

## “A Work of Faith in Progress” (Judges 6:1–8:21)

Have you ever doubted God’s promises? Have you ever questioned His work in your life? Of course, you have. It’s easy to do this, isn’t it? Consider the following scenarios: A leader in our church who is an extraordinary preacher has a call on his life to preach and pastor. Recently, his home church decided that they wanted him to be their new pastor. Unfortunately, the regional director of their denomination disqualified him because he doesn’t have at least one year of Bible college or seminary. Sadly, a Masters Degree in teaching was insufficient. Another man in our church with eight kids was recently laid off due to the economy. He was in the midst of an apprenticeship and still had three more years of night classes. Now his future in this career is up in the air. But what is certain is the mouths that he has to feed and the mortgage that he has to pay. A woman in our church battles chronic back pain and migraines. She lives in severe pain every day of her life. In each of these cases, God is at work and His promises will be fulfilled. If God calls a man to ministry, He will open up the right position in the right time. When a father loses his job, the Lord will eventually provide another. When a godly woman suffers extreme pain, God will not give her more than she can bear. God will always perform what He promises.

In Judges 6–8,<sup>1</sup> we will study Gideon—a man who doubts God’s promises and questions His work. You could say Gideon is a lot like you and me (Jas 5:17). Although Gideon eventually becomes a great hero, he is also filled with fear. In fact, he is one of the most fearful and doubtful individuals in the entire Bible. No biblical character requires and receives more divine assurance than Gideon. Yet, at a specific point in Gideon’s life he becomes the man God wants him to be. Therefore, this section is the key to the entire Book of Judges.<sup>2</sup> God wants you and me to be faith-filled believers who overcome our doubts and obediently trust Him. This story demonstrates that He will do whatever He can to bring us to the place of obedience. The word for today is: *Believe God’s promises and move from fear to faith.*

**The introduction and setting before Gideon’s debut (6:1–10).** This new section begins with a familiar refrain: **“Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD gave them into the hands of Midian seven years”** (6:1). Now remember, Israel is coming off of forty years of peace after God’s deliverance over Sisera’s nine hundred iron chariots (5:31). One would think Israel would have learned her lesson by now. But this generation, like the previous generations, falls right back into idolatry. What is the principle for us today? Remember, remember, remember! Remember the times God has delivered you in the past out of or through a difficult time. It is so easy to forget God’s faithfulness.<sup>3</sup> Might I recommend keeping a record of God’s faithfulness? Some people like journaling. Notice, I didn’t say “some women...” It’s easy to assume that journaling is for women, yet I have known many men who have journaled God’s faithfulness. Last week, I talked with a man who has been journaling his entire relationship with his fiancée. He wants to keep a record of God’s faithfulness to share with his wife, children, and grandchildren. If journaling is not for you, why not consider opening up a Word doc. and typing up bullet points of God’s faithfulness. If you would prefer to avoid the computer after a long day of work, work on regularly reminding your children and grandchildren of God’s faithfulness. This can be a healthy reminder not only for them but for you as well. Time has a way of eroding our memory and dimming our vision of the greatness of our God. Periods of rest in our spiritual lives can lull us into the delusion that we are self-sufficient and don’t really need God all that much.

In 6:2–6, God uses the Midianites to break the Israelites so that they will call out to Him. The Midianites are a vast army from the east who invade Israel riding on camels. They come each year during harvest season. They enter the land just as the Israelites are harvesting their crops. They plunder the land, take the harvest, get on their camels, head out of town, and then stay away until the next year’s harvest. Then they come back in and plunder the harvest again. This sounds like what deer do to my wife’s garden and fruit trees. Fortunately, we don’t depend on our harvest like the Israelites! This is a devastating loss over a seven-year period. Yet, God uses this pain and suffering to woo His people back.

In the midst of Israel's distress, God does something unorthodox. He sends an unnamed prophet to rebuke His people (6:7–10).<sup>4</sup> This is akin to a stranded motorist calling a garage for assistance and the garage sending a philosopher instead of a mechanic. Israel needs deliverance and the Lord sends a prophet; Israel asks for an act of God's power and He sends them a preacher who rehearses His grace (6:8b–9) and repeats His demands (6:10). The Lord sends a prophet because Israel needs more than immediate relief; they need to understand why they are oppressed. They must see that “the LORD gave them into the hands of Midian seven years” (6:1) because they refused to obey Him (6:10b).<sup>5</sup> Likewise, in many cases we need understanding *before* we receive relief. We may want to escape from our circumstances while God wants us to interpret our circumstances. God's way of holiness is more important than the absence of pain. If things aren't going so well at work, God may be trying to get your attention. He may want to teach you some things. If you're having trouble in your marriage and family, God may have handpicked you for a trial because He wants to sanctify you...yet as through fire. Would you simply identify the trial in your life and then ask God what He is trying to teach you?

**The commissioning of Gideon as Israel's deliverer (6:11–32).** Instead of “dropping the hammer” on Israel, God once again shows them His great grace by raising up another deliverer. In 6:11–16 we read, **“Then the angel of the LORD came and sat under the oak that was in Ophrah [not “Oprah”], which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press in order to save it from the Midianites. [One would normally thresh wheat at the threshing floor outside the city. Animals and a threshing sledge would be employed. Because of the Midianite threat, Gideon was forced to thresh with a stick in a winepress inside the city.]<sup>6</sup> The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, ‘The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior.’ Then Gideon said to him, ‘O my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?’ But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.’ The LORD looked at him and said, ‘Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?’ He said to Him, ‘O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house.’ But the LORD said to him, ‘Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man.’”** This is some kind of dialogue! The angel of the Lord pursues a scaredy-cat from an idolatrous family. He even calls Gideon “valiant warrior.”<sup>7</sup> I used to think the angel must have had difficulty keeping a straight face, without bursting out in laughter. I now see these words as prophetic. The angel spoke to Gideon, not as he was at the moment but according to what he would be in the future.<sup>8</sup> Even today the Lord addresses you and me as “saints,” even though we are often fearful and faithless. God is confident in us because “everything pertaining to life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3) has already been implanted within us. Now it is merely a matter of appropriating who we are in Christ. The Lord wants you to believe what He says about you.

The promise the angel gives Gideon is: “Yahweh is with you” (6:12). He repeats this same promise again in 6:16. Against Gideon's inadequacy the Lord stacks His adequacy. God does not always answer the questions that we have. We want to ask all kinds of what, when, where, why, and how questions, but all we really need to know is WHO!<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, Gideon complains against God and makes all kinds of excuses for himself. He does this not once (6:13), but twice (6:15). Gideon then asks for a sign to assure him that it is really the Lord who is speaking to him, and the Lord graciously accommodates Himself to Gideon's unbelief. Gideon then prepares a sacrifice, which God promptly consumes by bringing fire from a rock (6:17–21).<sup>10</sup> This miracle results in Gideon being astonished with the Lord (6:22–23). Consequently, he builds an altar to the Lord and names the place “The LORD is Peace” (6:24). The Hebrew word for “peace” (*shalom*) means much more than a cessation of hostilities but carries with it the ideas of well-being, health, and prosperity. Gideon now believes the Lord is able to use him, not because of who he is but because of who God is. This is where you and I must find ourselves. We must become convinced that we are insufficient and God is more than sufficient. *Believe God's promises and move from fear to faith.*

In 6:25–32, the Lord lays down a call to “altared living”<sup>11</sup> In 6:25–26 the narrator writes, **“Now on the same night the LORD said to him, ‘Take your father’s bull and a second bull seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal which belongs to your father, and cut down the Asherah that is beside it; and build an altar to the LORD your God on the top of this stronghold in an orderly manner, and take a second bull and offer a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah which you shall cut down.’”** The assignment God gives isn’t an easy one. He calls Gideon to kill two of his father’s bulls and abolish his altar. Since altars to Baal were built on high places, it would have been difficult to obey God’s orders without attracting attention.<sup>12</sup> Gideon is required to come out of the closet and go public with his faith in Yahweh. This is exactly what he does in 6:27–32. **“Then Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the LORD had spoken to him; and because he was too afraid of his father’s household and the men of the city to do it by day, he did it by night. When the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was torn down, and the Asherah which was beside it was cut down, and the second bull was offered on the altar which had been built. They said to one another, ‘Who did this thing?’ And when they searched about and inquired, they said, ‘Gideon the son of Joash did this thing.’ Then the men of the city said to Joash, ‘Bring out your son, that he may die, for he has torn down the altar of Baal, and indeed, he has cut down the Asherah which was beside it.’ [According to Deut 13:6–9, it was the idol-worshipers who should have been slain!] But Joash said to all who stood against him, ‘Will you contend for Baal, or will you deliver him? Whoever will plead for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because someone has torn down his altar.’<sup>13</sup> Therefore on that day he named him Jerubbaal, that is to say, ‘Let Baal contend against him,’ because he had torn down his altar.”**

This section makes it clear that two altars cannot coexist side-by-side. In other words, you cannot have an altar to Yahweh and an altar to Baal. They are mutually exclusive. The demand placed on Gideon is meant as a paradigm for Israel. Yahweh is preparing to deliver them. But Israel must be properly prepared for such deliverance. God cannot safely trust His good gifts to those not fully given to Him. When one of our children runs into the house crying, after skinning a knee from a headlong fall in the driveway, we don’t simply slap a giant two-inch-wide Band-Aid over the mass. Rather, we cleanse the grit and gunk out of the wound before the Band-Aid goes on.<sup>14</sup>

Another insight that comes from this section is: Many of our biggest spiritual battles will be fought in the home. Knowing that Gideon is still afraid, God assigns him a task right at home to show him that He will see him through. Gideon has to take his stand in his own village before he dares to face the enemy on the battlefield. Before God gives His servants great victories in public, He sometimes prepares them by giving them smaller victories at home.<sup>15</sup> When we prove that we’re faithful with a few things, God will trust us with greater things (Matt 25:21). We must always recognize if we don’t practice our faith at home it is unlikely that we will practice it anywhere else.

**The preparation for the battle (6:33–7:18).** The focus of this entire passage is found in this section. The driving force of this passage is not the matter of Gideon being the judge from the Midianites. Certainly he is used for that purpose, but the focus of the narrative comes in 6:33–7:18, in which the theme of deliverance is momentarily suspended to allow for another development. The primary matter in the Gideon narrative is not the deliverance itself but rather something more personal, namely, Gideon’s struggle to believe God’s promise.<sup>16</sup>

Before Gideon believes God’s promise, he asks for reassurance.<sup>17</sup> What is troubling about this is three times prior the angel said, “You are the man” (6:12–16). Then Gideon asks for and receives a miraculous sign that he is the one (6:17–21). After all that, he is still unsure. “Lord, I know what you want me to do, but I still have my doubts. I’m insecure. I feel inferior. I don’t feel up to the task.” So Gideon does the unthinkable, he “fleeces” the Lord not once, but twice.

In 6:36–40, the narrator records an unusual episode. **“Then Gideon said to God, ‘If You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken, behold, I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I will know that You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken.’ And it was so. When he arose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece, he drained the dew from the fleece, a bowl full of water. Then Gideon said to God, ‘Do not let Your anger burn against me that I may speak once more; please let me make a test once more with the fleece, let it now be dry only on the fleece, and let there be dew on all the ground.’ God did so that night; for it was dry only on the fleece, and dew was on all the ground.”** Obviously, this account is not the ideal. Like Gideon, when you know God’s will, you are to do it. Period. End of discussion. It is a weak form of Christianity that says to the Almighty, “You must meet my conditions before I will do your will.” A better way to discern God’s will is to say “I will” to God. In 2 Cor 5:7 Paul writes, “We live by faith, not by sight.” You can say it another way: “We walk by faith, not by fleeces.”<sup>18</sup> With that said, the old bumper sticker “God said it; I believe it; that settles it” may be snazzy bumper-sticker theology, but it doesn’t always neatly cover the struggles of believing experience.<sup>19</sup> Many godly men and women are afraid. Fortunately, God is not as pious as some Christians, for He is unashamed to stoop down and reassure us in our fears. Think about this: If your little girl is afraid of the big neighborhood dog are you going to call her “sissy” or “chicken?”<sup>20</sup> Of course not! That would be hurtful and unthinkable. In the same way, God doesn’t browbeat us because we are wimpy believers. He simply wants us to bring our fears to Him. I like the spiritual expression, “Faith is doubt saying its prayers.” Today, *believe God’s promises and move from fear to faith.*

Now, in 7:1–8 we move into battle preparations. **“Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him, rose early and camped beside the spring of Harod [trembling]; and the camp of Midian was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley. The LORD said to Gideon, ‘The people who are with you are too many for Me to give Midian into their hands, for Israel would become boastful, saying, ‘My own power has delivered me. Now therefore come, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, ‘Whoever is afraid and trembling, let him return and depart from Mount Gilead.’ So 22,000 people returned, but 10,000 remained. Then 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. Therefore it shall be that he of whom I say to you, ‘This one shall go with you,’ he shall go with you; but everyone of whom I say to you, ‘This one shall not go with you,’ he shall not go.’ So he brought the people down to the water. And the LORD said to Gideon, ‘You shall separate everyone who laps the water with his tongue as a dog laps, as well as everyone who kneels to drink.’ Now the number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, was 300 men; but all the rest of the people knelt to drink water. The LORD said to Gideon, ‘I will deliver you with the 300 men who lapped and will give the Midianites into your hands; so let all the other people go, each man to his home.’ So the 300 men took the people’s provisions and their trumpets into their hands. And Gideon sent all the other men of Israel, each to his tent, but retained<sup>21</sup> the 300 men; and the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.”** What an astounding account! This is one of the more inspiring (and potentially frightening) accounts in the Bible. God uses some amazing odds to teach Gideon to believe His promises and move from fear to faith. In 8:10, we discover that there are 135,000 Midianite troops vs. 32,000 Israelite troops (7:3). This amounts to four Midianite troops for every one Israelite soldier. I don’t know about you, but I don’t like those odds. But God shrinks the odds further. Gideon has to say, “If anyone is afraid, you can go home.”<sup>22</sup> The army shrunk by 2/3—from 32,000 to 10,000. This means there are thirteen Midianite troops for every one Israelite soldier. But God isn’t done leveling the playing field. In one last seemingly sadistic cut, God shrinks the army from 10,000 to 300.<sup>23</sup> Gideon and his army are now outnumbered 450 to 1. Whoa! This seems outrageous and sublime. Nevertheless, now it is clear that if Israel wins, the battle really is the Lord’s. As Zech 4:6 says, “‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts.” God wants there to be no doubt that He fights for Israel and He wins her battles.

After all the false starts of the previous chapter, Gideon is finally ready to confront the Midianites—or at least mostly ready. He has received three miraculous signs from God, and that ought to have been plenty of encouragement, but God comes to him and says in 7:9: **“Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hands.”** But God knew Gideon. He knew all his weaknesses and his hesitation, so he adds these words in 7:10–11a: **“But if you are afraid to go down, go with Purah your servant down to the camp and you will hear what they say; and afterward your hands will be strengthened that you may go down against the camp.”** Is God a God of grace, or what? The story continues in 7:11b–14: **“So he went with Purah his servant down to the outposts of the army that was in the camp. Now the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the sons of the east were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts; and their camels were without number, as numerous as the sand on the seashore. When Gideon came, behold, a man was relating a dream to his friend. And he said, ‘Behold, I had a dream; a loaf of barley bread was tumbling into the camp of Midian, and it came to the tent and struck it so that it fell, and turned it upside down so that the tent lay flat.’ His friend replied, ‘This is nothing less than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; God has given Midian and all the camp into his hand.’”** This is remarkable... God speaks through a Midianite soldier!<sup>24</sup> What are the odds of this? Two enemies of Israel are discussing a relevant matter that the Lord allows Gideon to eavesdrop on. God Himself orchestrates the dream, the interpretation, and the conversation. Once again, God’s power and sovereignty are clearly evident.

The key to the Gideon narrative and the entire Book of Judges is found in 7:15–18: **“When Gideon heard the account of the dream and its interpretation, he bowed in worship.** [Gideon doesn’t wait to get back to the camp where he will be safe and sound. He immediately prostrates himself and worships the one true God.] **He returned to the camp of Israel and said, ‘Arise, for the LORD has given the camp of Midian into your hands.’** [The “valiant warrior” FINALLY lives up to his name.] **He divided the 300 men into three companies, and he put trumpets and empty pitchers into the hands of all of them, with torches inside the pitchers. He said to them, ‘Look at me and do likewise. And behold, when I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. When I and all who are with me blow the trumpet, then you also blow the trumpets all around the camp and say, ‘For the LORD and for Gideon.’”** This sounds like an ancient “Semper fi” (always faithful) chant. Gideon and his men moved forward in faith because they were bent on fulfilling God’s promise. This is a powerful reminder that you cannot be too small for God to use, but you can be too big. If you want the credit for what God is doing, God will not use you. He says that He alone is Lord and there is no other and that He will not give His glory to another (Isa 42:8). And so we often see God working powerfully in the lives of some very weak people.<sup>25</sup> They are the ones who know that only He could get the glory and they are careful to give it to Him. *Believe God’s promises and move from fear to faith.*

**The defeat of the Midianite army (7:19–8:21).** Gideon and Israel storm the Midianite camp in the middle of the night. They blow trumpets, smash pitchers, and shout, “A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!” (7:20–21). Then something amazing happens: In all of the commotion of the attack **“the LORD set the sword of one against another even throughout the whole army”** (7:22). In other words, God turns the Midianites against themselves and they kill one another. Israel’s obedience results in God fighting their enemies for them! In 7:25, there is an obscure phrase that ties everything together for us: **“...they [Gideon and Israel] killed Zeeb at the wine press of Zeeb.”** This refers back to the start of the Gideon narrative (6:11) when the angel of the Lord visits the frightened Gideon while he is threshing wheat in a winepress, but it ends with Gideon executing the enemy prince at a winepress.<sup>26</sup> What a pilgrimage for Gideon. Although he started slow he matures in his faith, slowly but surely. We must remember that God is patient with us in our spiritual growth. He permits Gideon to take baby steps and bears with him through it all. It would have been much better if Gideon had been immediately courageous and obedient, but God is gracious to Gideon and to you and me. Even still, we must actively and intentionally seek to *believe God’s promises and move from fear to faith.*

The story of Gideon's battle against the Midianites trails off into an account of the series of events surrounding the pursuit of the fleeing Midianite kings. The central theme throughout these stories is that the Israelite tribes participated in the battle. The response of the Ephraimites (8:1–3) stands in stark contrast to that of the officials at Succoth (8:6) and at Peniel (8:8).<sup>27</sup> Gideon appears to have had his hands full.<sup>28</sup> Not only is he pressed for time and supplies in his pursuit of the enemy, but he receives no cooperation from his own countrymen. Some complain because they are left out of the battle and others refuse to join in. One cannot escape the conclusion that the writer intends to show that leading God's people was a thankless if not hopeless task. Through it all, though, we see Gideon faithfully accomplish his work under the power of God's Spirit (see 6:34).<sup>29</sup>

The apostle Paul likely has Gideon's military conquest in mind when he pens 2 Cor 4:6–7: "For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure [the gospel] in earthen vessels [clay pots], so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves." In the battle against the Midianites, the Israelites broke their jars so that the light can shine as they ransack the camp. Similarly, you and I are clay pots that are fragile, imperfect, and weak. Yet, we contain the treasure of Jesus Christ in our clay pots. At our best we are no more than clay pots. But when we are broken the light of God shines out of our weakness. Today, acknowledge your weakness and allow God to shine in and through you. When you believe that God is your first, last, and only option, you are right where God wants you to be. Brokenness precedes victory. In your doubt, weakness, and faithlessness, will you *believe God's promises and move from fear to faith*? If so, God will accomplish His purposes in and through you life.

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### **Scripture References**

Judges 6:1–8:21

Joshua 2:8–11, 23–24

Isaiah 59:1–2

Exodus 3:12; Joshua 1:5

Isaiah 41:8–10; 43:2, 5

2 Corinthians 3:5; 12:9

Matthew 28:18–20

### **Study Questions**

1. How has the Lord disciplined me in my personal life (6:1–6)? How long did it take me to respond to God's chastening? What brought about my repentance? What have I learned from this experience? Are there ways I think the Lord has disciplined my church? What (if anything) has my church learned in the process?
2. Why does God continue to grant exhortation (6:7–10) and deliverance (6:11ff.) to His people? How has this principle proven true in my own life? Over the course of my Christian experience, how has God extended His patience and grace to me? What have I learned about God through these episodes?
3. In what area of my life am I currently struggling to believe God's Word (6:13–21)? Why is it so difficult to trust God's promises in this particular area? How have I seen God fulfill His Word in my past experience? Why do I struggle to appropriate faith today?
4. When have I struggled to discern God's will (6:36–40)? What methods did I use to make my decisions? Was my orientation biblical? Why or why not? In my decision making today, how would I do things differently? How would I respond to the common question: "How can I know God's will?"
5. How can I be a greater man or woman of faith (7:1–18)? What areas of my life need further growth? When do I tend to be weak in faith? Read Genesis 22:1–19 for a great example of faith. Who is a modern day example of faith to me? How can I learn from this person?

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For an excellent study see J. Paul Tanner, “The Gideon Narrative as the Focal Point of Judges,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:594 (April-June 1992): 149–61.

<sup>2</sup> Gideon’s judgeship receives the most extensive narration in the Judges (100 verses comprising three chapters). Samson is comparable, with 96 verses in four chapters. Tanner writes, “In relation to the book as a whole, Gideon receives attention as the focal point because he represents a significant shift in the ‘quality’ of the judges that served Israel. A progressive deterioration begins with Othniel and continues through Samson. Othniel was almost an idealized judge, and Samson was a debauched self-centered individual. God used each judge, whether strong or weak, to accomplish His sovereign will and effect deliverance for the theocratic nation. Gideon, on the other hand, stands somewhere between these two extremes and represents the primary turning point from the ‘better’ judges to the ‘weaker’ ones.” Tanner, “The Gideon Narrative...,” 152.

<sup>3</sup> See the record of Israel in Deuteronomy 8.

<sup>4</sup> Tanner writes, “Though the familiar refrain “the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord” is given in 6:1, the Gideon narrative is not simply one more cycle of apostasy on par with the previous ones. The nation’s apostasy has reached a lower point, and this is underscored by the additional fact that the Lord sent an unnamed prophet to rebuke them (6:7–10) *before* Gideon was raised up as a “judge” to handle the Midianite crisis.” Tanner, “The Gideon Narrative...,” 154.

<sup>5</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *Judges: Such a Great Salvation*. Focus on the Bible (Ross-Shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2000), 92.

<sup>6</sup> See NET Study Notes: [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org).

<sup>7</sup> The phrase “valiant warrior” frequently had a military connotation. In the present context it appears that the name anticipated Gideon’s role as a warrior and was intended to inspire confidence. It is possible that the phrase simply identifies Gideon as a prominent citizen in his town which is how it is used of Boaz. “Valiant warrior” is the same description used of other men in the OT: Joshua (Josh 1:14, 8:3, 10:7), Jephthah (Judges 11:1), Boaz (Ruth 2:1), and David (1 Sam 16:18).

<sup>8</sup> Bob Deffinbaugh, “Israel’s Dark Ages” from the series *From Creation to the Cross* [http://www.bible.org/page.php?page\\_id=1482](http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=1482).

<sup>9</sup> Davis, *Judges*, 95.

<sup>10</sup> Preparing a sacrifice is a costly thing to do at a time when food is scarce. An ephah of flour was about a half a bushel, enough to make bread for a family for several days. It probably took him an hour to dress the meat and prepare the unleavened cakes, but God waits for Gideon to return and then consumes the offering.

<sup>11</sup> This expression is coined from my friend, Mike Paolicelli, pastor of Renew Church Charlotte, NC.

<sup>12</sup> Jewish altars were made of uncut stones and were simple, but Baal’s altars were elaborate and next to them was a wooden pillar dedicated to the goddess Asherah, whose worship involved unspeakably vile practices.

<sup>13</sup> Elijah takes a similar approach in 1 Kgs 18:27.

<sup>14</sup> Davis, *Judges*, 97.

<sup>15</sup> Before David killed the giant Goliath in the sight of two armies, he learned to trust God by killing a lion and a bear in the field where nobody saw it but God (1 Sam 17:32–37).

<sup>16</sup> Tanner, “The Gideon Narrative...,” 157.

<sup>17</sup> The fleece is simply to confirm God’s will, not to determine God’s will. He actually says as much in 6:36, “If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised.” Verse 37 says, “Then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said.” No matter what conclusion you come to about the modern practice of fleecing, remember that originally it was used to confirm God’s will, not to determine it.

<sup>18</sup> What is a fleece? A fleece is seeking to learn God’s will by means of a pre-determined sign. People generally use a fleece when they come to a point of decision and don’t know what to do. Maybe you’re faced with a job offer and don’t know whether to say yes or no. So you say to God: “Please give me a sign.” You are putting out a fleece when you say, “God, I am asking you to give me a sign and this is the sign I want you to give me.” It’s that second part that really qualifies as putting out a fleece. It’s not just asking for guidance. It’s when you say, “Lord, I want you to do such-and-such, and if you will do what I have asked, I will know what your will is.”

<sup>19</sup> Davis, *Judges*, 99 n. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Davis, *Judges*, 100.

<sup>21</sup> The word “retained” (*chazaq*) is important. The Hebrew word typically means “to get a grip on what is trying to get away.” The point: Gideon didn’t exactly have a company of brave men to work with. If it hadn’t been for the honor of the thing, I believe they would just as soon have gone home. Courage is not exactly common.



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<sup>22</sup> See also Deut 20:8: “Then the officers shall speak further to the people and say, ‘Who is the man that is afraid and fainthearted? Let him depart and return to his house, so that he might not make his brothers’ hearts melt like his heart.’”

<sup>23</sup> It is likely that God chose this final method of sifting the army because it is simple, unassuming (no soldier knew he was being tested), and easy to apply. We shouldn’t think that all 10,000 drank at one time, because that would have stretched the army out along the water for a couple of miles. Since the men undoubtedly came to the water by groups, Gideon was able to watch them and identify the 300. It wasn’t until after the event that the men discovered they had been tested.

<sup>24</sup> In the Scriptures, God frequently spoke to people through dreams. He spoke to the following believers: Jacob (Gen 28, 31), Joseph (Gen 37), Solomon (1 Kgs 3), Daniel (Dan 7), and Joseph, the husband of Mary (Matt 1:20–21; 2:13–22). But He also spoke to the following unbelievers through dreams: Abimelech (Gen 20), Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2, 4), Joseph’s fellow prisoners (Gen 40), Pharaoh (Gen 41), and Pilate’s wife (Matt 27:19).

<sup>25</sup> “Gideon is weak, frightened, and hesitant. Does God choose weak individuals? Of course! Is God patient with weak servants? Absolutely—up to a point.” See Terry G. Cater, J. Scott Duvall, and J. Daniel Hays, *Preaching God’s Word* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 226.

<sup>26</sup> Gideon’s great victory over the Midianites became a landmark event in the history of Israel, not unlike the Battle of Waterloo for Great Britain, for it reminded the Jews of God’s power to deliver them from their enemies. The day of Midian was a great day that Israel would never forget (Ps. 83:11; Isa. 9:4; 10:26).

<sup>27</sup> Succoth and Penuel were two Israelite cities in the territory of Gad on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Thus, once again, some fellow-Israelites were unwilling to come to the aid of their brethren who were in need. The unity between the tribes of Israel that we witnessed in the Book of Joshua is rapidly eroding in the Book of Judges.

<sup>28</sup> Judges 8:1–3 introduces the first note of discord among Israelite tribes in Judges—a note that will crescendo throughout the remainder of the book. Gideon moves from fearful to faithful in the conflict with the Ephramites. Carolyn Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*. Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 179.

<sup>29</sup> John Sailhamer, *NIV Compact Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 209.