

Judges

Lesson 14

(ix) The Instruction to Gideon

(a) Destroy the Holy Places of False Gods (6:25)

The conversation with the LORD was still going on with Gideon that day and into the night. We come to the instruction to Gideon from the LORD. It was to destroy the holy places of false gods found in verse 25. *“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....”* (6:25).

Gideon’s extended family was not without their sin against the LORD. On Gideon’s extended family land stood an altar to Baal and an Asherah pole. These were not small, unassuming tokens of an altar and an Asherah pole. The altar and pole were large enough that it would take two sturdy, healthy bulls to pull them down. We must wonder if Gideon had once sinned against the LORD at these Canaanite holy places. We do not know.

Nevertheless, Gideon’s extended family was part of the seven years of disobedience against the LORD. In verse 31 of this chapter, we will learn that Joash, Gideon’s father, probably did not worship the Canaanite gods. Nevertheless, at this point in the story, the takeaway from this verse is thus. Ridding a nation of sin begins in the homes and with our extended families.

(b) Build a Holy Place to the True God (6:26)

With the destruction of Joash’s altar and Asherah, the LORD instructed Gideon to build a holy place to the true God. Verse 26. *“...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.”* (6:26)

It may have taken two bulls to pull down the altar of Baal and the Asherah pole. The second of the two bulls had a second purpose, to consecrate and dedicate the newly built altar to the true God.

Gideon’s offering was to be a *burnt offering*. We learned about burnt offerings that were suitable to the LORD in the first chapter of Leviticus. For the bull that Gideon was to offer on the new altar, the animal was slain, skinned, and quartered. The inner organs and the legs of the animal were washed in the water. All the parts of the animal were placed on the altar and burn until they were completely consumed except the hide. Gideon would be allowed to use the hide for anything he needed it for. The smell of the smoke from the animal was a sweet aroma to the LORD, holy and acceptable to Him. (Leviticus Chapter 1)

(x) The Fear of Gideon (6:27)

But Gideon was afraid of his father and the men who lived in his father’s household as well as the others of the tribe of Manasseh in the area. The writer tells us of the fear of Gideon in verse 27. *“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.”* (6:27)

The writer tells us that Gideon took ten of his employees to help with the task. The verse uses the word “servants,” not slaves. Israelites were not allowed to have slaves as instructed in the book of Leviticus. These were “servants” or paid employees. The writer tells us that these were Gideon’s men. They must have been men that he worked with. He trusted them; they trusted him. More than likely, Gideon gathered these men and completed the task on the same night that Gideon offered the meal to the *angel of the LORD* and built an altar to Him under the oak tree. Why did he complete the task at night instead of the daylight? It was because he was afraid of the Israelites, who

were Baal and Asherah worshippers. They would be up early and down at the holy place to worship with the dawn of day.

(b) Condemned by Men

(i) What the Men Discovered (6:28)

Early in the morning, the men of the city rose. We come at this point to see Gideon condemned by these men. Why? It is because of what the men discovered. Verse 28. *"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."* (6:28)

The men found the altar torn down early that morning because it was the custom to worship Baal and Asherah first thing every morning.

(ii) What the Men Asked 6:29a

When the men of the city came to worship their Canaanite gods and found the images destroyed, we hear what the men asked. Verse 29a. *"They said to one another, "Who did this thing?"* (6:29a)

Their question was normal. They wanted to know who destroyed their prize idols.

(iii) What the Men Heard (6:29b)

What did the men do when they found their idols destroyed? They searched. In their search, we come to what the men heard. Verse 29b. *"...And when they searched about and inquired, they said, "Gideon the son of Joash did this thing."* (6:29b)

Evidently, it did not take long for the men to learn that Gideon was the culprit.

(iv) What the Men Demanded

(a) The Demand of Joash to Produce His Son (6:30)

We come now to what the men demanded. They demanded that Joash produce his son. Verse 30. *"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."* (6:30)

Just because the men demanded Joash to produce his son does not mean Joash did so.

(b) The Warning of Joash to Produce His Son

(i) The Plea for Gideon – Results in Death (6:31)

Instead of producing his son, we hear the warning of Joash to produce his son. We also hear the plea for Gideon, which results in death. Verse 31. *"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."* (6:31)

Here we learn that Joash was probably not a worshiper of Canaan's gods, as was his extended family. In his warning back to the idol-worshippers of Israel, Joash makes a startling statement. He challenges the idol worshippers to let their false gods handle Gideon if he is a true god. In addition, Joash warns the idol worshiper cousins that if they continue to seek the case for Baal, they will be dead by morning.

(ii) The Name of Gideon – Jerubbaal Destroyed Altar (6:32)

With his words to the idolatrous extended family of Joash, Joash gives Gideon a new nickname. Verse 32. *"Therefore on that day he named him Jerubbaal, that is to say, "Let Baal contend against him," because he had torn down his altar."* (6:32)

The name Jerubbaal means *"Let Baal contend against him."* We are thankful that Joash defined the new name for us. Gideon's new name challenges Baal to fight against Gideon.

(2) Midian's Commencement (6:33)

Gideon has a new name – Jerubbaal. But something else has happened about that same time. We are told of Midian's commencement. Verse 33. *"Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the sons of the east assembled themselves; and they crossed over and camped in the valley of Jezreel."* (6:33)

It was that time of the year for the Midianites and their allies to come into the Promised Land to plunder the nation. They did not enter from the south. They did not enter from the north. They entered from the east, crossed the Jordan River, and camped in the vast Valley of Jezreel. Midian camped there with his men, the Amalekites, and the sons of the east. We are not through with this chapter.

The LORD had proven Himself to Gideon. Gideon trusted that his call was from the LORD. In a strange turn in the flow of the text, the writer inserted the fact that the Midianites camped in the Valley of Jezreel. It was time for Gideon to gather the troops.

(3) Gideon's Command

(a) Called the Troops

(i) From His Family First (6:34)

The LORD had designated Gideon, the youngest son of Joash, to free the Nation of Israel from the oppression of the Midianites and their allies. We come to Gideon's command as he called the troops to help. Where did he start? From his family first. Chapter 6, verse 34. *"So the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon; and he blew a trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called together to follow him."* (6:34)

The *"Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon."* The Hebrew for *"came upon"* means to *clothe or lay around like a coat of mail or strong equipment.* The Spirit gave him fortitude and courage. He moved Gideon to zeal, strength, and might. Gideon was clad with the presence of God. Gideon could not be defeated because of the Holy Spirit.

Gideon *"blew a trumpet."* No doubt, Gideon blew the trumpet with the alarm melody to muster the troops for battle. It was a different melody from the one that called the people to worship or the one to call the people to work. When that certain melody was sounded, all those who heard the blast knew it was for war.

"... and the Abiezrites were called together...." Who were the Abiezrites? Remember, Gideon's father was named Joash the Abiezrite. The Abiezrites were a family line in the tribe of Manasseh. The original father of this family was named Abiezer, the son of Gilead. Gilead was the son of Machir, Manasseh's only son. In Numbers 26:31, the name is spelled *"Izzer"* in some English versions. In other versions, it is spelled *"Jeezer."* The Hebrew letters in a transliteration would be *Aiezzer.* The "b" in Abiezer is an English mistake in the translation. Be that as it may, Gideon's own clansmen were the first to respond to the call to fight. They came.

(ii) From His Tribe Second (6:35a)

As Gideon's clansmen were arriving, more men were needed. Where did he call for them? From his tribe second. Verse 35a. *"He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, and they also were called together to follow him...."* (6:35a)

No doubt, this call did not go just to west Manasseh but to the whole tribe residing on both sides of the Jordan River. They came.

(iii) From His Northern Cousins Third (6:35b)

But to Gideon, even more men were needed. So, the call for men from his northern cousin happened third. Verse 35b. *"...and he sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they came up to meet them."* (6:35b)

Asher was a tarnished tribe in the last cycle. Asher stayed by the ship landings rather than helping Deborah and Barak defeat Sisera and Jabin. Coming to help with Gideon's call was the opportunity to redeem the reputation of the tribe after forty-seven years. They came.

As for Zebulun and Naphtali, they had valiantly fought to defeat Sisera and Jabin and were distinguished among the tribes during Deborah's time in office (5:18). They came.

(b) Commissioned the Tests

(i) The Wet Fleece and Dry Ground (6:36-38)

First, Gideon called the troops. Now we see where Gideon commissioned the test with the wet fleece and the dry ground. Verse 36. *"Then Gideon said to God, 'If You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken,³⁷ 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.'³⁸ 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."* (6:36-38)

With the army of Israel's four tribes around him, Gideon seemed to still be at home wondering if he could lead such a battle against such a great host of men camped in the Valley of Jezreel. In human strength alone, Gideon must have felt totally helpless. The first test of the fleece was needed to answer the question, *"If You will deliver Israel through me...."*

The LORD answered Gideon's first request.

(ii) The Dry Fleece and Wet Ground (6:39-40)

Just to make sure, Gideon humbly commissioned another test with the dry fleece and the wet ground. Verse 39. *"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.'⁴⁰ God did so that night; for it was dry only on the fleece, and dew was on all the ground."* (6:39-40)

The LORD allowed Gideon to dictate the terms of the sign. As before, the LORD answered Gideon's second request. Gideon was the man of God to deliver Israel.

Chapter 7

(c) Culled the Troops (7:1)

With Gideon's new name being used, he is called Jerubbaal. If you will remember, Jerubbaal means *let Baal contend against him*. Gideon's new name meant that he was going to lead an army against all the forces of Baal. To believers in Baal, Gideon was facing a god. To believers in the LORD, Gideon was facing a figment of man's imagination – not a god at all. Let Baal contend against Jerubbaal. First, Jerubbaal called the troops. He then commissioned the test. Now he culled the troops. Chapter 7, verse 1. *"Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him, rose early and camped beside the spring of Harod; and the camp of Midian was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley."* (7:1)

The day Gideon found the fleece dry on the ground, he and all his men journeyed toward the Valley of Jezreel and camped at the "spring of Harod."