

I. Judges 6: A Spirit of Fear....

- The forty years of rest and tranquility ushered in by the victories of Deborah and Barak are over. Israel has again slid into unrighteousness and the Lord has brought punishment. The Midianites are in power over Israel and dominate them for seven years.
- The forces of Midian, Aamelek and Kedem (people of the East) would come and destroy the crops of Israel and take livestock from the people. The Israelite soldiers were forced to take refuge in strongholds in the mountains, unable to prevail against the massive armies of the foreigners. The people of Israel again cry out to the Lord for help.
- The Lord sends an unnamed prophet to explain why they are suffering. It is the same story—they have disobeyed God, despite the fact that the Lord delivered them from Egypt and placed them in the land of promise.
- The Lord selects the next deliverer for Israel. Gideon, an unlikely hero, is living a simple life, threshing out grain in a winepress (a winepress would have been sunk in the floor, making grain easier to hide from the Midianites than a simple threshing floor). An angel of the Lord visits him and tells him the mission God has selected for him.
- Gideon's response is in line with the theme of the entire chapter: Gideon's fear. His excuses are that his family is the "least" of the tribe of Manasseh (despite verses 25 and 27 alluding to his family being prominent) and that he is the youngest in his father's house. This response is surprising based on the angel's salutation, which calls Gideon a "mighty man of valor" (strong warrior). Gideon wants to know why, if the Lord is with the people, they are they under such oppression. Why has the Lord abandoned them? Obviously, Gideon did not hear the prophet God sent.
- The Lord promises to be with Gideon and that he will lead the defeat of Israel's oppressors. Gideon asks that the angel grant him a sign to show he is indeed the Lord's messenger. Gideon prepares a meat, broth and bread offering and presents it to the angel. He is directed to place the offering on a nearby rock and pour out the broth on it. The angel touched the rock with his staff and a fire sprang forth, consuming the offering. The angel vanishes, leaving no doubt in Gideon's mind that he has faced an angel of the Lord. The Lord reassures him that he will not die as a result. Gideon constructs an altar there to the Lord.
- The Lord gives Gideon an introductory mission, perhaps to test his mettle. He is to tear down his father's altar to Baal and the Asherah pole using his father's own bulls. Upon destroying the devices of these false gods, Gideon is to erect in their place an altar to the Lord God. Gideon is to offer another of his father's bulls on this altar. Gideon takes ten servants and does what the Lord said. Gideon, however, carries out the instruction under the cover of darkness, again showing a spirit of fear.
- The next day, the men of the city see that the centers of profane worship have been destroyed. They conduct an investigation and determine it was Gideon (it would seem that the ten servants are not trustworthy, unless there was an unnamed witness). They demand that Gideon's father, Joash, deliver Gideon to them so they might kill him for this "crime". Joash is surprisingly defensive of his son's actions and tells the people that Baal, if he is a god, can take his own revenge on Gideon. The people start to call Gideon "Jerubbaal" meaning, "Let Baal contend".
- The armies of the Midianites and Amalekites gather in the valley of Jezreel. The Lord's Spirit comes upon Gideon and he assumes his role of commander. Members of Gideon's clan (family of Abiezer) unite with him. Messengers are sent out through Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali to gather more forces.
- Gideon, despite the Spirit of the Lord resting on him, still requests a sign from the Lord that He will be with Gideon and Israel. Gideon places a fleece on a threshing room floor and asks the Lord for a sign: in the morning, let there be dew on the fleece only, not the floor. The following morning, the fleece is wringing wet. Gideon, begging that his request not anger the Lord, asks for reinforcement the following morning, in that there will be dew on the floor, but that the fleece remain dry. God grants this request and the sign is given.
- Gideon has seen all he needs to see and overcomes his spirit of fear and accepts his gift of leadership from God (II Timothy 1:6,7)

II. Judges 7: A reduction of forces

- Gideon has amassed a force of 32,000 men. The Lord tells Gideon that there are too many men assembled. His desire for a reduction in forces stems from the fact that God wants Israel to understand that they will not conquer their enemies by their sheer number or combat skills. They will do so by the miraculous power of God. Gideon proclaims that those among their number who are afraid have leave from him to depart and return to their homes. 22,000 men depart the camp.
- 10,000 is still too large of a force in God's sight. He tells Gideon to take the remaining army down to the spring of Harod and let them quench their thirst. Gideon is to separate out the men that drink water from their hand versus kneeling down to lap water directly from the pool (the lapping dog comparison is strange and difficult to understand in context, dogs do not lap from their hands). 300 men are left after this test is applied. This test may seem strange, but there is an analogy to it. Those who kneel may symbolize those who are accustomed to kneeling before the false gods Israel had been chasing after.
- The Lord, perhaps sensing some worry in Gideon after the drastic reduction of fighting men, tells him to take his servant and go eavesdrop on the enemy camp. Purah and Gideon overhear a conversation between soldiers in the enemy camp. A man has had a dream there about a loaf of bread tearing down the tent of the Midian camp. One of his cohorts interprets this dream as a dire prediction regarding the outcome of the coming battle with Gideon's army. They will lose to Gideon (they know his name and heritage).
- This cements Gideon's mind regarding the Lord's promise. Even the enemy knows that the Lord will give Gideon victory. He bows in worship to God and goes back to rally his forces. Gideon divides his small force into three groups. They will surround the camp. He outfits each man with a trumpet in one hand and a pitcher containing a torch in the other. He tells them to follow his lead and blow their trumpets on the outskirts of the enemy's camp.
- Once the men are in position, they blow their trumpets and smash the pitchers. The enemy army is thrown into panic and confusion by the Lord. They even attack and kill each other. They flee from the terror of the Lord and Gideon's army. Gideon summons men from Naphtali, Asher and Manasseh to pursue the Midianites. The men of Ephraim are summoned to chase down the Midianite rulers Oreb and Zeeb. The Ephraimites capture and kill the two enemy leaders.

III. Judges 8: The road to peace...for a while

- The men from Ephraim are upset that they were called to pursue the Midianites, but not summoned for the main battle. Gideon rebukes them and rightly so, as they have missed out on nothing in the main battle but horn blowing and jar breaking. He reminds them that God has delivered the two Midianite leaders into their hand, a thing to glorify in. He says that the works he has done pale in comparison to that accomplishment. They are calmed by his logic.
- Gideon continues pursuit of Zebah and Zalmunna (two Midianite kings), crossing the River Jordan. He seeks nourishment from the people of Succoth and Penuel, but is refused. He promises vengeance upon them once he concludes his business. Gideon proceeds and does indeed capture Zebah and Zalmunna. We see the number of their army that was defeated (120,000) and only 15,000 remained.
- Gideon keeps his promise and during his return trip with the captured kings, he punishes the people of Succoth with thorns and briars. He has learned about their leadership by interrogating a young man from that town. He also tears down the watch-tower at Penuel.
- Zebah and Zalmunna are executed by Gideon for their slaughter of his brothers at Tabor. Gideon's oldest son, Jether is originally ordered to carry out the execution, but was too young and timid.
- The people ask Gideon to rule over them like a king, but he refuses and states clearly who should rule over them in v. 23. He does ask that they donate gold earrings from the spoils of the war. He makes an ephod out of the 1,700 shekels of gold (about 50 lbs.). This ephod is set up in his hometown of Ophrah, supposedly to celebrate the victory and God's salvation, but instead the people seem to wind up worshipping it, to Gideon's detriment and disgust.
- 40 years of peace follow. Gideon has 70 sons with many wives and one son by a concubine from Shechem (Abimelech, see ch. 9). Gideon dies at a "good, ripe old age". Right away, Israel began to chase after Baal, forgetting what the Lord had done for them under Gideon. They did not even show kindness to his descendants.