

Judges Chapter 6

Verses 1-2

The “Midianites” were descended from “Midian”, one of the several children born to Abraham and Keturah, who had been sent away to the east so that Isaac might be Abraham’s uncontested heir (Gen. 25:1-6).

Joseph was later sold into Egypt by Midianite merchants (Gen. 37:23-28).

Moses fled to the land of Midian, where he married Zipporah, a Kenite princess (compare Exodus 2:15-22).

The Midianites provided opposition to the Israelites as they journeyed toward the Promised Land, being found in league with the Moabites (Num. chapters 22-25), and the Amorites (Joshua 13:21).

Known primarily as prosperous traders, the various groups of Midianites tended to merge with the Ishmaelites (compare Gen. 37:25-28; Judges 8:24).

Verses 6:1 – 7:22: The “Gideon” cycle shows Israel’s growing apostasy and the inability of her best leaders to gain real deliverance.

In addition, for the first time, a judge contributed to Israel’s spiritual decline (8:24-27).

Judges 6:1 "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years."

“Midian”:

These wandering herdsmen from east of the Red sea had been dealt a severe blow in Moses’ time (Num. 31:18) and still resented the Israelites.

They became the worst scourge yet to afflict Israel.

The “Midianites” were half-brothers of the Hebrews, the children of Abraham and Keturah, His second wife (Gen. 25:2-4).

Amid their oppression, the Israelites fled to the “mountains for refuge (verse 2).

The “evil” of the people during this time can be summed up in three words: infidelity, idolatry, and intermarriage.

The children of Israel seemed to never learn.

They reach out to God when they are in trouble.

As soon as their trouble is over, they return to the worship of the false gods of the people around them.

This seven years they spent in the hands of Midian, was a chastisement from God.

Judges 6:2 "And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: [and] because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which [are] in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds."

Israel's sin was renewed, and Israel's troubles were repeated.

The Israelites hid themselves in dens and caves; such was the effect of a guilty conscience.

Sin dispirits men.

The invaders left no food for Israel, except what was taken into the caves.

They prepared that for Baal with which God should have been served, now God justly sends an enemy to take it away in the season thereof.

These caves were where they lived, when they were hiding from the Midianites.

The caves afforded a certain amount of protection from the enemy.

They set up places where they could hide and withstand their enemies.

At least in the caves, the enemy could attack from only one side.

This was a place where they were relatively safe.

Judges 6:3 "And [so] it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them;"

Their land, and it was grown up, and near being ripe.

For the Midianites gave them no disturbance in the winter.

And during seedtime, when they came out of their lurking holes, and manured their land, and sowed it.

"That the Midianites came up":

Into the land of Canaan, from the other side Jordan, where their country lay, and which it seems lay lower than the land of Israel.

"And the Amalekites, and the children of the east":

The former were implacable enemies of Israel, and on every occasion, would join other nations in oppressing them.

And the children of the east were Arabians, as Josephus expressly affirms.

"Even they came up against them":

All these three sorts of people in a confederacy.

For the Amalekites" (see the note on 3:12-13).

Judges 6:4 "And they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass."

Formed a camp, from whence they sent out parties to plunder the people.

Or "they were fixing their tents among them," as the Vulgate Latin version.

And so the Targum, "they dwelt by them", or fixed their habitations by them.

For they seem not to have come as a regular army, but as bandits to pillage, plunder, and destroy the fruits of the earth.

"And destroyed the increase of the earth":

The corn and grass before they were well ripe, and fit to cut down.

This they did, and gave it to their cattle, and the rest they carried off.

"Till thou come unto Gaza":

A principality of the Philistines, which lay in the western part of Canaan, on the shore of the Mediterranean sea.

So that as these people came out of the east, and entered the eastern part, they went through the whole land from east to west, cutting down all the fruits of the earth for forage for their cattle.

"And left no sustenance for Israel":

Nothing to support life with, cutting down their corn and their grass, their vines and olives, so that they had nothing to live upon.

"Neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass":

Not anything for those creatures to live upon, nor did not leave any of them, but carried them all away.

It appeared from the two verses above, that they destroyed Israel's crops every time they planted.

They took their animals as well.

They were trying to starve Israel out.

The children of the east were probably speaking of Haran.

Judges 6:5 "For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; [for] both they and their camels were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it."

A camel can travel three or four days with a heavy load on its back, covering about 300 miles without food and water.

The Midianites and others would invade Israel on their camels and gather up everything they could before leaving, thus devastating the people and the land.

There were so many of them, they ate and destroyed everything in sight.

They had no intention of saving anything.

They came to destroy and that is just what they did.

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

Were reduced very low, brought into famishing circumstances through the Midianites thus destroying the fruits of the earth year after year.

"And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD":

Which they should have done at first, instead of going into dens and caves.

However, better late than not at all.

They cried, not to the idols they had served, being sensible they could not help them, though so as to worship them.

But to Jehovah the God of the whole earth, and who was in a special sense their God, though they had forsaken him.

The only time they cry out to God, is when they are destitute.

Now that they are out of food and cannot help themselves, they call out for help unto the LORD.

Verses 7-10

God sent an unidentified “prophet” to urge the people to turn back to Yahweh and end their oppression.

Up to this time, all the Israelites did was cry out for relief.

God wanted something more than a cry; He wanted a confession (Hosea 5:15).

The Israelites’ problem was not their enemies but their disobedient hearts.

Repentance precedes deliverance (Joel 2:12-17).

Judges 6:7 "And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of the Midianites,"

Because of their oppressions and ill usage of them, and not because of their sins, which had brought those evils on them.

Of which, at present, they seemed not to be sensible.

And yet such was the goodness and compassion of God to them, that having a mind to deliver them, he immediately, on their crying to him, sends them a messenger to bring them to a sense of their sins.

And prepare them for the deliverance he designed to work for them, as follows.

Judges 6:8 "That the LORD sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage;"

“The LORD sent a prophet”:

He used prophets in isolated cases before Samuel, the band of prophets that Samuel probably founded (1 Sam. 10:5), and later such prophets as Elijah, Elisha and the writing prophets, major and minor.

Here the prophet is sent to bring the divine curse because of their infidelity (verse 10).

This is speaking of the LORD telling them what their error is, before He helps them.

This prophet is in a sense, like Deborah.

The difference is, she was a prophetess.

He brings news from God to these rebellious people.

The message begins by reminding them that it was God who brought them out of bondage in Egypt.

Judges 6:9 "And I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drove them out from before you, and gave you their land;"

Even after they were brought out of Egypt, when the Egyptians pursued after them, and overtook them at the Red sea.

Where they were in the utmost distress, and the LORD wrought salvation for them.

He gave them a passage through it, and destroyed the Egyptians in it.

"And out of the hand of all that oppressed you":

The Amalekites who made war with them at Rephidim, Sihon, and Og, kings of the Amorites.

Who came out to fight with them, and oppose their passage through their land into Canaan.

And the kings of the Canaanites also, who combined against them.

"And drove them out from before you, and gave you their land":

Not only the land of Sihon and Og, but the whole land of Canaan.

Out of which more properly the inhabitants of it may be said to be driven.

The LORD fought their enemies, and brought them to their land of promise.

The LORD has kept covenant with them.

He did just as He had promised to do.

Judges 6:10 "And I said unto you, I [am] the LORD your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but ye have not obeyed my voice."

The covenant God of them and their fathers, and they ought not to have owned and acknowledged any other besides him.

"Fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell":

Meaning not a fear of being hurt by them.

But such a fear and reverence of them as to worship them, which was only to be given to the LORD.

The Amorites are here put for all the Canaanites, they being a principal people among them.

"But ye have not obeyed my voice":

To cleave to him, fear and worship him.

They had been guilty of idolatry, and this is the sin the prophet was sent to reprove them for.

And bring them to a sense of.

They have not kept God's laws and His commandments.

God had promised them He would be with them, but they were not to fear.

Their disobedience to God has gotten them in the place they are in.

Verses 11-12

Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress in a pit in the ground where he would be less visible and less vulnerable to Midianite attack.

The angelic appearance, which was Jesus Himself, means that Gideon hears the word of the LORD directly from the mouth of the LORD: "The LORD is with thee".

In addressing him as "mighty man of valor", the LORD saw Gideon as he would become, not as he was (Heb. 11:32).

Judges 6:11 "And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which [was] in Ophrah, that [pertained] unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide [it] from the Midianites."

"An angel":

This Angel (literally "messenger"), of the LORD is identified as "the LORD" himself (verses 14, 16, 23, 25, and 27; compare Gen. 16:7-14; 18:1; 32:24-30), for other appearances (see note on Exodus 32:2).

"Threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it":

This indicated a situation of serious distress; also, it indicated a small amount of grain.

This is clear because he is doing it rather than having cattle tread it.

It is on bare ground or in the winepress rather than on a threshing floor made of wood, and is done remotely under a tree out of view.

The fear of the Midianites caused this.

“Gideon”:

Was a military and spiritual leader who delivered Israel from seven years’ oppression by the Midianites (verse 1).

The Angel of the LORD appeared to him with strong words of encouragement (verses 12, 16).

Gideon destroyed his father’s altar to Baal (verse 25), and erected an altar to the LORD (verses 27-28).

Then at the command of God, he reduced his army from 32,000 to three hundred, to face the 135,000 Midianites.

The Midianites outnumbered Gideon’s band 450 to one.

Nevertheless, God gave the victory to Gideon and his dedicated men (7:9-25).

After the victory, Gideon was invited to become king, but he declined (8:22-23).

After Gideon retired to his home (8:28), Israel was blessed with 40 years of peace.

Gideon is included (in Hebrews 11:32), for his faithful deeds (Judges Chapters 6 and 8).

One of the most interesting things to me, is that God calls those who are the least likely to expect it.

They are generally not trained in the job God has for them to do.

Their ability and strength to carry through on what God wants them to do, lies in God's abilities, not in their own.

The land of Israel is caught up in idolatry.

They are heavily oppressed on every side, but God knows who to choose to serve Him.

He sends the angel of the LORD to speak.

Gideon raised wheat and hid it from the Midianites.

What an unlikely person to be called of God!

Gideon was a simple man.

Judges 6:12 "And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD [is] with thee, thou mighty man of valor."

He stayed some time under the oak, and Gideon being busy in threshing, took no notice of him wherefore he came and stood before him, in his sight.

"And said unto him, the LORD is with thee":

The gracious presence of God was with Gideon while he was threshing.

Who very probably was sending up exclamations to heaven, on account of the distressed case of Israel.

And was deep in meditation about the affairs of the people of God, and contriving how to deliver them.

Or the angel might mean himself, who was no other than Jehovah, the eternal Word of God, who was present with him, and spake unto him.

And so the Targum, "my Word is thy help".

"Thou mighty man of valor":

Who very probably was a stout man in body, and of a courageous mind naturally.

And might at this instant have an increase both of bodily strength and greatness of soul.

Or, however, this was said to animate and encourage him for what he was about to be sent to do.

Angels are not always seen by other people.

The angel is on a mission from God to speak to Gideon.

Gideon would be the one he appeared to.

What a wonderful encouragement to know the LORD was with him.

Probably, Gideon had never thought of himself as a mighty man of valor.

He thought of himself as a farmer of wheat.

Gideon sees what he is now.

God sees his potential for what He wants Gideon to be.

Judges 6:13 "And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where [be] all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites."

The statement "O my Lord" is an expression of respect, similar to "sir" (John 4:11; 1 Peter 3:6).

Gideon expressed uncertainty in his response ("if the LORD be with us"), asking what many people ask during times of struggle.

Gideon truly believed "the LORD hath forsaken us".

Gideon's language here indicates a weak theology.

The very chastisements of God were proof of His care for and presence with Israel.

It takes a very brave man to speak to an angel in this manner.

Perhaps, he was not aware he was an angel.

He probably appeared in the form of a man.

Gideon is down in his spirit, because of what the Midianites are doing to all of them.

He does not understand, if God is really with them, why are they having all of the trouble?

He is undoubtedly, not aware of the conditions of the covenant God had made with them.

Verses 14-16

God promised that Gideon would be victorious, not because Gideon was mighty but because "Surely I will be with thee" (Exodus 3:12; Joshua 1:9).

The Christian's confidence should rest in God's presence and power, not in personal abilities or resources (2 Cor. 1:8-9; 13:9-10; Heb. 13:5).

Judges 6:14 "And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?"

The same before called the angel of the LORD, and who was no other than Jehovah himself.

Who looked upon him with great earnestness, and with great delight and pleasure smiled upon him.

And thereby showing he had a kindness for him, and meant well to him.

"And said, unto him, go in this thy might":

Both of body and mind, which had been before given unto him, and was now increased, and which no doubt Gideon was sensible of.

"And thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites":

As he did, and therefore justly reckoned among the saviors and judges of Israel.

"Have not I sent thee?"

To do this great work, save the people of Israel, from whence Gideon might perceive who it was that talked with him.

And having a command and commission from God, had authority enough to go about this service.

The LORD does not even answer Gideon on his question.

He tells him to fight for Israel.

There is a promise in this, that the LORD will be with him and strengthen him for the battle.

God has promised him victory over the Midianites.

Judges 6:15 "And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family [is] poor in Manasseh, and I [am] the least in my father's house."

Whether he had yet suspected who he was, or took him still for some eminent person, is not certain.

It is very probable he began to think he was some extraordinary person sent of God, and speaking in his name, and therefore takes issue with him about the work he put upon him.

"Wherewith shall I save Israel?"

In what way is it possible for me to do it, who had neither men nor money sufficient for such an undertaking?

"Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh":

Of which tribe he was, and the "thousand" in it, as the word here used signifies.

Was the least of all the thousands in that tribe; some render it.

"And I am the least in my father's house":

Perhaps the youngest son.

Though some take him, and others his father, to be the Chiliarch, or head of the thousand.

But by these words of his it does not seem as if either was true.

Not that he wasn't of some wealth and substance, power and authority, by having such a number of servants as to take "ten" of them with him (Judges 6:27).

However, this he says in great humility and modesty, having no high thoughts of himself and family, nor any dependence on his own strength, and on an arm of flesh.

Many of the people who serve the LORD, feel they are not qualified to do so.

This is what Gideon is saying here.

He is poor and not qualified, in his own sight, to lead.

Judges 6:16 "And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man."

The Targum is, "my Word shall be thy help," which was sufficient to answer all objections taken from his meanness, unworthiness, and weakness.

"And thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man":

All together, and as easily as if he had but one man to deal with.

And the destruction be so entire and general that none shall be left.

The LORD accepts no excuses.

He just reassures Gideon that He will be with him.

He says they will be so easy for Gideon to defeat, it will appear to Gideon as if they had been one man.

Verses 17-35

Before he could represent God in the public square, Gideon needed to know Him in a personal way.

Too often, people who aspire to leadership pass over this first requirement, and then collapse under the public scrutiny.

God's warriors must be with Him in worship before they can be with Him in warfare.

Gideon's request for this first "sign", and his extravagant offering at a time when the nation was starving, reveals his desire for the LORD's acceptance, assurance and allegiance.

The "fire" that "consumed" the offering encouraged this young leader that he was not heading into battle by himself.

Judges 6:17 "And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then show me a sign that thou talkest with me."

Like Moses (Exodus chapter 33), Gideon desired a sign; in both incidents revelation was so rare and wickedness so prevalent that they desired full assurance.

God graciously gave it.

Gideon is now questioning whether this is a message from the LORD or not.

He wants proof that it is from the LORD.

Verses 18-23

In the realization of the presence of God, the sensitive sinner is conscious of great guilt.

Fire from God further filled Gideon with awe and even the fear of death.

When he saw the LORD, he knows the LORD had also seen him in his fallenness.

Thus, he feared the death that sinners should die before Holy God.

But God graciously promised life (verse 23).

For a similar reaction to the presence of God (see Manoah in 13:22-23; compare Ezek. 1:26-28; Isa. 6:1-9; Rev. 1:17).

Judges 6:18 "Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set [it] before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again."

Intending to go to his own, or his father's house, to fetch some food to entertain him with.

And therefore entreats he would not leave the place where he was until he returned.

"And bring forth my present, and set it before thee":

Hebrew, my "meat-offering"; and his idea probably was to prove, by his visitor's partaking of the entertainment, whether or not he was more than man.

Therefore, some have thought of it as a sacrifice.

But it appears by what follows that it was not of the nature of a sacrifice; and, besides, Gideon was no priest, nor was this a place for sacrifice, nor was there here any altar.

And besides, as Gideon did not yet know that it was the LORD himself, he could never think of offering a sacrifice to him.

"And he said, I will tarry until thou come again":

Which was a wonderful instance of divine condescension, it being some time he waited before Gideon could prepare what he brought, as follows.

Gideon wants the angel of the LORD to remain until he can go and get something.

The angel agrees to wait for the return of Gideon.

Judges 6:19 "And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought [it] out unto him under the oak, and presented [it]."

The flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot.

The flesh seems to have been roasted, which is done by cutting it into small pieces, fixed on a skewer, and put before the fire.

The broth was for immediate use.

The other, brought in a hand-basket was intended to be a future supply to the traveler.

This is like a sacrificial offering that Gideon has brought out to the angel of the LORD.

Judges 6:20 "And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay [them] upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so."

Instead of sitting down and partaking of the entertainment made for him, he bid him do as follows.

"Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock":

Not as a table to eat it from, but as an altar to offer it upon.

And which rock and altar might be typical of Christ, who sanctifies every gift, present, and offering of his people.

This rock was undoubtedly in sight, and very probably the oak, under which they were, grew upon it, or at the bottom of it, where it was no unusual thing for oaks to grow (Gen. 35:8).

But it was upon the top of the rock that these were to be laid, where afterwards an altar was built (Judges 6:26).

"And pour out the broth":

Upon the flesh and cakes, and upon the rock also, which by bringing from his house must have been cool and it became cooler by being poured out, and cooler still by being poured upon a cold rock.

"And he did so":

He readily obeyed his orders.

Though he had reason to wonder he should have ordered the food he brought for his entertainment to be thus made use of.

Perhaps he might expect that he intended to give him a sign, as he desired, and therefore the more readily, without any objection, complied with his order.

The broth was poured out like a drink offering, and the flesh and the unleavened bread were laid on the rock which acted as an altar.

Judges 6:21 "Then the angel of the LORD put forth the end of the staff that [was] in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the LORD departed out of his sight."

The miraculous fire that consumed it and the vanishing of the stranger, not by walking, but as a spirit in the fire, filled Gideon with awe.

A consciousness of demerit fills the heart of every fallen man at the thought of God, with fear of His wrath.

And this feeling was increased by a belief prevalent in ancient times, that whoever saw an angel would forthwith die.

The acceptance of Gideon's sacrifice betokened the acceptance of his person.

But it required an express assurance of the divine blessing, given in some unknown manner, to restore his comfort and peace of mind.

“Fire” is often a sign of the divine presence (compare Exodus 3:2-4; 13:21-22; 19:18; Isa. 4:4; Ezek. 1:27; Dan. 7:9; Zech. 2:5; Acts 2:3; Heb. 12:18; Rev. 1:14).

This fire that consumed the offering, showed it was accepted from heaven.

This should be a sufficient sign for Gideon that the message was truly from God.

Angels appear and disappear instantly.

This is what happened here.

Judges Chapter 6 Questions

1. How many years did the LORD deliver Israel into the hands of Midian?
2. Where did the Israelites try to hide?
3. Who came up against Israel?
4. What did they destroy and take, besides Israel's crops?
5. The enemies of Israel was described in verse 5, as being as numerous as _____.
6. In verse 6, where did Israel turn for help?
7. Who did the LORD send to Israel in answer to their cries?
8. Who is this prophet like?
9. What things does the prophet remind them that God had done for them?
10. What had God warned them not to fear?
11. Who did God send after the prophet?
12. Why had Gideon hid the wheat behind the winepress?
13. What is interesting about the people God chooses to serve Him?
14. The _____ of the _____ appeared to Gideon.

15. What question does Gideon ask him?
16. What does the LORD call Gideon to do?
17. What excuse does Gideon give for not being right for the job?
18. What promise does God make to Gideon?
19. How easy will it be for Gideon to defeat Midian?
20. What does Gideon ask, so he will know this is from the LORD?
21. Gideon asks the angel to wait for what?
22. What did Gideon bring back?
23. What is this really that Gideon brought?
24. What does the angel tell Gideon to do with the offering?
25. What happens to the offering?