

Judges 6:1-35

Gideon

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 concern Gideon and his achievements.

Judges 6:1-2 - "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. 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."

Rashi - Until now it was said (above 3:12, 4:1), "and they continued to do," because (one) sin was piled on (another) sin, but with this song (ch. 5) they were forgiven for all they had done and it was as though now they were beginning to sin. So it is explained in Aggadath Tehillim .

Israel had completely defeated the Midianites under Moses (**Numbers 31**), but that was maybe 200 years before. The survivors had repopulated themselves and nurtured a grudge against Israel. Now they were getting their revenge.

Judges 6:3-4 - "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; 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. 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."

"the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east" - in a confederacy. Just as Herod and Pilate became friends (**Luke 23:12**), and the Sadducee priests and the Pharisees, normally political enemies, joined in their common goal of arresting and killing Jesus.

"grasshoppers" = *'arbeh* - locusts

What God had once used as a plague on Egypt, the Midianites were now a type of, but this time coming against Israel for their sins.

This is the plot of "The Magnificent Seven" and "A Bug's Life" - the banditos or locusts come every harvest season and devour the fruit of Israel's flocks, fields and vineyards.

But repentance always causes God to hear our cries, and he not only stops his chastisement but blesses us with overflowing grace.

The prophet Joel also describes the coming Babylonians army as a host of locusts.

- **Joel 2:3** - "...the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a

desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them."

They would also be sent by God for Israel's chastisement, with the result being repentance:

- **Joel 2:12** - Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil."

The result -

- **Joel 2:25** - "And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you."

Finally, the children of Israel began to turn back to God.

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

God's Response - a Prophet

Judges 6:7-8 - "And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of the Midianites, 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; And I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drave them out from before you, and gave you their land; 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."

He reminds them why this is happening to them. They "feared" the gods of the Amorites/Canaanites - in the sense of reverence and worship.

The Angel of the Lord

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."

Rashi - "the Abiezrite": From the family of Abiezer, of the family of Gilead, of the family of Menasseh. Joash is an Abiezrite, a descendant of Abiezer, son of the sister of Gilead, who was the son of Machir the son of Manasseh, (Joshua 17:2)

He beat the wheat out with a staff, that it might be more silently done, and not with oxen, whose bellowing might give away the location. Not at a threshing floor but...

"by the winepress" - The association here of threshing wheat with the winepress is rare a combination of two different types representing testing or tribulation. Separating the wheat from the chaff is equated with crushing of the grapes. The result for believers is the bread and wine of the Afikomen/Lord's Supper/Communion.

Gideon's task is reflecting what God has been doing to Israel through their chastisement by the Midianites, and then what happened to Jesus, and finally what is happening to his body the church. (Another analogy is the assayer's "proving" of precious metals).

Here is where the Angel of the Lord appears to him - similar to when the risen Jesus appeared to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus in the "breaking of the bread" (**Luke 24:35**).

This was the Angel of the Presence, the Word and Son of God, and who is expressly called Yahweh himself a few verses later in **Judges 6:14** - a pre-incarnation appearance of the Messiah.

Gideon the 'Mighty Man of Valor'

Judges 6:12-13 - "And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valor. 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 irony is that Gideon was not feeling very "valorous." We see from the next verses that he was from a poor family, and his clan was the "least" in the tribe of Manasseh. He was in a state of despair, questioning God. At the annual Passover seder he had heard the sayings passed down by the forefathers of the coming out of Egypt and the miracles. If Israel was God's people, then why doesn't He help us now?

The answer had been given by the prophet previously sent, and by the presence of an idol - an altar of Baal and a sacred grove erected by his own father that stood in his village. Israel had fallen into idolatry, worshipping the gods of Canaan along with Yahweh.

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

Gideon's response here would have been similar to Sarah's laugh when she heard she would give birth to Isaac. For this reason, Gideon would ask for signs to make sure he heard God correctly.

Gideon Asks for a Sign

Judges 6:17-19 - "And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then shew me a sign that thou talkest with me. 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. 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."

"present" = *minchah*, often used for a meal offering.

Rashi - We see that it was Passover, the day of the waving of the Omer, therefore it was said, (below 7:13) "And behold, a roasted cake of barley bread tumbled, etc."

וְהַמֶּנֶּקֶת.

But the season is not clear here. Gideon was threshing wheat, so this should be near Pentecost and the wheat harvest. But a barley cake is featured in the dream in **Judges 7:13**, pointing to Passover and the first fruit offering. In the same way that threshing and the winepress are featured together, so are passover and Pentecost in this story. There are elements of both.

Acceptance

Judges 6:20-21 - "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. 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 miracle was similar to that wrought by Elijah on Mount Carmel (**1 Kings 18:33**).

Compare with the disciples on the road to Emmaus: "he vanished out of their sight" (**Luke 24:31**)

Judges 6:22 - "And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord GOD! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face. And the LORD said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die."

- **Genesis 32:30** - "And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."

- **Exodus 33:20** - "...Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live."

- **Judges 13:22** - "And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God."

- **John 1:18** - "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."

"declared" = *exēgéomai* - declare, unfold, interpret

- **John 14:9** - "Don't you know who I am? If you have seen me, you have seen the Father."

"And the LORD said unto him" - Did he hear by a voice from heaven? or a perception within himself?

Judges 6 :24 - "Then Gideon built an altar there unto the LORD, and called it Jehovahshalom: unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abiezrites."

Jehovah-shalom = "Lord (who bestows upon us) peace." - God is peace, completeness, health, wholeness, safety

If Yahweh is all this, then we know we can not furnish any of it ourselves. He is all.

He built an altar on the rock where his offering had been accepted.

First Mission - Pull Down the Altar to Baal

- **Judges 6:25-27** - "And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it: And build an altar unto the LORD thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down. Then Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the LORD had said unto him: and so it was, because he feared his father's household, and the men of the city, that he could not do it by day, that he did it by night."

First Gideon is hiding from the Midianites. Now he must hide from his own villagers and family.

We learn from this episode that to pull down idols and cut down groves requires a minyan - ten men at rest who form a congregation. We can't overturn idolatry alone, we need people we can trust to exhort us.

Then, the idolatry must be replaced with real, spiritual worship of the only true God.

And the wood of the grove or Asherah dedicated to the female consort of Baal is transformed - it becomes part of the sacrifice that rises to God as a sweet savor.

- **John 4:24** - "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

Sometimes destroying idolatry is messy and requires unorthodox and extreme methods.

Rashi says eight transgressions were permitted that night. Gideon offered that which was set aside to be sacrificed for idolatry, he used idolatrous utensils, the offering was at night, it was on a private altar and not in the Sanctuary, he was not a priest, sacred vessels were not used, wood from an Asherah was employed, and an animal that was worshipped was used, as is stated in Temurah 28b. (The bullock was fully grown and had been set aside for an offering to Baal).

The Targum says that the bullock had been fattened for seven years, and had been set aside for sacrifice to Baal; which was as long as the tyranny of the Midianites over them.

The new altar to Yahweh was probably near or next to the altar already built at the place where fire consumed Gideon's offering earlier. All this seems to take place nearby Gideon's home.

Compare Gideon's actions with those of Elisha, who when called by Elijah, slew the oxen he had been plowing with, used the plough and yokes as firewood to boil the meat, handed that out to the people. "Then he arose, and went after Elijah" (**1 King 19:19-21**)

The Backlash

Judges 6:28-29 - "And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was cast down, and the grove was cut down that was by it, and the second bullock was offered upon the altar that was built. And they said one to another, Who hath done this thing? And when they enquired and asked, they said, Gideon the son of Joash hath done this thing."

Whenever our idols are marred and their sacred spaces defiled, we react with anger but also fear because we're exposed and vulnerable.

Judges 6:30 - "Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die: because he hath cast down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove that was by it."

Everything is backwards in this response - justice demanded a trial with witnesses before judgment and sentencing, and in the Torah, idolaters were to be killed, not those who pulled down idols. That shows how far from God society had fallen.

Mocking the Idols

Judges 6:31 - "And Joash said unto all that stood against him, Will ye plead for Baal? will ye save him? he that will plead for him, let him be put to death whilst it is yet morning: if he be a god, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar. Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, Let Baal plead against him, because he hath thrown down his altar."

It's remarkable that Gideon's father - who had originally set up the Baal altar and grove - is his first covert in reformation and return to faith in Yahweh, and comes to the defense of his son.

"will you save him" - avenge him

"Jerubbaal = "let Baal contend"

Satire at its best, calling into question the reality of false gods - if Baal is a god, why does he need people to protect him or speak for him? He can speak for himself! In fact - instead of putting my son to death, execute the person who is denigrating Baal's powers for his lack of faith!

Enemies Gather

Judges 6:33-35 - "Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel. But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; and Abiezer was gathered after him. And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh; who also was gathered after him: and he sent messengers unto Asher, and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali; and they came up to meet them."

They gathered in the Valley of Jezreel (Armageddon), where previously Deborah and Barak had defeated Jabin and Sisera (**Judges 4-5**).

Probably because this was harvest time and they were arriving for their seasonal plundering. But it is not clear if this was the same season Gideon had been threshing, or later, perhaps at Passover time.

"The Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon" - It "clothed"- *labash* him - which freed him (at least temporarily) of his fears and indecision, and inspired others to gather to him for war.

Bottom Line

We want the Spirit to clothe us! Like the dew of Mount Hermon, flowing down from head to toe. This is a different experience than the indwelling of the Spirit. It is the occasion of the power and certainty from within that fills and covers us, allowing us to speak truth and be a conduit for God's power.

It came upon Gideon - not because he had the right mindset, psyched himself up or recited the right phrases. It came upon him despite those things, by the direct declaration of the Lord. He was open to it though because he saw that he was accepted, when the fire consumed his offering.