

## A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 6

- Vv. 1-10 *The oppression of the Midianites.* This is the fourth oppression. The first oppression was under Cushan-Rishathaim and the people of Mesopotamia. The second oppression was that of Eglon, king of Moab, who led the people of Transjordan to suppress the Israelites. The third oppression had been under Jabin, king of Hazor, who led the northern Canaanites against Israel. This kind of listing, of course, omits the Philistines under Shamgar, but this oppression is hardly described, being only mentioned in Judges 3:31. This oppression of the Midianites was brought on from the same causes—the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord.
- Vv. 11-26 *Call and commission of Gideon.* The call of Gideon is not as well known as the calls of Moses, Samuel, and Isaiah; but Gideon's call is similar in many respects. He was reluctant when God came to him and gave him the challenge of leading the people of Israel. The call came in a very clear and unusual way, and Gideon finally accepted when he received assurance of God's presence with him.
- Vv. 27-40 *Gideon's fleece.* Gideon destroyed Baal's altars according to God's instructions. Still he wasn't convinced that God would be with him in the

## STUDIES IN JOSHUA-JUDGES-RUTH

great task of delivering Israel from the oppression of the Midianites. He asked God for two signs, both involving the dew of heaven and a fleece of wool. Through these rather unusual instruments, God made known His strength and assured Gideon of His abiding presence.

### LESSONS FOR LEARNING

1. *God gives daily bread.* Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." When men turn their backs on God, they may suffer physically as well as spiritually. Israel sinned, and the Midianites destroyed the increase of the land. Some think it was during this terrible famine that Elimelech and Naomi, with their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, left Israel and went to Moab. Even a strong, young man like Gideon was forced to hide in a wine press in order to thresh enough grain to subsist.
2. *Why?* Gideon asked, "If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?" (verse 13 ). We ask why sin continues to run wild. We ask why we suffer in war. We ask why illness strikes us or death comes to break our family circle. Still we believe all things work together for good (Romans 8:28).
3. *God gives us signs.* Gideon wanted a sign. God was patient and gave him two signs. The Jews in Jesus' day asked Him for a sign, and He said an evil and adulterous generation asked for a sign. He further stated that no sign would be given it except the sign of Jonah (Matthew 16:1, 4) . Still Jesus is willing for those who faithfully trust Him to have signs. He said that there would be certain signs of His coming again (Matthew 24:3

ff.).

## CHAPTER SIX

Gideon of Manasseh and Abimelech 6:1-9:57

*Midian Oppresses Israel 6:1-10*

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.

2 And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strongholds.

3 And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them;

4 And they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass.

5 For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their camels were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it.

6 And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the Lord.

7 And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord because of the Midianites,

8 That the Lord sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage;

9 And I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drove them out from before you, and gave you their land;

10 And I said unto you, I am the Lord your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but ye have not obeyed my voice.

*1. Who were the Midianites? 6:1*

The descendants of Midian, son of Abraham and Keturah, were called Midianites. Abraham had six sons by Keturah—Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Ishbak, Shuah, and Midian. Midian, himself had five sons—Ephah, Epher, Henoah, Abida, and Eldaah (cf. Genesis 25:2, 4; I Chronicles 1:32 ff.) . When Abraham made provisions for his heirs, he gave gifts to Midian and sent him along with Ishmael to the east country, away from Isaac (Genesis 25:6). The Midianites were defeated by the Moabites and the Edomites under Hadad (Genesis 36:35; I Chronicles 1:46). It was the Midianites who appeared as merchantmen traveling from Gilead to Egypt and bought Joseph from his wicked brothers (Genesis 37:25 ff.). When Moses fled from Egypt, he found refuge with Jethro, a Midianite leader; and a Midianite served as a guide before the traveling thousands of Israel through the wilderness

wandering (Exodus 2:15, 21; also 4:19, and Numbers 10:29 ff.) . The Midianites joined the Moabites in asking Balaam for a curse, and Israel punished them (Numbers 22:4-7; 25:15, 17; 31:2 ff.) . No boundaries can be assigned to the "land of Midian." It included territory on the west as well as on the east of the Gulf of *'Akaba*. Generally speaking, it lay between Edom and Paran (I Kings 11:18) ; but in the days of the judges their district seems to have extended northward to the land of Gilead which lay east of the territory settled by the tribes of Israel. A trace of the ancient name is found in the modern name of Madyan, a place mentioned by some Arab geographers. It has a plentiful supply of water and lies east of the Gulf of *'Akaba*, some miles from the coast, almost opposite the point of the Sinaitic peninsula. Since the Midianites were nomadic, their land can hardly be limited to this area.

2. *Where did the Israelites hide? 6:2*

The Midianites were so numerous and their flocks and herds were so large that they literally brought a scorched earth policy to Israel, This forced the Israelites to find refuge from their oppressors in dens, caves, and strongholds. They were like some of the more modern Arabs who fled from the invading armies of Israel, taking refuge in rock-hewn tombs, During the six-day war of 1967, one young Arab man told of how he and his family hid in a cave near their village of Deir Dibwan; and for two days they were without food. They had expected the armies to move quickly through their territory and had taken food supplies for only a short time. They had enough water to last them throughout the six-day period, but they ran out of food on the fourth day.

3. *Where was Gaza? 6:4*

Gaza was on the Mediterranean seacoast. It was directly west of a point about half way down on the length of the Dead Sea. Gaza would thus be located in the territory which was assigned to Judah and Simeon and was in the south part of the Promised Land, Since Manasseh was towards the north, this gives us some kind of an idea of the extensive devastation brought on Israel by the Midianites. Gaza would be some seventy-five miles from the heart of the land assigned to the tribe of Midian.

4. *Why did the Midianites have tents and camels? 6:5*

Since the Midianites were a nomadic people without a specific territory in which to settle, they moved their families, flocks, herds, and droves from place to place. In the time of Gideon, they were described as "grasshoppers without number." The people were without number, and the camels were equally numerous. Between themselves and the animals, the Midianites ate up all the grain of Canaan, leaving the hapless Israelites in dire straits. Many

6:8-15      STUDIES IN JOSHUA-JUDGES-RUTH

commentators believe this was the era during which Elimelech and Naomi fled from Bethlehem to Moab because "there was a famine in the land" (Ruth 1:1) .

5. *Why did God send a prophet? 6:8*

God sent a prophet to warn Eli when he failed to rebuke his wicked sons (I Samuel 2:27) . Unnamed prophets make frequent appearances in the Scripture narrative to anoint kings (II Kings 9:4 ff.), to pronounce judgment on wicked rulers (I Kings 21:21-24) , or to challenge a nation (I Kings 13) . Many of these prophets banded together under the leadership of Samuel, and throughout the succeeding years the schools of the prophets play an important part in the national life of Israel.

*The Call of Gideon 6:11-35*

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

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

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.

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?

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.

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

17 And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then show me a sign that thou talkest with me.

18 Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee, And he said, I will tarry until thou come again.

19 And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour; the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it.

20 And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so.

21 Then the angel of the Lord put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the Lord departed out of his sight.

22 And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the Lord, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord God! for because I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face.

23 And the Lord said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die.

24 Then Gideon built an altar there unto the Lord, and called it Jehovah-shalom: unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

25 And it came to pass the same night, that the Lord said unto him, Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father bath, and cut down the grove that is by it:

26 And build an altar unto the Lord thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second

bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down.

27 Then Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the Lord had said unto him: and so it was, because he feared his father's household, and the men of the city, that he could not do it by day, that he did it by night.

28 And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was cast down, and the grove was cut down that was by it, and the second bullock was offered upon the altar that was built.

29 And they said one to another, Who hath done this thing? And when they inquired and asked, they said, Gideon the son of Joash hath done this thing.

30 Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die: because he hath cast down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove that was by it.

31 And Joash said unto all that stood against him, Will ye plead for Baal? will ye save him? he that will plead for him, let him be put to death whilst it is yet morning: if he be a god, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar.

32 Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, Let Baal plead against him, because he hath thrown down his altar.

33 Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel.

34 But the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; and Abiezer was gathered after him.

35 And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh; who also was gathered after him: and he sent messengers unto Asher, and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali; and they

came up to meet them.

6. *Why did God send an angel? 6:11*

God spoke in times past in divers portions and in sundry manners as it is said in the opening verses of the first chapter of the book of Hebrews. The Word was spoken by men and by angels, On different occasions a different kind of messenger was demanded. In the Greek language, it is hard to determine whether it was a messenger of God or an angel, for the root word is the same; but in this case, it is clear from the Hebrew text that both a prophet and an angel were sent to bring God's call to Gideon.

7. *Where was Ophrah? 6:11*

There are two places by this name. One in Benjamin (Joshua 18:23) lies five miles east of Bethel, and is now called *et-Taiyibeh*. This is a small village standing on a conical hill and contains many ancient ruins. It is presently a Christian village. Jesus retired to this obscure place after the miracle of raising Lazarus (John 11:54). The place which was connected with Gideon, however, was in the tribe of Manasseh, and is mentioned here and in Judges

8:27. This was the place where Gideon was buried, It is believed that the reference to Aphrah in the prophecy of Micah (Micah 1:10) is a reference to the same spot.

8. *Why was Gideon in the winepress? 6:11*

He was hiding grain from the enemy by putting it in the winepress, a cistern-like opening in the ground. The American Standard Version says that Gideon was in the winepress. Whether he was in it or by it, he was certainly hiding the grain from the oppressing Midianites. This verb, expressing the idea of hiding, is one which also might be translated to give the idea of causing something to flee. Since the winepress was carved out of stone, it was usually underground. Normally, two cistern-like areas were carved out, one slightly below the other. In the upper one, a man would tread out the grapes and as the liquid

rose to a certain height, it would enter a drain which flowed to the lower vat where the wine could be stored. Many of these were large enough for a man to hide in, and Gideon was probably down in the winepress with some kind of brush or other material covering the entrance to hide him completely from the enemies.

9. *Who was Gideon? 6:11 b*

Gideon was the youngest son of Joash of the clan of Abiezer of the tribe of Manasseh (Numbers 26:30, Joshua 17:1-2, I Chronicles 7:14-19) . His home was at Ophrah, but his family was an obscure one. He became a chief leader of Manasseh and is the fifth recorded judge of Israel. His father was an idolater. Sacrifices to Baal were made among the entire clan, but Gideon held this worship in contempt. The oppressors in his days were the Midianites under Zebah and Zalmunna, their two greatest chiefs; and they were accompanied by other wild tribes of the eastern desert. These men came first as marauders and pillagers at harvest time, but later took forcible possession of the lands and inflicted permanent injury and loss, especially upon Manasseh and Ephraim. Gideon was especially called of God for the need of the hour. It is possible that he had distinguished himself already by some resistance (6:12) , but he received a divine commission to be leader over all Israel. One cannot explain his rise to the place of leadership because he brooded over the death of some of his people (8:18), nor could patriotic impulses dwelling within him account for his rise. It is also apparent that he was not leader by popular demand (cf. 6:15, 17, 19 ff.) . His career can only be explained as one views him being moved by the Spirit of God.

10. *Why did Gideon ask for a sign? 6:17*

Gideon's asking for a sign shows he was not aspiring to a place of leadership among his people. He had been driven to a very low estate as he beat out his wheat in a

winepress and hid it from the Midianites. His human frailty cried out for some kind of assurance of God's divine call. It is easy to understand how he would be reluctant to take the leadership against such overwhelming numbers of marauding peoples, and the assurance given him by God must have increased his courage immensely. Although Jesus refused to give signs to the unbelieving Jewish leaders of His day (Matthew 16:1 ff.), He did honor the request of His disciples for an understanding of the signs which would herald His second coming (Matthew 24:3).

*11. Who was the angel of the Lord? 6:20-22*

The angel of the Lord had appeared many times in the history of Israel prior to the time of Gideon. Jacob had wrestled with this angel (Genesis 32:24 ff.) . It was the angel of the Lord who appeared to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3:2). This same angel had confronted Joshua before the people of Israel crossed Jordan to attack Jericho (Joshua 5:13 ff.) . At Bochim it was the angel of the Lord who rebuked the people of Israel on account of their failure to drive out the Canaanites (Judges 2:1 ff.). When Gideon saw him, he cried, "Alas, O Lord Jehovah, for as much as I have seen the angel of Jehovah face to face." He had seen one aspect of God's being; and he felt undone, as did Isaiah when he saw his vision of the Lord high and lifted up (Isaiah 6).

*12. What was the design of the altar? 6:24*

It was a memorial. Although Gideon made his offering before the Lord, he was not usurping the place of a priest; and he had no intention of establishing another center of worship in Ophrah. His father had an altar dedicated to Baal, but Gideon's altar was more like the altar erected by the Transjordan tribes who wanted a witness to the fact that they were a part of the nation of Israel, They erected an altar

for a memorial in the edge

## 6:24-26 STUDIES IN JOSHUA-JUDGES-RUTH

of the Jordan when Joshua dismissed them and allowed them to go to their homes (Joshua 22).

### *13. What was the meaning of the name given to Gideon's altar? 6:24b*

Gideon called his altar by the name Jehovah-shalom. This means "the Lord is peace." Although Gideon was called to go to war against the Midianites, he still looked to the Lord as the one who could give peace. It is evident from this verse that the memorial altar which Gideon erected in Ophrah was still standing in the days when the book was written. If we are accurate in dating the book from the time of Saul, it had stood through the periods of the remaining judges and still proclaimed that the Lord is peace to all who heard its testimony.

### *14. What was Gideon's first assigned task? 6:25*

The first thing God asked Gideon to do was to throw down the altar of Baal which his father had erected. At the same time, he was told to cut down the grove, or the Asherah, which was by it. Sometimes it is necessary for the ground to be cleared before a profitable crop can be planted. A man must take out of his heart the evil things which hinder his work before he can begin to do the good work of God. Such was the case with Gideon. It was necessary for his father's house to be put in order before he was ready to accomplish God's will for his life.

### *15. How were the altars distinguished? 6:26*

The altar for worshiping God was orderly. Such a suggestion leaves the impression that there was a great deal of disorder about the altar to Baal. Pagan worship often was indecent and disorderly. The Apostle Paul was afraid that this kind of condition would prevail in the worship among the Christians and for that reason gave the final injunction when he wrote to them saying, "but let all things be done

decently and in order" (I Corinthians

14:40), At the very least, this reference in Judges suggests that Gideon was to take the materials which were used in the altar to Baal in order to have what he needed to erect the altar to God.

*16. Why did they accuse Gideon? 6:29*

He had a reputation for fighting for truth. Gideon had been forced to tear down the altar under the cover of night. He knew the men of the city would oppose him if they found him destroying their place of worship. We do not know that the men of the city knew of Gideon's commission of the Lord; but when they saw their altar had been destroyed, they immediately pointed a finger of accusation towards Gideon. Such action indicates their recognition of him as a righteous man. He must have been one who did not worship at the altar.

*17. Why did Joash defend Gideon? 6:31*

His son's action stimulated the father to take a stand. Since Baal had not struck Gideon dead when Gideon destroyed his altar, Joash knew that Baal was no god at all. His eyes were opened by this bold action on the part of his son, and he immediately arose to defend his son. Probably Joash knew of Israel's earlier glorious history, and his conscience must have hurt him on occasions as he fell into this pagan worship. When this crisis came into his family's life, he chose to stand with the truth.

*18. Why call Gideon Jerub-baal? 6:32*

The word, Jerub-baal, means "let Baal contend." Joash had said that if Baal was a god he would fight for himself. He chided the men of Ophrah by asking them if they were going to fight for Baal. They evidently caught the meaning of Joash's words and thought it a fitting name to give to Gideon. Gideon was a man who reminded them how it was unnecessary for them to defend the false god. If he were really a god he would defend himself.

*19. Where was the valley of Jezreel? 6:33*

It was in Issachar, near Mt. Tabor and Mt. Carmel. The Greek word for Jezreel is Esdraelon. It is also known as the great plain of Josephus, and sometimes is called the valley of Megiddo. The plain is very rich in soil and lies on the top of a volcanic basalt, but there is little evidence of inhabited villages being built within its boundaries. Generally speaking, it is triangular, 18 x 15 x 12 miles. A great number of important battles were fought on its soil. As has been said, warriors from every nation have pitched their tent in the plains of Jezreel. Names such as those of Deborah, Barak, Gideon, Josiah, Holofernes, Vespasian, the Crusaders, Saracens, Turks, French, and General Allenby give a hint of the events which made the valley memorable. In general, we can describe it as being bounded by three mountains—Mount Gilboa, Mount Tabor, and Mount Carmel.

*20. Who was Abiezer? 6:34*

The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet. It is said then that Abiezer was gathered together after him. Abiezer was the eldest son of Gilead (Joshua 17:2). This family settled first of all on the east of Jordan, but must have changed their residence to Ophrah in Manasseh on the west side of Jordan. Gideon was of this family; and when it is said that Abiezer was gathered together after him, the meaning is that his own family followed him in his work for the Lord.

*21. Why wasn't the tribe of Issachar included? 6:35*

The battle was fought in their territory, so they were already invaded. Issachar had inherited the fertile land of Jezreel, and they surely would have wanted to defend it. Since there is no rebuke of their failing to follow Gideon, we suppose that they joined Asher, Zebulun, Naphtali, and Manasseh in the battles. All these tribes were in the

northern part of Israel and were most directly affected by the terrible onslaught of the Midianites.

*Gideon's Signs 6:36-40*

36 And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said,

37 Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said.

38 And it was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water.

39 And Gideon said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew.

40 And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.

*22. Why wish for so many signs? 6:36-40*

It was the weakness of his flesh which prompted him to ask for so many signs. God had already answered Gideon's request to receive his present. At that time an angel of the Lord touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes which he presented. Fire came up out of the rock and consumed the flesh and cakes. He had then received courage to tear down the altar of Baal. As he entered into the fuller task of driving the Midianites from the land, he asked for additional assurance that God was with him. When he put the fleece out and asked that there be water on the fleece only and none on the ground, he may have thought all the

water was soaked up by the fleece.

#### STUDIES IN JOSHUA.JUDGES-RUTH

When he put the fleece out the second time, he asked God to leave the fleece dry and have water around. The second *sign* would have seemed more unnatural, thus requiring what would have been considered more definitely a supernatural act on the part of God. God did not fail Gideon, and he received the assurance he wanted before he went into the battle.

#### TEN QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 6

1. Who were the oppressors mentioned in Judges 6?
2. What was the name of the judge raised up?
3. Of what tribe was he a member?
4. Who was his father?
5. What did this judge offer on the altar?
6. By what other name was this judge known?
7. Who joined the foes of Israel in the second invasion mentioned?
8. Where was the battle pitched?
9. What other tribes joined in the battle?
10. How much water was wrung from the fleece used in the first sign?