

Israel has once again rebelled against the LORD and He has responded by allowing Midian to oppress them. However, the LORD calls an unlikely deliverer named Gideon to rescue Israel from their oppressors. The LORD's choice of Gideon and the manner in which He gives the victory demonstrated that it was the LORD and not Gideon that defeated the Midianites.

Judges 6

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

“And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD” – Following the victory of Barak over Sisera (Judges 4), Israel had 40 years of relief from oppression (Judges 5:31). Presumably Israel had returned to the LORD under the influence of Deborah. However, a new generation has come along and Israel has once again slipped into idolatry as the alternating cycle of rebellion and repentance continues.

“and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years” – The LORD withdrew His hand of protection from Israel and enabled Midian to oppress them for seven years before the events of this chapter. The LORD would do this in order to compel Israel to repent and return to Him and seven years of suffering was accomplishing that purpose.

Verses 2-10: These verses describe how Israel had been driven into poverty by oppression from their enemies. The Midianites, Amalekites, and other warring people would invade and destroy Israel's crops and livestock before they had a chance to harvest them. The Israelites had been forced to hide in caves in the mountains for safety and they had begun to cry out to the LORD for help. The LORD answered by sending a prophet who declared that their suffering was due to their rebellion against the LORD by serving the gods of the Amorites.

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

“And there came an angel of the LORD” – In addition to the prophet, the LORD sends an angel to call a man to deliver Israel. This visit seems to be one of the occasions when “an angel of the LORD” turns out to be a manifestation of the LORD Himself (vs. 14, 16).

“and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abi-ezrite” – Ophrah was a city about 16 NW of Jericho. The angel finds an oak tree on the property of Joash the Abi-ezrite (a descendant of Abiezer) and sits under it. Notice that the angel comes to a specific place in order to speak to a specific man.

“and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites” – The angel of the LORD has come to speak to Gideon, the son of Joash. Gideon is busy threshing wheat in a manner so as to not draw Midianite attention to what he was doing. Rather than threshing the wheat out in the open where the wind could blow away the chaff, he was apparently using a more manual method of beating the grain out by hand. He was doing this by the winepress so as not to arouse suspicion. His actions here indicate the desperate lengths that Gideon and his family had to go to in order to get a little sustenance due to the fear that the Midianites would take it away.

12 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.

“And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him” – The angel apparently appeared to Gideon sitting under the oak tree (v. 11).

“and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour [strength; ability]” – The angel states two things that must have seemed strange to Gideon: (1) that the LORD was with him, and (2) that he was a mighty man of valor. Gideon questions the first statement in v. 13. The title of “mighty man of valor” seemed strange to use for someone who was hiding what he was doing from the Midianites.

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

Gideon questions the idea that the LORD was with him and the rest of Israel since he could not see any visual evidence of it. If the LORD was with them then why were they being oppressed by their enemies? He had grown up hearing the stories told by his ancestors about the LORD performing miracles and bringing them out of Egyptian bondage, and yet the LORD did not seem to be doing anything for Israel any more. Instead, He had forsaken them and left them at the mercy of the Midianites. Gideon failed to place the blame where it belonged: Israel's problems were self-inflicted because they had sinned against the LORD and were now reaping the consequences. It seems to be human nature to blame God for our problems when our sin is the true cause.

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

“And the LORD looked upon him” – This “angel” is the physical manifestation of the LORD Himself.

“and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites” – The LORD obviously did not mean that Gideon's strength would save Israel since Gideon certainly wasn't the most courageous or influential man in Israel (v. 27). Gideon did not have to be the strongest and bravest in Israel to accomplish what the LORD wanted when the LORD was with him.

“have not I sent thee?” – If the LORD was sending Gideon then the LORD would give him everything needed for the task at hand. Therefore the strength of the person being sent is irrelevant. Oftentimes it is the weakest people (in terms of human strength and ability) that see the greatest exhibitions of God's power.

1 Cor. 1:26-29 *“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.”*

2 Cor. 12:9-10 *“And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”*

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

Gideon immediately questions the idea that the LORD called him a “might man of valor” and wants him to save Israel because he did not consider himself to be a leader. He points out that his family is “poor” (Hebrew: *low; weak*). No leaders came from his family line nor did his family have influence in Israel. He then states that he is the “least” (Hebrew: *insignificant; youngest*) of those in his family. He is the last one that the LORD should consider choosing to save Israel.

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

The LORD affirms that He will be with Gideon to give him all the help that he needs. With the LORD's help he will be able to defeat the Midianites as easily as he could defeat one man.

Verses 17-40: Gideon brings an offering of food to the angel, who instructs him to place it on a rock. The angel touches the rock with His staff and it bursts into flames and consumes the food. Gideon realizes that he has been talking with an angel when the angel disappears. The LORD then instructs Gideon to tear down the altar of Baal that belonged to his father and cut down the grove (also used for worshipping Baal) next to it. Later, the Spirit of God came upon Gideon and he blew a trumpet and sent messengers to assemble an army from the tribes of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali. Looking for confirmation that the LORD has called him to save Israel, he proves the LORD by putting out a fleece.

Judges 7

2 And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people that *are* with thee *are* too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me.

Gideon has camped his army near the camp of the Midianites in preparation for the battle (v. 1). However, the LORD tells Gideon that he has too many soldiers to go against the Midianites. Gideon has 32,000 men and the LORD knows that Israel would believe that it was their military strength that saved them if He gives the victory to an army of that size.

Verses 3-15: The LORD has Gideon trim the number of men down until he has only 300 men left. The LORD wants there to be no mistake that the victory will be won by the LORD and not man. To boost Gideon's confidence that the LORD will indeed give them victory, the LORD has Gideon sneak down to the camp of the Midianites, where Gideon overhears two men discussing a dream the first one had. The second man gave an interpretation of the dream that showed that the LORD would indeed give Gideon and his men the victory.

16 And he divided the three hundred men *into* three companies, and he put a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers.

Gideon divides his men into three companies of 100 men each (presumably so they could surround the Midianite camp). Each man carried an empty clay pitcher (no water inside) and lamps inside the pitchers to conceal the light until the proper time.

17 And he said unto them, Look on me, and do likewise: and, behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be *that*, as I do, so shall ye do. 18 When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that *are* with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of all the camp, and say, *The sword* of the LORD, and of Gideon.

Gideon instructs his men to follow his lead. The plan is to maximize the element of surprise with both sound (the trumpets and the battle cry) and light (the sudden appearance of the lamps in the dead of night). It's also possible that news of the dream of the Midianite man had spread throughout the camp and caused unease among the men. Obviously the LORD was at work.

19 So Gideon, and the hundred men that *were* with him, came unto the outside of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch; and they had but newly set the watch: and they blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers that *were* in their hands. 20 And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow *withal*: and they cried, The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon.

Many of the Midianites were likely asleep as Gideon and his men surround the camp “in the beginning of the middle watch” (about 10 pm, although some commentators say 12 am). At Gideon's signal, all of the men broke their pitchers and began blowing their trumpets and crying out “The sword of the LORD and of Gideon!” No doubt the LORD supernaturally amplified the effectiveness of the surprise.

21 And they stood every man in his place round about the camp: and all the host ran, and cried, and fled. 22 And the three hundred blew the trumpets, and the LORD set every man's sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host: and the host fled to Beth-shittah in Zererath, *and* to the border of Abel-meholah, unto Tabbath.

“And they stood every man in his place round about the camp” – Gideon and his men did not have to move or raise a weapon. **“and all the host ran, and cried, and fled. And the three hundred blew the trumpets”** – Panic set in among the Midianites while the 300 continued to blow their trumpets. It was utter chaos as the Midianite soldiers ran around in fear trying to figure out what was happening. **“and the LORD set every man's sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host”** – The Midianites were in such a state of panic and confusion in the dark that they began attacking each other, driven by self-preservation. They could not distinguish between friend and foe. The LORD orchestrated this so that Gideon and his men did not have to do a thing but watch. **“and the host fled to Beth-shittah in Zererath, and to the border of Abel-meholah, unto Tabbath”** – The Midianite survivors fled from the camp in an attempt to escape.

Verses 23-25: Gideon calls for the men that he had previously sent home (vs. 3-7) to pursue the Midianites. Two Midianite princes are captured and executed.