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Judges 6 - 7



Judges - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg provides a detailed analysis of Judges 6-7, which concludes with the victory of Israel over the Midianites. The story follows the cycle of sin, punishment, repentance, and deliverance recurring throughout the book of Judges. Gideon, chosen by God as the leader of Israel's army, uses a sign from God to gather soldiers and defeat the Midianites. The account includes an interpretation of the role of the "angel of the Lord" as a distinct figure from a regular angel, and a discussion of the significance of Gideon's use of an ephod as a priestly garment.

Transcript

Judges 6-7 The Midianites, as we know, were descended from Abraham through another of his sons, Midian, who was born of Abram and Keturah. So they were blood relations somewhat remotely to the Israelites, who were also from Abram through another line. But they were generally not friendly.

Although Moses had married a Midianite woman, and had been befriended by the Midianite priest, his father-in-law, who was himself a Kenite, but was the priest of Midian. We don't know very much about the background of that, how a man who was a Kenite became a priest of Midian, but that's what we're told. But in most eras, the Midianites were very hostile toward Israel.

In fact, about a hundred years before this, there had been a war between Israel and the Midianites because of the incident of Baal-peor. Because Balaam had counseled both Moab and Midian in the way to bring corruption into Israel, and bring a judgment from God upon them through fornication and through idolatry. Balaam had counseled Balak, the son of Beor, who was the king of Moab, and Midian was with him.

They went and they seduced Israel into idolatry at Baal-peor, and this was a great offense that was remembered by Israel for a long time afterward. In fact, in the end of the book of Judges, Israel goes and fights against Midian, and seeks vengeance against them for this act. So, the Midianites have already had a war with Israel previously in the days of Moses, but that was a long time before this.

The Midianites now are sweeping over Israel in very large numbers, what is a hundred and something thousand of them coming in, and Israel has a much smaller force as we shall see when they actually defeat Midian. God delivers by few rather than by many, but it was an overwhelming flood of Midianites coming in, and they oppressed Israel for seven years. And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel because of the Midianites.

The children of Israel made for themselves the dens, the caves, and the strongholds which are in the mountains. So, this is a worse than average oppression. The Israelites didn't even feel safe staying in their home.

Probably this is not true of every last Israelite, but in some regions apparently the oppression was so severe that people left their homes and cities and lived in caves. Or at least had cave retreats that they would periodically retreat to when the danger seemed greatest of the Midianites coming through. In all likelihood, the Midianites ran periodical raids on various regions.

And when the Midianites were not there, probably people farmed their lands and lived in their homes, but when they saw the Midianites coming or heard they were coming, they would find hiding places. Because the Midianites apparently would slaughter them and just abuse them, probably rape their women and so forth. So, they made hiding places for themselves in caves and dens and strongholds in the mountains.

So, it was whenever Israel had sown, Midianites would come up, also Malachites, and the people of the east would come up against them. Then they would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the earth, as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep nor ox nor donkey. For they would come up with their livestock in their tents, coming in as numerous as locusts.

Both they and their camels were without number, and they would enter the land and destroy it. So, Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord. Now, the Midianites, it sounds like they just destroyed the crops.

There's a good possibility they took for themselves the crops that they wanted. After all, that's free food. When you're nomadic people, when you're Bedouins traveling around, you can't grow food yourself.

It's probably very rare for you to be able to have an abundance of grain, because you can't grow it yourself. You probably have to buy it by trading with other people. But, in all likelihood, they took and ate as much as they wanted.

Like locusts, they came in, it says. But, just like locusts, when the locust plague has gone by, they've left nothing green standing. Locust plague just totally denuded an area of all foliage and all greenery.

And that's what they apparently did. They probably ate what they wanted and just burned or destroyed the rest, just to be oppressive. And so, Israel was greatly impoverished and starving to death in many cases.

Although, this policy of the Midianites was apparently periodical. They'd be gone, and then they'd come in at harvest season and do all this damage. Some of the Israelites found ways to salvage a little bit of wheat or a little bit of food when the Midianites were not there, and take care of their needs secretly that way.

As we find Gideon does himself. He's got some wheat hidden from them, and he's very quietly and secretly threshing it. Actually, in a wine press, which is not a normal place to do that, but where he hoped not to be found.

So, they cried out to the Lord, as was the case after the oppressions previously. And this led to God raising up a deliverer. In this case, the deliverer was Gideon.

And in this case, we have a lot more detail about the man, the nature in which God called him, his own reservations, and what it took for God to convince him, much more than any of the previous judges. Gideon and Samson are the two judges about which we really get a character sketch of the men, much more than the others. So, this is a lengthy account.

It goes through chapter 8. And so, it came to pass when the children of Israel cried out to the Lord, because of the Midianites, that the Lord sent a prophet to the children of Israel. This was before he raised up a judge. Who said to them, Thus says Yahweh, God of Israel, I brought you up out of Egypt, and brought you out of the house of bondage, and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you, and gave you their land.

Also, I said to you, I am the Lord your God. Do not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But you have not obeyed my voice.

So, they're crying out to the Lord, and the Lord actually sent a prophet and says, What are you crying to me for? You haven't obeyed me. I told you to get rid of the Canaanites and their gods, and you've instead compromised with this. This is what you deserve.

Nonetheless, despite this rebuke, we find that God does send deliverance. But he wants them to feel rather convicted about their crimes, not just grieved about their oppression. They cried out to the Lord, not in repentance necessarily, but just in agony, and God had pity on them.

But he made it very clear that they deserved a scolding over their behavior. In verse 11, Now, we have here a reference to the angel of the Lord, and most evangelical scholars are agreed that the angel of the Lord in the Old Testament is different than just an angel of the Lord. There are many angels, and sometimes an angel is sent to do a certain

thing.

But, on occasion, we read of the angel of the Lord, the messenger. The word angel means messenger of the Lord. And Christians usually understand this reference to be what we call a theophany, an appearance of Christ prior to his incarnation, at least of God.

It is a representative of God who speaks as if he is God. And so, generally speaking, the angel of the Lord is not really distinguished from the Lord. In fact, it was the angel of the Lord that appeared to Moses in the burning bush.

And if you read the narrative, it sometimes says, And the Lord said to Moses, and sometimes it says, And the angel of the Lord said to Moses. It speaks of the angel of the Lord interchangeably with the Lord himself. And there are three times when the angel of the Lord seems to appear in the book of Judges.

We saw one of them when he appeared as the commander of the Lord's hosts. I'm sorry, that was in Joshua. But that was the angel of the Lord too.

But there was, it seems like there was another earlier appearance of the angel of the Lord here. Where is that? Oh, yes, chapter 2. Chapter 2, verse 1. It says, Then the angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal, And basically gave a message similar to what the prophet gave in this chapter. The angel of the Lord doesn't come with that message here.

But that's the angel of the Lord in chapter 2, verse 1. Then we have this instance, chapter 6. And then we have in chapter 13, verses 3 through 23, The angel of the Lord comes again and communicates with Samson's parents. So, God, perhaps Christ, pre-incarnate Christ, actually appears on earth three times that are mentioned during this period of time. That's on average about once per century, though.

That's not frequent, even in Old Testament history. But the angel found Gideon, who was threshing his father's wheat, what they could hide from the Midianites. Threshing, of course, is the process by which they separate the wheat kernels from the chaff so they can ground the wheat without the chaff being in there.

And that was the process they did it. But they didn't usually do it in a winepress. They usually did it in a threshing floor, which is above ground.

The winepress might have been a depressed area dug out below the ground so that he could do it more or less secretly, that somebody in the distance on Tamils coming, a raider could not see that he was doing it. So, they were trying to hide some food so they don't starve to death and hope the Midianites don't come and get it. This was in a place called Ophrah, which is apparently his hometown.

His father, Joash, is called the Ebiezrite. And I don't know where that is from exactly, but the point is that this is a town where this family lives and it becomes significant later on. This town, Ophrah, actually becomes a significant center of worship after the deliverance from Midian.

And the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, Yahweh is with you, you mighty man of valor. Now, a lot of preachers kind of think this is ironic. He calls him mighty man of valor while he's hiding in the winepress and they kind of laugh and say this is almost like a sarcastic statement.

Here he finds this man hiding from his enemies and he calls him mighty man of valor. I don't think it's sarcastic at all. I think Gideon demonstrated that he was a mighty man of valor and God knew that.

A mighty man of valor doesn't mean that he's stupid and that he takes unnecessary risks. A man who hides his stuff from marauding Bedouins is not necessarily a coward. He's wise and he is a mighty man of valor.

He certainly showed himself to be courageous because he eventually attacked hundreds of thousands of Midianites with 300 soldiers behind him. So, he is a mighty man of valor. He's a very courageous man.

How he may or may not have demonstrated that previousness, I don't know. A man of valor usually means a warrior. And we don't know if Gideon ever previously had done anything that showed himself to be a warrior, but God could see, and sometimes even people could see, a warrior in the rough before he's ever actually done any warfare.

In fact, David was referred to as a mighty man of valor back when he was tending sheep before he ever fought in any wars. I'm trying to remember exactly where that is. I believe it's in 1 Samuel chapter 16.

Yeah. In 1 Samuel chapter 16, when Saul was tormented by evil spirits, his servants realized that he's going to need to have some kind of relief and a musician who could play well might do the job. And, in fact, Saul himself knew that in chapter 16, verse 17 of 1 Samuel.

Saul said to his servants, Provide me now a man who can play well and bring him to me. Then one of the servants answered and said, Look, I have seen a son of Jesse, the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing, a mighty man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a handsome person, and the Lord is with him. Now, David at this point had never fought in any wars.

He was tending sheep. But there were talent scouts for the military that Saul was sending out. And they had been to Bethlehem, and they'd seen this young man who looked like he's the right stuff.

He could be a mighty man of war. I happen to have heard that he plays music. Interesting that David, living in an obscure town, and in a rather obscure profession out on the hillsides with the sheep most of the time, would have had this much information about him known at this point in time when he was not famous.

Yet it means that Saul, as I said, his talent scouts, his recruiters, were out and about looking for capable men that they might recruit into the army in all likelihood. And so they described David as a mighty man of valor, a man of war, though he had never done any war. So to call Gideon a mighty man of valor, though he might not have had any outlet for showing these qualities yet, would be something that is legitimate and not sarcastic at all.

Gideon did show himself to be just that. Now Judges 6.13, Gideon said to him, O my Lord, if Yahweh 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 forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites. Then Yahweh turned to him and said, Now who is Yahweh? The angel of the Lord is described as Yahweh here.

Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you? So he said to him, O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house. And Yahweh said to him, Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man.

It's fairly common for God to pick men who didn't have any natural qualifications or particular visible promise. When Moses was strong, when he was influential in Egypt, when he was the son of Pharaoh and had a lot of clout in Egypt, he thought of himself as a man suited to deliver Israel from the Egyptian bondage. We know that because Stephen tells us that in Acts chapter 7, he says that when Moses killed that Egyptian who was oppressing the Israelites, that Moses thought that the Israelites would know that he had been sent by God to deliver them.

So at that early stage in Moses' life, when he was 40 years old, when he killed the Egyptians, he thought he knew that he was the one to deliver Israel from Egypt. Yet he was very self-confident. God had him driven out into the wilderness to live and tend sheep for 40 years, and at the end of that time, God actually called him to go do just that, deliver Israel from Egypt.

And Moses' response was, Who am I to do that? Who am I to speak to Pharaoh? He had lost all his self-confidence. He didn't have position in the government anymore. He had been humiliated in a profession for 40 years that was an abomination to the culture he was raised in.

The Bible says shepherds are an abomination to the Egyptians. And so he just was very

much humbled. And in that state, when God finally did call him, actually it was only when he was that humbled that God felt he was qualified to call him, he said, Who am I to do that? That's what Gideon is asking, Who am I to save Israel? How can I save Israel? And God said to Moses the same thing he said to Gideon.

He said, I will be with you. It doesn't matter who you are. It's not about you.

This is not you. It's God delivering his people. And I will be with you.

And that's all you need to know. It doesn't matter who you are. That's what he told Moses.

And he told Gideon essentially the same thing. I will surely be with you. And you shall defeat the Midianites as one man.

Then he said to him, If now I have found favor in your sight, then show me a sign that it is you who talked with me. In other words, this man looks essentially like an ordinary man. It is clear the man was talking as if he was Yahweh.

Saying, I'm going to deliver Israel through you and so forth. It's clear that the man was talking like he was God, but he looked like a man. Gideon is thinking, Well, okay, I hear the big talk, but how do I know you're who you claim to be? You can go down to the mall in Santa Cruz and find people who think they're God.

There's a lot of crazies out there. And any man who walks up and says, I'm Yahweh, I'm telling you to go out and risk your life fighting off the Midianites, there's 300 men. Of course, all that information was not given at this point.

Any nut could say that. But Gideon says, It's not like I'm not willing to obey God, but how do I know you're God? What sign will you give me so that I'll know that it is you, that it's God who talks with me? Do not depart from here, I pray, until I come to you and bring out my offering and set it before you. And so the man, the angel of the Lord said, I will wait until you come back.

Then Gideon went in and prepared a young goat and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour. Now an ephah of flour is a lot of flour. It's like a bushel or something like that.

It's a lot of flour. At a time when grain was at a premium, and there's famine because of the Midianite raiders, and you just rest a little where you can when the Midianites aren't looking. To bring out an ephah of grain was a large offering to bring.

And by the way, the law of Moses did prescribe bringing flour with certain animal sacrifices, but not such large quantities, generally speaking. I mean, it was usually a handful or a relatively small amount of flour that would be burned on the altar with the animal sacrifice. But he brings a huge amount along with the goat that he's prepared.

And the meat he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and he brought them out to him under the terebinth tree and presented them. The angel of the Lord 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.

Now, it's not clear whether he intended to bring this as a sacrifice because there was actually no altar there, or whether he was just planning to feed God. You know, when Abraham was visited by Yahweh in Genesis 18, Yahweh and two angels came to visit Abraham in the form of three men, and Abraham fed him a meal. I mean, he played host to them and fed them.

And that may be what Gideon was thinking he was going to do, bring out some food for his guest, who he believes could be God. But the guest says, I'm not going to eat it, just put it over there on the rock. Pour out the broth, I'm not going to drink that.

And put the meat and the unleavened bread on this rock. Then 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 arose out of the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. And the angel of the Lord departed out of his sight.

So, although there was no altar there, God himself turned that ordinary rock into an altar of sacrifice. And, of course, in a miraculous way, which became a sign to Gideon that this really was God. And Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the Lord, so Gideon said, Alas, O Lord God, for I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face.

Now, it is generally thought that if you see God, you'll die. Moses had said to God, Show me your glory. And God says, No one can see my face and live.

And it was understood that when people see God, they'll die. If they happen to see God. Most people don't see God, but if you did, it would be the end of you.

Samson's parents also had the same reaction when the angel of the Lord, when they knew that was the angel of the Lord, they thought, Uh oh, we're going to die. At least the husband thought that, and the wife said, No, if we're going to die, why would he have given us this message and so forth. But the first reaction when they felt like, Uh oh, I've seen God, is I'm going to die.

When Jacob wrestled all night with a man who we believe was the angel of the Lord also, at the end of that wrestling match he said, I have seen the Lord face to face and my life is preserved. Because I've lived, I've survived. Which was sort of a marvel to him, you know, I've seen God, but I didn't die.

It's interesting because no one ever really did die seeing God in the Bible. God did appear to people, and they didn't die. But they had this sense that when they're in the presence of God, they're unworthy, as it were, to live.

Peter had sort of that reaction when he first met Jesus. Not when he first met him, but when he first saw a miracle from Jesus. When Jesus gave him that great catch of fish.

Peter fell down at Jesus' feet and said, Depart from me, Lord, I'm a sinful man. He felt like he could not bear to be in the presence of someone so majestic. And to be in the presence of God was something that made people untouchable.

And they felt their own unworthiness and feared that God had appeared to them in order to kill them. Then the Lord said to him, although apparently not through the angel of the Lord who had disappeared, but maybe through a voice in his head, Peace be with you, do not fear, you shall not die. Maybe a voice from heaven spoke to him.

So Gideon built an altar there to the Lord, and called it the Lord's Shalom, or of course Yahweh's Peace. To this day it is still an ophrah of the Abiezrites. Now, again, we have this kind of to this day kind of expression.

We had those in Joshua also. Those things give some idea of when the book was written. The person who wrote it, this account, was still living, or was living, I should say the altar was still standing at the time that the person wrote the book.

Now it came to pass in the same night that Yahweh said to him, Take your father's young bull, the second bull of seven years old, and tear down the altar of Baal that your father has, and cut down the wooden image that is beside it. The wooden image is the Asherah pole, which was, they say that the images of Baal and Asherah were often displayed together, and they were very sexually explicit images. In fact, from what I've read, in some cases, some of these images were simply carved replicas of genitals.

I'm not sure if they all were, but the worship of Baal and of Asherah were very sexually oriented kind of rituals. There was an altar to Baal, and there was an Asherah pole there at his father's house. Apparently his father was an influential person in that town.

He might have been the chief man of the town. It's hard to know, because the people of the town took it as a personal affront that his altar to Baal was destroyed. It may have been an altar on his property that the people all used in the village.

But it was to be removed. And so, it says, He tore down and cut down the wooden image that is beside it. Verse 26, And build an altar to Yahweh your God on top of this rock in the proper arrangement and take the second bowl and offer a burnt offering sacrifice with the wood of the image which you should cut down.

So Gideon took ten men from among his servants and did as the Lord had commanded him, but because he feared his father's household and the men of the city too much to do it by day, he did it by night. This was going to be a controversial act, because the worship of Baal had pretty much replaced the worship of Yahweh. That's why their problems had come upon them.

That's the condition of the nation. They were worshiping pagan gods rather than Yahweh. Now, notice God authorized Gideon to build an altar there, an official altar to God to offer sacrifices, which would be in contrast to that which was in the tabernacle in Shiloh at this time.

And so, there may be an indication that the priesthood had totally become corrupt and couldn't be relied on to offer acceptable sacrifices, or maybe because the people had abandoned Yahweh, the priesthood had to just kind of give up for the time being. They didn't have any tithes coming in to support them. They might have had to go find some place to work and support themselves, because when people are worshiping Baal instead of Yahweh, there's no income for the tabernacle.

It is possible that the tabernacle had fallen entirely out of use because of the people's apostasy, and therefore, alternative sites of worship were acceptable since there was a special time where Shiloh was not really going to be a place where you could worship. The priest may have abandoned Shiloh at this time for a season. So, God tells him to offer a bull on this rock here, and that becomes an authorized site by God himself.

Gideon becomes sort of an authorized priest, though he's of the tribe of Manasseh and not of Levi. He kind of stands in. Samuel did that in his time too.

His predecessor, Eli, was a judge and a priest, a legitimate Levitical priest, but his line was cut off, and Samuel, who became the next judge, also acted as a priest, though he was of the hills of Ephraim and not of Levi, it would seem. So, God allowed kind of, what should we say, ad hoc deviations from the ritual law, which ordinarily would require, Levi ordinarily required that you go to the altar at Shiloh, but because of the general apostasy, it was apparently impossible for them to go to those sites. So, he set up a rock as an altar here, and he became the priest who offered.

And, by the way, after his victory over Midian, he made an ephod for himself. He's kind of letting it go to his head that he's going to be a priest. An ephod is part of the priestly garment, the vestment.

So, it would appear that God, having allowed Gideon to do priestly work right here in his own town, later caused his town, Ophrah, to be the religious center after Midian was defeated, and Gideon kind of made himself the permanent priest, made himself an ephod. It became a snare to his household when he did it. It wasn't the right thing for him to do.

Or maybe it wasn't wrong, but something about it later caused defection. We'll consider that later when we come to that. Verse 28, And when the men of the city rose early in the morning, there was the altar of Baal torn down, and the wooden image that was beside it was cut down, and the second bowl was being offered on the altar which had been built.

So they said to one another, Who has done this thing? And when they had inquired and asked, they said, Gideon, the son of Joash, has done this thing. Then the men of the city said to Joash, Gideon's father, Bring out your son, that he may die, because he has torn down the altar of Baal, because he has cut down the wooden image that was beside it. Now, as I said, this property, this was his father's property.

It was his father's altar and image that was destroyed. But the people of the village seemed to take that as a crime against the village itself. And so it may be that Joash, the father of Gideon, was sort of a tribal chieftain or something like that, and so what was on his property was simply there for the public use as they worshipped the Baal.

Now, it's also possible that these people were upset not because they felt that their altar had been destroyed, but because they maybe feared repercussions from Baal. That Baal might punish us for this sacrilege done against his altar, so we must atone for it by killing Gideon. But actually, his dad stood with him.

Apparently, Gideon's zeal may have rubbed off on his dad a little bit. His dad may have felt convicted about his own apostasy when he saw his son returning to the Lord. And his father speaks up on his behalf and says, he said to all who stood against him, would you plead for Baal? Would you save him? The idea being, what an insult to Baal to think that you have to defend him.

Isn't he a god? If he's a god, let him defend himself. You think you have to defend him? You're insulting Baal. And he says, let the one who would plead for him be put to death by mourning.

If he is a god, let him plead for himself. Because his altar has been torn down. Therefore, on that day, he called him, that is called Gideon, Jerubal, which means let Baal plead.

That is, let Baal plead for himself. That became the nickname of Gideon. And it's saying, let Baal plead against him because he has torn down his altar.

The idea being, Gideon got a nickname that was based on his demonstration that Baal could not defend himself. Baal did not do anything to Gideon. And Gideon commemorated that fact by bearing this nickname for the rest of his life, really.

Then all the Midianites and Amalekites, the people of the east, gathered together and they crossed over in a camp in the valley of Jezreel. But the spirit of Yahweh came upon Gideon as he had come upon Othniel and others. And then he blew the trumpet and the Abiezrites gathered behind him.

So, this clan within Manasseh was going to follow this man who was of their clan who was rising up and being heroic and sounded a trumpet to gather them. So, the Abiezrites came behind him and he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh who also gathered behind him. He also sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali.

These tribes had been involved in the war against Sisera which was led by Deborah and Barret. So, he knew they could be counted on. He called them and they came up to meet him.

Now, someone he didn't call immediately were the Ephraimites which were a brother tribe to Manasseh. And the Ephraimites kind of took offense about this later on because they weren't invited. But he called the people who were first of all his own countrymen his own tribesmen and then also other tribes that had shown themselves valiant in previous occasions of the sort.

So, they all came to meet him. And Gideon said to God, If you will save Israel by my hand as you have said look, I shall 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 shall know that you will save Israel by my hand as you have said.

And it was so. When he rose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece together he wrung the dew out of the fleece a bowl full of water. But apparently the ground was dry.

Now, you might say, okay, he's gotten the sign he should go forward. But he apparently thinks, well, that might not be a miracle because if dew had been on the whole ground it's possible the dew would dry off the ground before it would dry off the fleece. The fleece would be more saturated.

So, he might have come out after the ground had dried but the fleece still had moisture in it. So, he decided to reverse the test. Then Gideon said to God, Do not be angry with me and let me speak just once more.

Let me test, I pray, just once more with the fleece. Let it now be dry only on the fleece but on all the ground let there be dew. And God did so that night.

And it was dry on the fleece only but there was dew on all the ground. This action of Gideon is usually referred to by Christians when they speak of it as putting out a fleece. And it becomes sort of a paradigm for a kind of behavior that Christians sometimes do when they ask for a sign from God.

And so, putting out a fleece sometimes means you're trying to find out what God's will is and you ask for a specific kind of thing to happen to confirm that what you are thinking is the Lord. That's how people talk these days. They talk about putting a fleece out.

I haven't heard it recently from Christians but I heard it a lot when I was younger. You need to put out a fleece with the Lord to see if he's guiding in this way. Some people think it's not a legitimate thing to do.

And some people think that Gideon was faceless in his doing it. God had already spoken to him and had already given him a sign and so forth. But those signs that God had given

him were before the people gathered.

The people that gathered to him were 22,000. The Midianites outnumbered them at least about 7 or 8 to 1, I think. His life was still way outnumbered.

And so, it may be that these fleeces were not just for Gideon but he wanted to show his soldiers that God was in it. After all, he had communicated with God but these people had not heard or seen or witnessed it. For him to claim, God had called me to lead you people against the Midianites, he's asking them to trust God but how do they know God's in it? So, after the troops had gathered, he did these two things which, although it only speaks of it as him wanting a sign for himself, in all likelihood this sign was to serve to encourage the people who had come with him that this really was a divine call.

That God was really in it. I don't know that there's anything wrong with it. God complied with it without complaint.

Gideon is not described as lacking faith. In fact, he's listed in Hebrews 11 as one of those who had faith. The faith of Gideon, apparently, is considered to be sufficiently legendary that the writer of Hebrews includes him in the catalog of those who, in the Old Testament, by faith, did great things.

So, I don't think we should see this as a lack of faith on his part. Confirmation, for the sake of other people who are faithful, that this may be a legitimate thing to seek. And that may be what he was doing here.

Then Jerubael, that is Gideon, chapter 7, and all the people who were with him, rose early and camped beside the well of Harod, so that the camp of the Midianites was on the north side of them, by the hill of Moreh in the valley. And the Lord said to Gideon, the people who are with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against me, saying, My own hand has saved me. Now, therefore, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, Whoever is fearful, afraid, let him turn and depart at once from Mount Gilead.

And 22,000 of the people returned, and 10,000 remained. He actually had 32,000 returned. I said he had 22.

He lost 22 and still had 10,000 left. Still, they were outnumbered at least 5 to 1 by the Midianites, by the count that's given later of the Midianites, who were slain. And so, they were already a small army, and they got cut back two-thirds from 32,000 down to 10,000, because God didn't want them to have a great army.

Now, Jonathan, at a later date, told his armor bearer, let's go, the two of us, go and attack this garrison of Philistines, because it's no difficult thing for God to deliver by many or by few. It's possible that Jonathan was inspired by remembering this story. It didn't really matter how many people there are.

If God is with you, you'll win. And that was something God wanted to demonstrate here, and it may have proved as a permanent lesson to Israel that Jonathan took heed to. Verse 4, And the Lord said to Gideon, The people are still too many.

Bring them down to the water, and I will test them for you there. Then it will be that of whom I say to you, this one shall go with you, the same shall go with you. And of whomever I say to you, this one shall not go with you, the same shall not go with you.

So, he brought the people down to the water, and the Lord said to Gideon, Everyone who laps from the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set apart by himself. Likewise, everyone who drinks gets down on his knees to drink. So, Gideon was to watch people as they were going to the water and they were allowed to get something to drink.

And there were two ways that people did it. Some got down on their knees to drink, apparently to put their face in the water. Others lapped water like a dog.

That apparently means they lifted the water in the hollow of their hand and lapped it. That would mean that they were not putting themselves in a vulnerable position like those on their knees. They were like people who were still alert and still keeping an eye on things.

They didn't want their face down in the water where perhaps an enemy could surprise them. These were men who had more of a warrior mentality. The ones who lapped like a dog.

They lift the water to their face and lick it into their mouth like a dog licks water. That's at least how this is generally understood. The rabbis think that those who got on their knees to lap the water would be people who were accustomed to getting down on their knees before bail.

And that's why they were excluded. But that's the kind of thing the rabbis come up with in these stories. It's not necessarily a given that people who were used to bowing to bail would also bow down to get water.

So I don't know that that's really a correct explanation. I think it has more to do with the sense of readiness. The first group that were sent away were the ones who were the most cowardly.

Which means the 10,000 that remained remained because they were somewhat more battle ready, somewhat more of a warrior mentality. But they had to be sent out even more, probably in terms of the same quality. Of being military ready.

And so those that were down on their knees, if you get down on your knees, your enemy can surprise you, you can't easily get back up. It's not the attitude of a warrior. And so he picked the few who lapped water like a dog.

It turned out there were only 300 of those. So most of 10,000 didn't do it the right way that God wished. So he brought the people down to the water.

He told them how to distinguish between them. He put them into two groups. And verse 6 says, And the number of those who lapped, putting their hands in their mouths, was 300 men, but all the rest of the people got down on their knees to drink water.

Then the Lord said to Gideon, And by the 300 men who lapped, I will save you and deliver the Midianites into your hands. Let all the other people go. Every man to his place.

That must have been disheartening to Gideon. And he starts out with 32,000, which looks pretty impressive until you think of how many Midianites he has to overcome. And it's not enough.

Then God says, Send home two-thirds of those guys. Then you've got 10,000. Still looks like a lot of people when you're looking at it.

But when you do the math, you realize this is going to be tough. Let's see, only 10,000. And then God says, Send away over 9,000 of those 10,000.

Keep only 300. And that's who you're going to fight the Midianites with. And Gideon sends them away.

That's a man of faith. I mean, when you consider what he's asked to do, it's easy for us to read the story in a disattached way, sitting in a comfortable and safe place, and say, well, of course, you know. Of course God can deliver them.

If he didn't, the story wouldn't be in the Bible. We know how it's going to end. We know he's going to win.

But when you're actually going through it, when God's actually leading you into a crisis situation, he says, trust me on this. But it's dangerous. It takes faith that it's going to turn out right.

And Gideon had faith. People took provisions and there were trumpets in their hands. And he sent away all the rest of Israel, every man to his tent, and retained those 300 men.

Now the camp of Midian was below him in the valley. So they were up on a mountain looking down on the camp of Midian. And he sent away everybody.

Now, when it says the people left, one of these places, one of these verbs, we're talking, we're talking winding in Hebrew. The word is that they wound their way down the mountain. They probably took a circuitous route so that the Midianites would not see this large crowd of Israelites leaving and would not be on the alert.

So it happened on the same night that the Lord said to them, Arise, go down against the camp for I have delivered it into your hand. Now, God is so accommodating. He's asking a man to do something that's terrifying.

Take 300 men against, you know, hundreds of thousands of soldiers that are against him. And he realizes, okay, now that I've put you in such a precarious situation, I'm going to give you some real encouragement here to build your faith. Go down at night, sneak up to the camp, and I'll show you something down there.

But he says, if you're afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah, your servant. If you don't want to go alone, take your servant with you. I'm not sure why that would help much.

And you shall hear what they say. And afterward, your hands will be strengthened, which is an idiom that means you'll be encouraged to go down against the camp. Then he went down with Purah, his servant, to the outpost of the armed men who were in the camp.

Now the Midianites and Amalekites, all the people of the east were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts, and their camels were without number as the sand by the seashore in the multitude. And when Gideon had come, there was a man telling a dream to his companion. He said, I have just had a dream.

To my surprise, a loaf of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian. It came to a tent and struck it so that it fell and overturned and the tent collapsed. That's a really strange dream.

A loaf of bread comes tumbling down and knocks your tent down. And the guy who had the dream thought it was strange too. Strange enough to say, this is a weird dream.

Let me tell it to you. Then his companion answered and said, This is nothing else but the sword of Gideon, the son of Joash, the man of Israel. For into his hand God has delivered Midian and the whole camp.

Well, that was certainly a leap. What could it mean? Well, it's obvious, isn't it? It's obvious that Gideon is going to destroy Midianites. I don't know that that would be necessarily obvious, but it suggests either that this other Midianite soldier inadvertently prophesied, which could be, because Caiaphas, the high priest, prophesied inadvertently in John chapter 11.

He prophesied that Jesus must die for all the people. The author John tells us that he spoke this unknowingly. He prophesied unknowingly.

So, a man might prophesy without knowing it. It's also possible, though, that Gideon's rebellion against Midian was something the Midianites knew about and were preparing for themselves for. Or maybe they weren't taking it very seriously because he had so few

people to come against him.

Maybe they were not very afraid. But they knew that Gideon, they knew his name. This couldn't be anything but Gideon who's going to come down and destroy us.

Either that was like a prophecy utterly bypassing the man's intellect and just God speaking through him. Or the Midianites knew about Gideon and had concerns about this. And some of them had concerns about it.

Maybe, in general, the leaders didn't have enough concern to do anything about it. But these soldiers were not comfortable about it. And it's possible that one just kind of jumps to the conclusion this dream is a bad omen.

And maybe it means that Gideon is going to be more successful than we thought. Anyway, hearing that dream and that interpretation let Gideon know that these people were nervous. Even though they outnumbered Israel by a great deal, they were afraid.

And that God was even terrifying them with strange dreams and interpretations. So he was very encouraged. And it says in verse 15, So it was when Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation that he worshipped.

He returned to the camp of Israel and said, Arise, for the Lord has delivered the camp of Midian into your hands. Then he divided the 300 men into three companies and he put a trumpet into every man's hand with empty pitchers and torches inside the pitchers. And he said to them, Look at me and do likewise.

Watch, and when I come to the edge of the camp, you shall do just as I do. And when I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then you also blow the trumpets on every side of the whole camp. And say, The sword of the Lord and the sword of Gideon.

Since the Midianites knew the name Gideon, he was going to exploit that. Since they already were experiencing some fear. Who knows how many men were given that dream that same night.

And they were experiencing some fear of what Gideon might do. They were going to exploit that. This is the sword of Gideon and of Yahweh coming.

Now they had torches covered with pitchers so that the light would not show. They didn't have flashlights you could just turn on and off. They had to hide the light until the opportune time.

And they put 100 soldiers on 3 sides. 300 soldiers all together. Of the Midianites.

And it was probably pitch black out. So when these 100 lights on each side would appear, the Midianites waking up in the night and seeing all these lights around them and hearing all these trumpets blowing around them. 300 trumpets would still be pretty

loud.

They wouldn't know if there were thousands or hundreds of thousands. They just see that they're surrounded. And these lights suddenly pierce the darkness and they hear this war cry.

And it throws them into panic. First of all, because it's in the middle of the night they're unprepared. They're not in their armor.

They don't have their weapons at hand. Their families are with them. This is going to catch them by surprise and terrify them.

And we'll find that Gideon wins largely at least in the initial part of the victory by maybe killing each other in their confusion. So it says in verse 19 So Gideon and the 100 men who were with him came to the outpost of the camp at the beginning in the middle of watch just as they had posted the watch and they blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers that were in their hands. Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers.

They held the torches in their hands in their left hands and their trumpets in their right hands for blowing. And they cried the sword of the Lord and Gideon. Now they're holding pitchers they're holding torches and trumpets but not swords.

It seems like you're not going to fight with a trumpet very much or with a torch even too much but they would at some point you know abandon the trumpets and take their swords. And every man stood in his place all around the camp and the whole army ran and cried out and fled. When the 300 blew the trumpets the Lord set every man's sword against his companion that is the Midianite swords against their companions throughout the whole camp.

And the army fled to Beth-Akashia toward Zerah as far as the border of Abel-Meholah by Tabuk. And the men of Israel gathered together from Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh and pursued the Midianites. So those that had been sent away now were encouraged they weren't fearful anymore and they joined them.

So they only needed the 300 for the initial assault and that was in order of course to show God's miraculous ability to work with a small group but eventually many more Israelites joined them and began to pursue the Midianites. Then Gideon sent messengers throughout all the mountains of Ephraim saying come down against the Midianites and seize from them the watering places as far as Beth-Barah and Jordan. In other words the places where they would cross to Jordan to safety on the other side.

He wanted the Ephraimites who were near the river to prevent that. To not allow the Midianites to escape from the land but to be killed instead. Then all the men of Ephraim gathered together and seized the watering places as far as Beth-Barah and the Jordan

and they captured two princes of the Midianites Oreb and Zeb.

And they killed Oreb it's the rock of Oreb and Zeb they killed the one prince of Zeb. Now that's not just coincidence it's that this rock came and they pursued Midian and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeb to Gideon. Now we're going to stop there because of our time.

The fable is not yet over. There's one more chapter of Gideon.