

Judges

Lesson 12

At the end of the seven years, we hear about when Israel cried and when the hopes had plummeted. Verse 6. *“So Israel was brought very low because of Midian, and the sons of Israel cried to the LORD.”* (6:6)

That was all they needed to do. It is all you need to do when hopes seem gone. Cry to the LORD. He will hear.

(2) The Prophet of Israel (6:7)

What did the LORD do? He sent a prophet of Israel. Verse 7. *“Now it came about when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD on account of Midian, ⁸ that the LORD sent a prophet to the sons of Israel, and he said to them...”* (6:7).

If you will remember, when the people of cycle three cried out to the LORD, He sent a prophetess. This time, in cycle four, He sent a prophet. He had a word for Israel from the LORD.

(a) The LORD’s Message (6:8-9)

We come to the LORD’s message for Israel. Verse 8. *“Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘It was I who brought you up from Egypt and brought you out from the house of slavery. ⁹ I delivered you from the hands of the Egyptians and from the hands of all your oppressors, and dispossessed them before you and gave you their land...’”* (6:8-9).

The LORD heard the cry of the people, but He was not just going to jump in and help without having a message of training to these sinful Israelites. He wanted to remind the Israelites of what He had done for Israel. He was the One Who rescued them from Israel and helped Israel remove the Canaanites and Amorites from the land. He had stopped helping when Israel stopped pursuing the Canaanites as ordered. Therefore, the LORD had a reason for this message.

(b) The LORD’s Reason (6:10)

We come to the LORD’s reason for His message. Verse 10. *“...and I said to you, ‘I am the LORD your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live. But you have not obeyed Me.’”* (6:10)

What was the reason for this message? It was to remind Israel that she had disobeyed the LORD by breaking His covenant and commandments by worshipping the gods of the Amorites. The fourth cycle is the same as the first three cycles. Nothing new.

But the LORD does have a prophet for Israel. We will meet him next.

b) Enter Gideon – Israel’s Judge - Forty Years

(1) Gideon’s Commencement

(a) Chosen to Judge

(i) The Introduction of Gideon (6:11)

In the fourth cycle of Israel’s sin against the LORD, the nation cried to the LORD, and He had a prophet in place to become a judge. Enter Gideon – Israel’s judge for forty years. In introducing Gideon, the writer begins with Gideon’s commencement as he is chosen to judge. The introduction of Gideon begins in verse 11. *“Then the angel of the LORD came and sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, 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.”* (6:11)

The *“angel of the LORD came and sat under the oak that was in Ophrah....”* Throughout the Old Testament, and in the Gospels before the birth of the LORD Jesus, the *angel of the LORD* appeared to man at various times. When the LORD appeared in those times where a man could see Him in visible form, He manifested Himself in a special form of a man Who could appear and disappear, eat, drink, speak, and perform all the miraculous things that only God can do. He was Jehovah; He

was Jesus before He came to this earth as a babe. Here we see the LORD sitting under an oak tree at a place called Ophrah.

Ophrah is a town located in the tribal area of Manasseh. It sat about six miles southwest of Shechem. It was Gideon's home as a child. He will remain there all his life and be buried there when he dies (Judges 9:5; 8:32). It is four miles northeast of Bethel.

Joash the Abiezrite was the father of Gideon. Abiezer was a distant descendant of Manasseh. Abiezer's descendants were called Abiezrites. Gideon was of the tribe of Manasseh, and he was an Abiezrite.

Why was Gideon "*beating out wheat in the wine press in order to save it from the Midianites?*" First, this verse tells us the time of year that the Midianites were on their way to oppress Israel. Wheat harvest occurred in late April, May, or early June. Therefore, Israel was expecting the Midianites in mid to late spring. The harvest of grapes can begin in June, but more likely, it begins in July and continues through August and September as the grapevine produces. Therefore, at the time of the wheat harvest, the winepress was empty. Evidently, Gideon felt like he could beat the wheat and hide it in the winepress from the Midianites.

(ii) The Appearance to Gideon (6:12)

The oak tree where the angel of the LORD sat was near the winepress of Joash and Gideon. It was close enough for the *angel of the LORD* to call out to Gideon as he worked. Sitting under the tree, we come to the appearance to Gideon by the LORD. Verse 12. "*The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, 'The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior.'*" (6:12)

The King James Version renders the last words as "*The LORD is with thee, though a mighty man of valor.*" Moffatt's version says, "*You stalwart hero, the Eternal is with you.*" Knox's version says, "*The LORD be with you, courageous heart.*" We do not know the background of Gideon. Whether or not he had already proved himself as a warrior, a man of valor, or a hero does not matter. Gideon may not have known that he was a hero of the people, but the LORD did. Gideon will not disappoint the LORD. But at this meeting, he will question the LORD Who has appeared in the shade of the oak tree.

(iii) The Question of Gideon (6:13)

We have just heard of the appearance of the LORD to Gideon. Now we hear the question of Gideon to the LORD. Verse 13. "*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.'*" (6:13)

Gideon clearly understood the special relationship between the LORD and Israel that went back all the way to Egypt. He had heard about it from the fathers of Israel's past. In response to the LORD's announcement, Gideon's response also shows his total dejection in the current circumstances in the nation. It also shows his bitterness for the seven years of suffering. We might say Gideon's words like this. *If the LORD is with us, where is He?* We know exactly where the LORD was. He was exactly where He said He would be if Israel worshipped Canaanite gods. The LORD was waiting on Israel to act. Israel called to Him. He called to Gideon. He looked past Gideon's discouragement to Gideon's future for Israel as the LORD's prophet.

(iv) The Charge of Gideon (6:14-16)

Looking past Gideon's question, we come to the charge of Gideon by the LORD. Verse 14. "*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?'*"¹⁵ 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.*"¹⁶ But the LORD said to him, "*Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man.*" (6:14-16)

In the charge to Gideon, the LORD confirmed that He had called Gideon for this purpose at this time. But Gideon was unsure of himself. How could he be the hero of Israel? Gideon says, “*my family*.” The Hebrew would be better translated *my thousands*. Gideon was not talking about his family with his brothers and his father, Joash. In these words, he was talking about the group of a *thousand* men he belonged to in the tribe of Manasseh. A division in an Israelite tribe consisted of what they called a *thousand*. It is also called a *clan*. A *clan* consisted of the households of several fathers and the number of individuals who live there (1st Samuel 10:19-21). Gideon says he is part of the weakest clan of the whole tribe of Manasseh.

Furthermore, Gideon was the youngest male in his “*father’s house*.” The words *father’s house* is a reference to Gideon’s own family. He was the youngest son of his father, Joash.

(v) The Request of Gideon (6:17-18)

The writer now tells of the request of Gideon. Verse 17. “*So Gideon said to Him, ‘If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who speak with me.*’¹⁸ *Please do not depart from here, until I come back to You, and bring out my offering and lay it before You.*” And He said, “*I will remain until you return.*” (6:17-18)

Look at verse 18 again. “*If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who speak with me.*” What is Gideon asking? He is asking the LORD to prove that He is indeed the LORD. Gideon seems not to be sure that it is the LORD Who has given him the promise of victory against the Midianites. Gideon asks the LORD to stay where He is under the tree until he returns with an offering. As we will see, it is not an offering in accord with the offering found in the first chapters of Leviticus. Why? The offerings in Leviticus were specific to the duties of the priests who served in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple. This offering from Gideon was to be a meal for the *angel of the LORD*. The LORD agreed to wait for Gideon to return.

Interestingly, Gideon asked the LORD for a sign and asked Him to remain until he returned with a meal offering. Gideon must have had his idea of the sign he desired. He does, and he will still ask for that specific sign. But the LORD will give him a different sign upon his return with the meal.

(a) A Meal Cooked (6:19)

The writer then describes the meal cooked by Gideon. Verse 19. “*Then Gideon went in and prepared a young goat and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour; he put the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot, and brought them out to him under the oak and presented them.*” (6:19)

Gideon prepared and presented a meal for the LORD that was the common food prepared for guests of special honor.

(b) A Meal Consigned (6:20)

But once Gideon returned with the meal, the LORD took over. From a meal cooked, we come to the meal consigned. Verse 20. “*The angel of God 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.*” (6:20)

While Gideon was preparing the meal, the LORD had prepared a rock. The LORD instructed Gideon to put the meal on the rock and pour the pot of broth upon the meat and the two pounds of bread. Gideon complied with the request of the LORD.

(c) A Meal Consumed (6:21)

Gideon surely expected the LORD to eat the meal. But the LORD had a different plan. Gideon had asked for a sign. The LORD was about to give it to him. We come to a meal consumed. Verse 21. “*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 sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. Then the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight.*” (6:21)

With the flash of the fire from the rock, the meal was consumed, and the LORD disappeared from Gideon’s sight where He was sitting under the tree.

(vi) The Admission of Gideon (6:22)

The sign of the consuming of the meal was good enough for Gideon. We come to the admission of Gideon in verse 22. *“When Gideon saw that he was the angel of the LORD, he said, ‘Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face.’”* (6:22)

The LORD’s sign to Gideon was good enough to prove that He was the LORD. Gideon seems to exhibit that he had seen the face of the *angel of the LORD* and lived when he says, *“Alas, O Lord GOD!”* Gideon was surprised that he was still alive. Remember in Exodus 33:20 where the LORD said to Moses, *“You cannot see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.”* Many years later, when the *angel of the LORD* spoke to Manoah and his wife about Samson, the couple had the same concern. Manoah said, *“We shall surely die because we have seen the LORD.”* (13:22).

(vii) The Promise to Gideon (6:23)

But Gideon did not need to fret. The LORD delivered a promise to Gideon. Verse 23. *“The LORD said to him, ‘Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die.’”* (6:23)

The LORD may have been out of Gideon’s sight, but He was not finished talking with Gideon. In addition, the LORD had delivered to Gideon not one but two miracles to prove that He was the LORD. First, the meal was consumed. Second, Gideon did not die. Both were enacted by the LORD.

(viii) The Altar of Gideon (6:24)

Hearing the words of the angel of the LORD to Gideon, what did Gideon do? We come to the altar of Gideon. Verse 24. *“Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and named it The LORD is Peace. To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.”* (6:24)

The act of naming altars is present in the history of Israel and before. For example, the same was done in Genesis 22:14, Genesis 31:47-49, Genesis 33:20, Joshua 22:34, etc. Gideon named this altar under the oak tree on Joash’s land, *“The LORD is Peace.”* The Hebrew can be translated as *Jehovah-shalom*. The actual altar built by Gideon was still standing when the writer penned the words of this book for the first time. For Gideon, the name meant that the tree was the place where the LORD granted peace to the current nation of Israel. But Gideon had to start at home instead of out in the nation.