB)

6:25 *Tear down ... altar.* Gideon's first task as the Lord's warrior was to tear down an altar to Baal, as Israel had been commanded to do (see 2:2; Ex 34:13; Dt 7:5). (CSB)

Baal. See note on 2:13. (CSB)

Asherah pole. See NIV text note; see also notes on 2:13; Ex 34:13. (CSB)

6:26 *proper kind of altar.* See Ex 20:25. (CSB)

6:27 *too afraid.* Gideon's immediate response showed fear rather than zeal. He removed the Baal altar at night, hoping not to incur the wrath of his community and family. (TLSB)

6:1–27 Gideon's initial call to be a judge reveals his demoralized spirit and weak character, yet with the assurance of the Lord's presence, he makes a first assault on the Baal worship in his own community. Unchecked, sin takes an ever greater hold on individuals and entire communities. Instead of speaking God's words and promises from generation to generation, parents may leave a legacy of unbelief and false worship (cf Dt 5:9). Gideon seems an unlikely figure to become a future champion of Israel. Yet the Lord of surprising, unearned grace seeks sinners and equips them to accomplish great things. • Help us, Lord, to believe Your promises, seek Your will, and act in the courage You alone give. Amen. (TLSB)

6:28 *rose early.* Dawn was a common hour for offering sacrifice. (TLSB)

6:29 *Who has done this thing?* Spoken not in appreciation for Gideon's courageous act but in anger and with the intent of punishing the perpetrator. (TLSB)

they said. The informants are not identified. (TLSB)

6:30 *He must die.* The Israelites were so apostate that they were willing to kill one of their own people for the cause of Baal (contrast Dt 13:6–10, where God told Moses that idolaters must be stoned). (CSB)

6:30 Because Gideon still lived in his father's household as the youngest son of the family, the responsibility for his action lay with his father, Joash. (TLSB)

6:31 *Will you contend for Baal?* Joash's question uses legal language. If Baal was such a powerful god, why would he need any human being to act in his defense? Though he does not directly defend his son, Joash seems to support his actions. (TLSB)

6:32 *Jerub -Baal.* See NIV text note. This name later occurs as Jerub-Besheth (2Sa 11:21) by substituting a degrading term (Hebrew *bosheth*, "shameful thing") for the name of Baal, as in the change of the names Esh-Baal and Merib-Baal (1Ch 8:33–34) to Ish-Bosheth and Mephibosheth (see notes on 2Sa 2:8; 4:4). (CSB)

Ironic nickname. Joash put the name positively: Gideon had challenged Baal by tearing down the altar devoted to him. Yet Gideon never fully renounced his loyalty to Baal; cf 8:27, 33. (TLSB)

Let Baal contend with him. Let Baal defend himself against Gideon. (CSB)

6:33 *Valley of Jezreel.* See note on 5:19. (CSB)

The invading armies, sweeping from the east, crossed the Jordan at this spot, where rich farmland was clearly visible. (TLSB)

6:34 *Spirit ... came upon.* Lit. “Spirit ... clothed himself with.” This vivid figure, used only three times (here; 1Ch 12:18; 2Ch 24:20), emphasizes that the Spirit of the Lord empowered the human agent and acted through him (see note on 3:10). (CSB)

Descriptive expression for how the Holy Spirit surrounded Gideon with divine protection for his assignment. In vv 36–40, Gideon used an article of clothing to discern the Lord’s will. In 8:27, he formed an article of clothing that became the object of idolatrous worship. (TLSB)

6:35 *Manasseh.* West Manasseh. (CSB)

Asher. This tribe earlier had failed to answer the call to arms (5:17). (CSB)

Gideon’s summons for help went out to the northernmost tribes clustered around the Sea of Chinnereth. (TLSB)

6:28–35 Gideon’s act of tearing down the Baal altar arouses antagonism. He receives an outpouring of the Holy Spirit to empower him for battle and win the support of neighboring Israelite tribes. As Gideon is clothed by the Lord, so the Holy Spirit clothes us with the righteousness of Christ Jesus. Through Baptism, we live here in safety and will stand bold “on the great day of God the Almighty” (Rv 16:14). • “Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness My beauty are, my glorious dress; Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed, With joy shall I lift up my head.” Amen. (LSB 563:1) (TLSB)

6:36–37 At best, Gideon’s challenge is a weakness of faith, maybe even outright unbelief (cf Dt 6:16). Gideon did not need these signs to ascertain the will of God; the Lord had clearly revealed His will (v 14). Gideon sought signs because he wanted a demonstration that the Lord had the power and the willingness to keep His promises. The Lord is patient with him.

6:37 *fleece.* Blanket of wool shorn in one piece from a sheep. (TLSB)

6:38 *dew.* Sign of God’s blessing; dew sustained life in a dry climate (cf Gn 27:28; Dt 33:28). Through the summer months, there is little or no rain in Israel, but the appearance of the morning dew is the guarantee of moisture on crops. (TLSB)

6:39 *just one more request.* Cf. Abraham’s words in Ge 18:32. (CSB)

dry on the fleece only. The second sign would go against nature, since the wool fleece would ordinarily absorb moisture. Luth: “In all his promises, moreover, in addition to the word, God has usually given a sign, for the greater assurance assurance and strengthening of our faith. Thus he gave Noah the sign of the rainbow. To Abraham he gave circumcision as a sign. To Gideon he gave the rain on the ground and on the fleece. So we constantly find in the Scriptures many of these signs, given along with the promises” (AE 35:86). (TLSB)

6:36–40 Despite a clear revelation of the Lord’s will, Gideon twice puts the Lord to a test, hoping to gain certainty for his faltering faith. Jesus said that an evil and adulterous generation looks for a sign (Mt 12:39). But when the Lord wishes to give us a sign, we are arrogant to reject it (cf Is 7:10–14). The Lord is patient with us and merciful through His Son. • Almighty God,

send us Your Holy Spirit, that through Your Holy Word our faith may be built up and strengthened. Help us realize that in the Word alone we find the Good News of salvation, through Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)