



A Study of the Book of Judges

Lesson 6: Gideon, Thou Mighty Man of Valor... Judges 6:1-6:34

Now this morning we have come to the central transitional character of the Book of Judges¹.

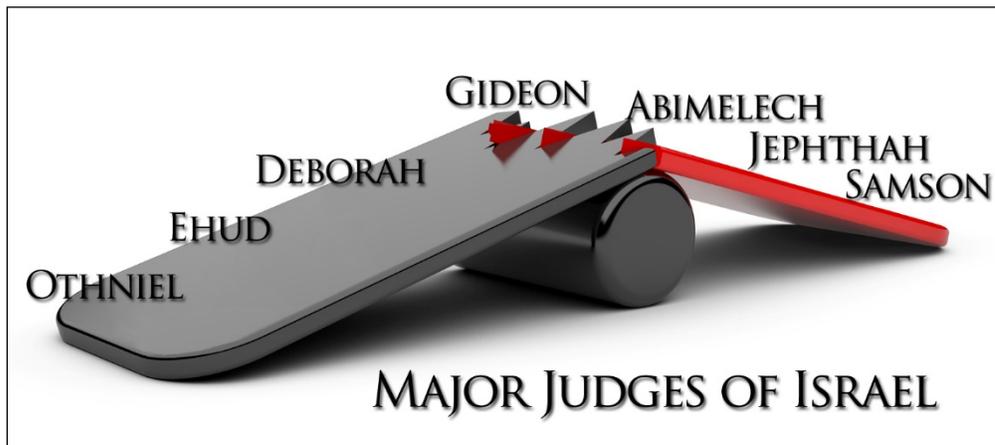
Do you know who that is? Yes, of course, it's Gideon.

Now I have been planting that idea in your minds for a number of weeks. I have done that by the use of a short pithy line to help you remember the structure of the book. That line is...

Now I have even tried to represent that idea to you visually by using a picture of a seesaw. What I am doing here is showing you the structure of the book. It has a double introduction...a double conclusion...and between that double introduction and double conclusion the stories of seven major judges and Gideon is the transitional figure in the middle².

I think this next slide will help you see that even more. You see the three judges to the left of Gideon are all headed up...that is, they are all viewed positively in the

book of Judges. The judges to the right of Gideon are all headed downward and the point I want you to remember is that they are largely viewed negatively. Gideon himself is viewed both positively and negatively. He is quite positive at the beginning and quite negative at the end...so he is a transitional figure. He starts out not great but O.K. and then goes down hill. I think you'll see that clearly enough in the next few weeks.



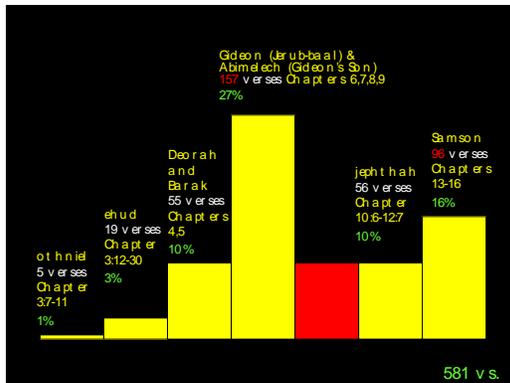
I want you to think of Gideon as something like a fulcrum on a seesaw. I asked you to keep that image in mind so that you could remember the content, structure and purpose of the book...that is, that everything in Judges moves upward or is positive until Gideon and everything in Judges moves downward after Gideon.³

Now that observation is not new to me. It is not even new to this century. It is a fact that has been noted by Bible students for a long time but I think it is an important fact for you to keep it in mind as you read the Book of Judges for yourself. If you will keep that idea in mind that the text moves upward to Gideon and downward after Gideon it will help you to remember the overall message and

intent of the Book of Judges.⁴ I think it will help to make the stories fit together better and just make a lot more sense.

Now one thing that will help to make that clearer, is for you to realize just how much of the Book of Judges is concerned with or devoted to Gideon. I think sometimes when we read biblical stories we focus so hard on the characters that we sometimes forget to take into account how much space is devoted to each character. I think that is important because sometimes the author makes a point simply by how much or how little he says about a character. Let me show what I mean.

There are 581 verses in the Book of Judges and of those 581 verses 157 deal with Gideon's story or the story of his son Abimelech. That means that roughly 27% of the Book of Judges is dedicated to the character of Gideon. Most people do not take that into account when they read the book. But if you were to exclude the double introduction and the double ending and just deal with the text concerning the seven judges over 40 percent of what is left is about Gideon...40 percent. Now that, I think, speaks volumes about the author's intention. That means that whatever Judges has to say about Gideon is very important to the overall purpose and intent of the author. It means that the story of Gideon is crucial to the author's purpose.



Now all of those things are important but not as important as the text itself. With that in mind let's put in at Judges 6:1.

Now the first thing we are going to see in Judges 6 is an account of the situation leading up to the call of Gideon and that account begins with a phrase that we have already seen several times in the Book of Judges,

^{NIV} **Judges 6:1**...Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites.

Now we know that forty years of peace passed after Deborah and Barak and that after that time the Israelites suffered terribly for seven years. They suffered because they allowed themselves to be wooed by the Baals and the Asherahs. They broke covenant with YHWH and adopted the religion and practice of the Canaanites.

Now the Midianites that are mentioned here in the passage are descendants of Midian, the son born to Abraham through his wife Keturah, the woman he married after Sarah died. You can read about that in Genesis 25. This is one of

those passages that tends to make the reader ask, **“No why did he do that? Why did he marry her? Wouldn’t things have gone much better if he had not?”**

Now what we find is that before Abraham’s death he sent Keturah and her children off to the east so that they might not interfere with Isaac and his reception of the promised blessing of God but they keep popping up anyway...and when they do they are a constant thorn in the side of the Israelites. You can read all about that in Genesis 25.

^{NIV} **Genesis 25:1**...Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. ² She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak and Shuah...⁴ The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida and Eldaah. All these were descendants of Keturah. ⁵ Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac. ⁶ But while he was still living, he gave gifts to the sons of his concubines and sent them away from his son Isaac to the land of the east.

Now these Midianites, these Bedouin characters that are left undescribed come up again in Genesis when Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers. They are the wandering Midianites that bought him from his brothers and transported him down to Egypt and sold him there to Potiphar.(Genesis 37).

Basically, the Midianites were wondering Bedouin tribes living in the desert both to the east and south of Canaan. What we are going to see in the next few verses is that they used to sweep down on the land of Canaan almost like locusts devouring the land. Look at verse 2.

^{NIV} **Judges 6:2**...Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds.

Now it is hard to know exactly the nature of the shelters that are mentioned here. It may have been hiding places for the Israelites themselves but most scholars think that the shelters mentioned are actually food caches stored in the hills to hide their food and grain from the marauding Midianites⁵. Now they reason that think that is because of verse 3.

^{NIV} **Judges 6:3**...Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. ⁴ They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys.

Now I should point out that the Midianites not sparing a living thing does not necessarily mean that they killed all of the animals. Rather it means, I think, that they did not leave any of the animals to the Israelites...that is, they stole them. They were wandering Bedouins...almost like locusts...coming in taking everything that was not tied down. They not only stole all of the animals but they stole all of the crops as well. They stole everything. That is why in the next verse they are compared to locusts. They scoured the land clean. Look at verse 5.

^{NIV} **Judges 6:5**...They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count the men and their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it. ⁶ Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the LORD for help.

Now I take verse 6 to be hyperbole. That is, I take it to be a literary exaggeration. I take it that the Midianites attacked in so many different places with so many different raiding parties that it was impossible to keep up with how many of them there actually were. I am sure it seemed like no place in Israel was safe.

Now in verse seven, we see the repeated refrain of the Israelites crying out to the Lord and what we notice there is that He sends them a prophet which the same thing He did in the days of Deborah and Barak. Look at verse 7.

^{NIV} Judges 6:7...When the Israelites cried to the LORD because of Midian, ⁸ he sent them a prophet, who said, "**This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ⁹ I snatched you from the power of Egypt and from the hand of all your oppressors. I drove them from before you and gave you their land. ¹⁰ I said to you, 'I am the LORD your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.' But you have not listened to me.**"

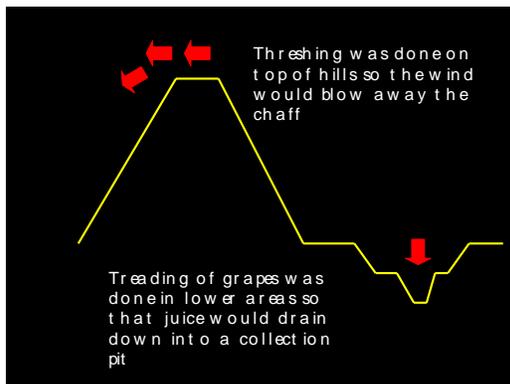
Now the thing you ought to notice is that the prophet does not announce any sort of deliverance. That makes this prophetic word different than the one in the time of Deborah. This one has no good news attached to it. It is simply an analysis of the reason why such devastation has come upon the nation. There is no promise of deliverance. It is simply bad news from first to last.

Now I think the author intended to emphasize the bleakness of their situation...to produce in his readers a collective and sorrowful sigh. It is an effective tool because it makes the turn in the story all that much more wonderful. In fact, the author turns in the story from the dismal analysis of the prophet to the very person that the Lord intends to use to deliver His people. He does that in Judges 6:11.

^{NIV} Judges 6:11...The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. ¹² When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, "**The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.**"

Now no one knows exactly where the city or town of Ophrah was. We know it was in the area possessed by the tribe of Manasseh and almost certainly on the western side of the Jordan but that is about all.

Now I would like for you to get a sense of how ironic the angel's greeting was. But to do that you have to understand exactly what was going on in verse 11. In order to help you understand let me explain why it was unusual for a person to thresh wheat in winepress.



Most of the time wheat was threshed on a hilltop. That is, it was beaten out to separate the grain from the stalk. That grain was roughly handled so that the husk and kernel would separate. Then they would sweep up the collected grain go up on a hilltop and throw the mixture up into the air so that the kernel of wheat would separate from the shell or husk of the wheat. Now the reason that they would separate was that the husk was lighter than the kernel and would be blown away by the wind while the kernel or main part of the wheat would fall to the ground where it would be picked up and later ground into flour. They almost always threshed grain on hilltops because there was almost always a constant breeze on the hilltops⁶.

That is not only the usual manner in which wheat was threshed but it was the usual manner in which it was threshed for thousands of years. It was hard work but without the wind to separate the husk from the kernel, it meant that countless hours were required where a person had to sit and separate the two things by hand.

Now Gideon was not threshing his wheat on a hilltop and the reason he was not was because being on such a hilltop would have exposed him to the view of these marauding Midianites for miles around.

Rather than do that Gideon was threshing his wheat in a winepress which was usually put in a lower place. Usually it was a two level pit. The grapes were crushed on the upper level by walking on them and the juice ran down to the lower level where it was connected in jars.

Apparently Gideon was threshing his wheat there because it gave him a place to thresh his wheat without being seen. In other words, he was threshing his wheat secretly...while hiding.

That makes what the angel of the Lord has to say all that much more ironic. Actually, I think it makes it pretty funny. Look at verse 12 again.

^{NIV} **Judges 6:12...**When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, "**The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.**"

Now Gideon was hiding from the Midianites. He was not only hiding...he was hiding as low as he could go. And you know, the thought of him hiding in a

winepress makes it hard to think of Gideon as a **“mighty warrior”** as a gibbôr heḥâyil. Now I think it would be pretty hard to argue from the text that at that particular point that Gideon was actually a mighty warrior⁷. In fact, I think you would have to say that he is anything but that. But he will become that. You see the angel of the Lord is announcing to Gideon what God will raise him up to be. He is doing that just as He did with Abraham in Genesis 15 when He announced that Abraham would become a father of many nations. He said that to Abraham at a time when Abraham had not children. He is doing the same with Gideon here...telling him what he will become through God’s grace. He is saying that will make Gideon the instrument He will use to get rid of the Midianites and to deliver His people.

Now I probably ought to say a word about this mysterious character...the angel of the Lord.

This angel is spoken of as **“the angel of Yahweh,”** and **“the angel of the presence (or face) of Yahweh.”** This particular character is referred to many places in the Old Testament so I thought we ought to look at a few passages that contain a reference to him:

I think the most famous passage is Genesis 18, where He appears to Abraham on the Plains of Mamre on His way down to destroy Sodom. You will remember the scene where Abraham prepares Him a meal and as He departs to go down to Sodom and He says to Himself, **“Should I hide from Abraham that which I about to do?”** And He then decides to tell Abraham what He is going to do and Abraham bargains with Him asking whether He will destroy the city of Sodom if there are

fifty righteous there...and then forty righteous and then thirty righteous and so on...down to ten righteous...asking whether He intended to destroy the righteous with the wicked.

But He also occurs in another very famous passage with Abraham...Genesis 22...where God had commanded Abraham to go up into the mountains and to sacrifice his son Isaac there on a mountain the Lord was to show him. You will remember that the Lord sent the Angel to stop him at the last moment before he plunged the knife into Isaac and says, **“Stop don’t do that...now, I know that you love me because you have obeyed me.”**

You see the Angel of the Lord is a special character or personification of the Lord.

He also occurs in genesis 32 where He wrestles with Jacob and He appears in the burning bush before Moses on the backside of Sinai. He is actually in the bush. Now the point I want to make is that in all of those cases, the characters that meet the Angel of the Lord extend to Him reverence and worship and awe.

A study of these passages and other passages of like nature shows that while the angel and Yahweh are at times distinguished from each other, they are with equal frequency, and in the same passages, merged into each other. Now most conservative scholars believe that this **“angel of the Lord”** was in fact a preincarnate theanthropic manifestation of Jesus Himself. That it was the Lord Jesus coming to meet with mankind in a mediated form to represent the Father. Now because it was Jesus, the interaction between God and man was mediated and yet the angel was still worthy to receive the worship of the individual to whom

he appeared. I want you to remember that when we come to Gideon's response to the Angel of the Lord when he recognizes who He is.

That being said, apparently Gideon initially thinks of the angel as simply a man or maybe even a prophet. Look at what he says in verse 13. I want you to notice his doubt concerning what the angel pronounces. In fact let's call his response in verse 13, doubt number one.

^{NIV} Judges 6:13... "But sir," Gideon replied, "if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian."

Do you see what he is asking? He is asking, **"If the Lord is with us as you say why have we been abandoned?"**

Now let me ask you, **"How would you respond to Gideon? Is the presence of trouble an indication of the Lord's abandonment?"**

Do you believe that? Do you think that when someone gets sick they have been abandoned by God? What about if someone loses their job? Is that a sign that they have been abandoned by God? Do you believe that in this particular case that the apparent abandonment of the Lord was because of their sin? Do you believe that is always the case? When is it and when is it not the case?

You see I think it is usually impossible to tell. That means we ought to be very slow to make pronouncements about the relationship of a person's suffering and their sin. It is one thing when a Prophet of God does so in the Bible...it is another

thing altogether when it is the person in the pew behind you. I think that wonderful passage in the Gospel of John where the disciples ask about the man born blind ought to instruct us to be careful about making pronouncements about others. You will remember they asked, **“Who sinned this man or his parents...that he was born blind?”**

Jesus answered them, **“Neither...this man was born blind that the glory of God might be displayed in him.”**

So we run into a difficult situation whenever we try to assess the lives of those around us who are suffering and we ought to be careful about what we think and say. It seems to me that we can wind up being like Job’s friends if we are not careful.

Now in verse 14, we are going to see the angel of the Lord’s response. But we are also going to see Gideon continue to voice his doubt.

^{NIV} **Judges 6:14...The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?"**

Now the response that the Angel of the Lord gives Gideon is, **“Yes the Lord is going to deliver His people on the basis of His covenantal faithfulness. He is going to deliver them from this vast, innumerable army of human locusts and He is going to do so with someone threshing grain in secret because of his fear...namely you.”**

Now in verse 15, Gideon voices his doubt again. Let’s call this doubt number two.

^{NIV} Judges 6:15... "But Lord," Gideon asked, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."

Now that probably means two things. First, it probably means that his clan was very small and thus insignificant and not to be relied on for much help and secondly that Gideon was probably the youngest in his family. What he is saying is that he does not have any authority, any power or any recognition from anyone and that he simply cannot understand how he can do what the Lord says.

In verse 16, the Lord attempts to speak peace to Gideon and to affirm His faithfulness to do all that He has promised.

^{NIV} Judges 6:16... The LORD answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together."

Now in the following verses, Gideon asks for a sign from the angel of YHWH to confirm the truthfulness of what He had promised.

^{NIV} Judges 6:17... Gideon replied, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me."

Obviously, this is doubt number three.

Now I should say that Gideon does not doubt the reality of whether someone is speaking to him...rather he really questioning whether what is being said to him is really from the Lord. He continues:

^{NIV} Judges 6:18... Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you." And the LORD said, "I will wait until you return." ¹⁹
Gideon went in, prepared a young goat, and from an ephah of flour he made bread without yeast. Putting the meat in a basket and its broth in a pot, he brought them

out and offered them to him under the oak. ²⁰ The angel of God said to him, "**Take the meat and the unleavened bread, place them on this rock, and pour out the broth.**" And Gideon did so.

Now I want you to think for a moment not about the miraculous burning up of Gideon's offering but rather about the extraordinary patience of God here. Now I do not know how long it took for Gideon to prepare and cook a young goat or to make bread from the ephah of flour but I have to assume it was a matter of hours. Anyway, when Gideon finally returned with everything he had prepared, the angel of the Lord was still there...still waiting patiently to confirm for Gideon the reality of the promise He had made. I think the story makes that point to show the longsuffering of God...the patience of God...that He is willing to wait for Gideon both to prepare his sacrifice and to let his faith grow.

I think there is, of course, a parallel with the patience the Lord showed Gideon and the patience He showed the nation of Israel...indeed, even the patience He shows us. Now look at verse 21.

The angel of the Lord touched Gideon's offering with the tip of His staff and fire came up out of the rock and consumed everything. Look at verse 22.

^{NIV} **Judges 6:21**...With the tip of the staff that was in his hand, the angel of the LORD touched the meat and the unleavened bread. Fire flared from the rock, consuming the meat and the bread. And the angel of the LORD disappeared. ²² When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the LORD, he exclaimed, "**Ah, Sovereign LORD! I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!**" ²³ But the LORD said to him, "**Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die.**"

Now Gideon's response is one of terror and awe. He uses a special name here for the angel of the Lord to express that. The name "**Sovereign Lord**" is the

combination of Adonai and YHWH. It is actually **"Lord YHWH"** and is a special reference to the covenant-keeping name of God Himself.

What he is saying is, **"It is You...the covenant-keeping faithful God of our fathers."** That is what the phrase **"Sovereign Lord"** means.

In verse 24, the angel of the Lord appears to Gideon again at night.

^{NIV} **Judges 6:24**...So Gideon built an altar to the LORD there and called it The LORD is Peace. To this day it stands in Ophrah of the Abiezrites. ²⁵ That same night the LORD said to him, **"Take the second bull from your father's herd, the one seven years old. Tear down your father's altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. ²⁶ Then build a proper kind of altar to the LORD your God on the top of this height. Using the wood of the Asherah pole that you cut down, offer the second bull as a burnt offering."**

Now the story is a wonderful story. The angel of the Lord appears to Gideon and gives him instructions about tearing down, not just an altar to Baal but his own father's altar to Baal. Now the fact that Gideon's father had an altar to Baal is an indication of just how bad things had gotten in Israel. What the angel of the Lord wants is for Gideon to take a bull and use it to tear down his father's altar and the Asherah pole next to it and then kill the bull and sacrifice it upon the altar.

Now I have to tell you that I think the offering of a bull here had special significance. I think it had special significance because it was seven years old...the same amount of time the Midianites had been oppressing the land and because Baal was often represented by an image of a bull. Visually, it would have looked like Gideon is tearing down Baal's altar and slaughtering Baal's image upon it.

You see Gideon is not just tearing down an altar...he is doing more than. He is going toe to toe with Baal.

Now the only other thing I think you have to notice here is that Gideon tore down the altar at night instead of in the daytime and the text even tells us why he did it that way. He did it that way because he was afraid of the men of the town⁸.

^{NIV} **Judges 6:27**...So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the LORD told him. But because he was afraid of his family and the men of the town, he did it at night rather than in the daytime.

I think it might be possible to think of his fear as a manifestation of his doubt. If that is the case, it means this is doubt number four.

Now Gideon had every reason to be fearful of their response. Verse 28 makes that clear.

^{NIV} **Judges 6:28**...In the morning when the men of the town got up, there was Baal's altar, demolished, with the Asherah pole beside it cut down and the second bull sacrificed on the newly built altar! ²⁹ They asked each other, "**Who did this?**" When they carefully investigated, they were told, "**Gideon son of Joash did it.**" ³⁰ The men of the town demanded of Joash, "**Bring out your son. He must die, because he has broken down Baal's altar and cut down the Asherah pole beside it.**" ³¹ But Joash replied to the hostile crowd around him, "**Are you going to plead Baal's cause? Are you trying to save him? Whoever fights for him shall be put to death by morning! If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar.**"

Now what is remarkable here is that apparently Gideon's father had had a complete change of heart. It was, after all, his altar that was torn down. But here

he argues for his son and does so in a manner that prevails. This leads to a renaming of Gideon in verse 32.

^{NIV} **Judges 6:32**...So that day they called Gideon "**Jerub-Baal**," saying, "**Let Baal contend with him,**"⁹ because he broke down Baal's altar. ³³ Now all the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples joined forces and crossed over the Jordan and camped in the Valley of Jezreel.

Now the name Gideon means "**hewer**". That is, it means one who "**hews**" or "**cuts down**" which is certainly what Gideon did to the Asherah pole and the altar of Baal. But after Gideon's father's response he is renamed and his new name Jerub-Baal means something like "**Let Baal fight with him**" or "**Let Baal defend himself against Him**" or something like that. It is making a point that Gideon is not afraid to go against Baal and that Baal will have to do something about Gideon himself if he is able.

Now in verse 34, we see Gideon gathering to himself an army to fight against the Midianites.

^{NIV} **Judges 6:34**...Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him. ³⁵ He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, calling them to arms, and also into Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, so that they too went up to meet them.

Now what is funny about this particular section is that in the very next verse we see Gideon having another doubt...doubt number five...look at verse 36.

^{NIV} **Judges 6:36**...Gideon said to God, "**If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised--**" ³⁷ **look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you**

will save Israel by my hand, as you said." ³⁸ And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew-- a bowlful of water.

So that settled everything for Gideon...right? Well, no it did not. Look at verse 30...and doubt number seven.

^{NIV} **Judges 6:39**...Then Gideon said to God, "**Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece. This time make the fleece dry and the ground covered with dew.**" ⁴⁰ That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew.

That makes six doubts altogether. Now what we are going to see next week in chapter 7, is the actual military conquest and victory led by Gideon and you know what is funny about the story next week is that right before the battle, right before the time to attack, Gideon become terribly fearful all over again and yet the Lord is still going to say to him, "**Gideon... let me answer that doubt too.**"

Seven doubts...seven doubts in row in the life of Gideon¹⁰.

Now what does that tell us about the Lord? I think if anything, it says that the Lords knows that we are but dust...that we are weak and need to have our faith propped up on every side...to be constantly reassured of His kindness and His kind intention toward us¹¹. That is, of course, one of the reasons that we observe weekly communion here in this place. We do it because we constantly need to have our faith propped up...to be reminded of His love for us and this (the Lord's Supper) helps to do that. We taste the bread and drink the cup to be reminded of His great covenantal promises and love for us...we do that because we need God's reaffirmation of His love and kind intention toward us.

Now in preparation for next week, I would like you to read chapter seven in advance. Do you have any questions or comments? Alright let's pray.

¹ J. Cheryl Exum, "The Centre Cannot Hold: Thematic and Textual Instabilities in Judges" in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* Exum, J. Cheryl. "The Centre Cannot Hold: Thematic and Textual Instabilities in Judges" in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* Vol. 52 Number 2, July 1990, 412. Exum writes, "Although no neatly progressive pattern emerges, a turning -point occurs with Gideon. Gideon and the important figures after him reveal disturbing weaknesses, if not serious faults."

² Exum, 413. Exum writes, "Judges begins with a double introduction, balanced by a double conclusion often misleadingly called 'appendixes' or 'additions.' Though Caananites are (surprisingly) still in the land after Joshua's death, events begin propitiously with YHWH promising victory to Judah...Successes and failures intermingle, but the overall impression is increasingly negative, a pattern mirrored in the Book of Judges as a whole."

³ Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit and Tremper Longman III, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 468. "The positive theme of the book of Judges is balanced by the negative theme of national apostasy and failings in the lives of some of the judges themselves. The motif of blindness is one of the image patterns by which the recurring cycle of self-destruction is presented. The cycle of disobedience and punishment (*see* Crime and Punishment) is brought on by chosen blindness to the Deuteronomic law. Throughout the book of Judges, the people do evil in the sight of the Lord (Judg 2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1). In other words, they do what is right in their own eyes (Judg 17:6). The blindness of the leaders does not happen at once but only gradually throughout the narrative. Beginning with Gideon, each judge appears on the scene just a little more blind and oblivious than the preceding judge. Gideon leads Israel into idolatry; Jephthah sacrifices his daughter; Samson sacrifices himself; the Levite sacrifices his wife, which becomes the catalyst for Israel to nearly destroy the entire tribe of Benjamin. The characterization of the judges becomes a literary image to portray people who lose sight of God by doing what is right in their own eyes."

⁴ Paul J. Tanner. "The Gideon Narrative as the Focal Point of Judges" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 April 1992, 146-61. "In relation to the book as a whole, Gideon receives attention as the focal point because he represents a significant shift in the "quality" of the judges that served Israel. A progressive deterioration begins with Othniel and continues through Samson. Othniel was almost an idealized judge, and Samson was a debauched self-centered individual. God used each judge, whether strong or weak, to accomplish His sovereign will and effect deliverance for the theocratic nation. Gideon, on the other hand, stands somewhere between these two extremes and represents the primary turning point from the "better" judges to the "weaker" ones."

⁵ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Volume 2...Joshua-2 Samuel*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1984), 329. "These ravines, caves, and fortresses were not merely to serve as hiding-places for the Israelitish fugitives, but much more as places of concealment for their possessions and necessary supplies. For the Midianites, like genuine Bedouins, thought far more of robbing and plundering and laying waste the land of the Israelites, than of exterminating the people themselves."

⁶ Andrew R. Fausset, *Judges* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 105. "Joash's youngest son, fifth of Israel's judges *threshed* rather" was knocking out" with a stick, *wheat by the wine-press*...usually they threshed on an area of hard earth, a 'threshing floor' in the open field, with threshing carriages armed with teeth, or else oxen which trod out the grain. Only the very poor knocked out the grain of their gleanings with a stick (Ruth ii. 17). That Gideon was obliged to knock out his little grain in the wine-press, a pit sunk in the ground or hewn in the rock, implies the soreness of the Midianite oppression], *to hide* (it) *i.e.*, remove it with all possible speed "from the face of" (Heb.)] *the Midianites*."

⁷ Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Judges* in the Bible Speaks Today Series edited by J.A. Motyer (Downer's Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 278-9. "To judge by appearances, Gideon is anything but a 'mighty man of valor' as he skulks in the winepress. However, some commentators take it that the angel is speaking actual truth. Gideon needs only to have his courage coaxed out into the open.

⁸ John Marshall Lang & Thomas Kirk, *Studies in the Book of Judges* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Klock & Klock Christian Publishers, Inc., 1983 a reprint), 110. "Gideon obeys the instructions. But, as well he might, he obeys with fearfulness. He is the one man against the world. He is virtually severing the future from the past-marching into a future that is full of peril and difficulty. And the first consequence of the step to be taken will be the wrath of his fellow-villagers, the indignation, perhaps the fierce retribution, of his father's house. But he has put his hand to the task, and he cannot look back. We imagine the trepidations of the morning next after the night in which the Voice of the Lord found him."

⁹ Daniel A. Block, "Will the Real Gideon Please Stand Up? Narrative Style and Intention in Judges 6-9 in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40/3 (1997): 360. Block proposes that Jerub-Baal was Gideon's real name and that Gideon was his nickname given after hacking down the Aserah pole and tearing down Baal's altar on his father's property. He writes, "First, nowhere else does *yārûb* ever occur as the jussive of *rîb*, "to strive, contend." Second, by adding *bô*, "against him," the interpretation offered by Joash is in fact the opposite of what this form of theophoric name would have meant to a person not familiar with this story. Jerubbaal is a verbal sentence name following the prevalent predicate-subject order with "Baal" functioning as the subject of the verb "will contend". Normally names of this sort lauded the deity for action on behalf of the one who gave or bore the name, in which case the name reflects Jonah's fundamentally proBaalistic stance. Indeed, judging from the following narrative in this book and the references to this man in later writings it seems that Jerubbaal was in fact his real name (1 Sam 12:11). But later horror at the name is reflected in the historian's deliberate corruption of it to Jerubbesheth, "Let shame contend."

¹⁰ Exum, 416. Exum writes, "No character in the book receives more divine assurance than Gideon and no one displays more doubt. Gideon is significantly, the only judge to whom God speaks directly, though this privilege does not allay his faintheartedness."

¹¹ William J. Dumbrell, "'In Those Days There Was No King in Israel; Every Man Did What Was Right in His Own Eyes.' The Purpose of the Book of Judges Reconsidered." In *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 25 (1983), 30. Dumbrell believes the book was written in exile to show that Israel's existence was not dependant upon king or judge but on YHWH alone.