

Judges Chapter 6- John Karmelich

1. How do you know when God calls you to do something? Should you test that message to see if it is from God? What if what you believe what God calls you to do goes against what's popular and what people around you don't want you to do? These are the type of questions the next judge we get in the book of Judges must face. His name is Gideon. How he actually acts as a judge is the topic of the next lesson. Chapter 6 focuses on how and why God called him to be a judge. The next two chapters will focus on how Gideon acted as a judge. In Chapter 6, the big questions to ponder are, "How do I know when and how God's calling me to go do something? How do I know that message is from God? Can I force Him to talk to me? (No.) Still, if I believe He wants me to do some specific project, how do I develop the courage to do what I believe He's calling me to do? Is it ok to test to see whether or not that message is from God?"
 - a) Before I get into the specifics of how all of this worked for Gideon, "judge of the moment" let's focus on us. How do we know when God calls us to do something?
 - b) For starters, "God is God", He has every right to do nothing we'd consider significant or lead millions to people to Him. I'm positive our rewards in heaven are never based on the number of people we save or lead to Him, but strictly on whether or not we are doing His will at any given moment. I'd argue a woman who God called to faithfully raise a child in Him may have the same reward in heaven as someone who's lead millions of people to Christ. Again, it's not the size of the ministry. It is about our willingness to let God be in charge of every aspect of our lives and do what it is He wants us to do.
 - c) That leads to the big question: So what is God's will for our lives? My favorite answer is what is it we can't stand not doing? What is it we love to do anyway and how can we use the gifts He's given us for His glory? How do we combine what we're good at in a way to make a difference for Him? Obviously the answer is different for everyone. The question is are we making the effort in the first place? Are we seeking His will in good times and in when life isn't going well? For example, many of you know I got really sick for two months and I had to put this ministry on hold. God effectively told me, "I don't love you because you're making a difference for Me. I love you just because I do. Therefore, trust Me through this time and when it's over you can return to do what you love to do because you love to use your time to make a difference for Me."
 - d) OK John, good for you. What about the rest of us? First, God will never call us to do a thing that violates His word. Take a moment, to look at your situation. God has the power to change any situation. Maybe He wants to change it or maybe not. A good prayer here is, "Heavenly Father, you know my situation. What would You like me to do as to use the most valuable thing you've given me, my time to make a difference for You?" God will not audible tell you an answer, but if we're willing to surrender our lives to Him, He loves if we'll let Him be in charge and use our lives for His glory.
 - e) What about the practical stuff? Don't the bills need to be paid and our homes cleaned? I'm not arguing against that. Over and above that, ask God to show you how we can use our lives to make a difference for Him. A famous 19th Century pastor told a railroad worker, how to be a good witness for Jesus, "If you like being a railroad worker, then be a witness for Jesus as a railroad worker". The point is simply to use our lives as they are to go make a difference for Him in this world. That's why God made us in the first place. What about the majority of people who ignore God that way? God didn't call all people to go make a difference for Him, but if you're convinced that Jesus is God and died for all your sins, then whether you like it or not, you've been called. Deal with it. You don't need a special feeling, it happened. Accept it and use your life to make a difference for Him.
 - f) What about testing God? In this story, the main character has his doubts that God can use him in a way to make a difference for Him. Is it ok to test God that way?

- g) Commentators are mixed. Some argue that God made it clear to the main character of the will of God and the fact He tested God shows a lack of faith. Others argue that because he had a lack of faith God "worked on his level" to increase that faith.
 - h) That leads me to the topic of "boldness" for God. Let's be honest, to use our lives to make a difference for Jesus goes against the grain of society. We're going to be put down for the effort. People will say negative things to us behind our back or to our face! So how do we have boldness to make a difference? The answer is we depend on His power. In the early chapters of the book of Acts, the church prayed for boldness for the disciples. My point is we don't make a difference by willpower. We make a difference by relying on His power to make that difference. The main character of this story made excuses and lacked at times boldness to do God's will. We'll read of God working on His level and at times having the boldness to make a difference for Him. If God calls us to do something, a way we know if He did, the results over time will be what God desires. Did I have success overnight in what God called me to do? Of course not. But I loved to do it and over time, I could see it all was God's will despite the spiritual and physical battles I've had over the years.
2. OK, enough about you and me. Time to discuss the main character of this story and why it's part of the bible for us to learn.
- a) The story opens after the death of the last Israelite judge Deborah. The Israelites turned to idols again and God made life rough for them. Why did they turn from God? Because to put it simply, "sin is tempting". The desire for fame, riches, sex and stuff is the same today as it was then, and the local deities promised those things if the Israelites turned to them.
 - b) What we also learn is God is a jealous God. Once we're one of His, He fights to bring us back to Him. That's why God allowed foreign nations (in this case east of Israel) to invade and make life horrid for the Israelites.
 - c) Next let's remember who "judges" were. They weren't perfect people. They messed up as they lacked trust in God themselves. God picked them because He picked them. Why He picked you or me can't be explained, we must simply accept it. It's as if God loves to go in many cases out of His way to pick the least likely of people to make a difference for Him, if for no other reason than to show He's God, He's in charge and we must accept it.
 - d) During this time when an enemy of Israel made life miserable, the text states that some unnamed prophet makes it obvious to the Israelites that they've turned from God and that is why they're suffering so bad.
 - e) Then the rest of the chapter focuses on a man named Gideon. We read he was working to make food in a way to hide it from Israel's enemies. We read he was from one of twelve tribes of Israel and Gideon states in effect, "I'm nothing special".
 - f) That's when God went to work to prove that "God decides who's special and who isn't!"
 - i) An angel shows up in human form. Gideon suspects he's an angel and to test the theory, Gideon makes this man some food. The angel made it instantly disappear and then the angel disappeared. This was to clue Gideon in, who he's talking to!
 - ii) Then God communicates to Gideon that God wants to use him. God tells Gideon to destroy an altar made to a false god. Because of the vision and the fact God did give Gideon the boldness to do this, he destroyed the false altar and even offered a bull as a sacrifice to pull down the altar to the idol.
 - iii) Gideon's father speaks a bit about how the Israelites should worship God and his son did the right thing. Despite the fact the townsfolk wanted to kill Gideon for this act, God worked through him to the right thing as that act showed the locals that God is working through Gideon to lead them to a relationship with God again. Gideon's father built the altar and love for his son turned him to God!
 - g) The final step was the famous "fleece" test. This is where Gideon asked for a pile of wheat to be dry while the ground is wet (God made it so) and then the opposite. God worked on Gideon's level to trust Him to be the next judge in Israel. OK then, time for details.

3. Chapter 6, Verse 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.
- a) OK John, we're curious what's going on here? Why did God allow the Israelites to go into the hands of their enemies and why should I care? So glad you asked.
 - i) As I said in the introduction, "Sin is tempting, for a lack of a better term." What we don't realize at times is that when we're Christians, God won't let us get away with get away with sin. It doesn't mean we can't sin. It doesn't mean we won't suffer in our sins. It simply means in effect that God's "tougher on His" than He is on those who don't believe in Him because He expects us to be a good witness for Him!
 - ii) In Chapter 5, the judge of that day was a woman named Deborah. I suspect that it has been seven years since she died. So why did the Israelites who probably knew their history turn from God? The local deities promised financial success, and even free cheap sex by turning to their god. The false gods had visual reminders of how "real they seem" by idols being made to them.
 - iii) So why does God hate visual reminders of His existence? Wouldn't it be easier for us to be good witnesses if such reminders existed? Those reminders are around us if we think about it. If we look at the world around us and appreciate the beauty of nature or stare at the night sky, God's work is visible everywhere. The reason one of the 10 Commandments forbids statues to God is He wants us to look up to Him for guidance and not an idol for good luck. God is here to save us from sin and He wants us to be a witness for Him. God's not here to "improve our golf score".
 - b) Anyway, the Israelites back then were getting their focus off of God and onto things that would make them rich or satisfy their desires. Therefore He wanted to get their attention and let them suffer for violating one of His commandments. If nothing else it's a reminder that God calls us to obey His Commandments. Not to earn our salvation, but to remind us that He's called us to be a living witness for Him. When we turn from that, He will allow us to suffer with the goal of getting our focus back upon Him.
 - c) For those who like a time reference, it's now been about 200 years since the Israelites first came in the land and destroyed Jericho. Therefore, this is about 1,200 BC.
 - d) OK then, back to the story:
4. Verse 2: Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds.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.
- a) OK, who is Midian and who are the Amalekites and again, why should I care?
 - i) The short version is the Midians lived east of Israel in what is Jordan today. The Amalakites were wanderers over the Middle East and had reputations as thieves.
 - ii) The Israelites defeated the Midianites in battle when they were working their way from Egypt to Israel. (Numbers 31:7-18).
 - iii) God also told Moses that the Israelites would have war with the Amalekites from generation to generation. (Exodus 17:8).
 - iv) Neither one of these nations are around today. So why should I care about this if it is not an issue today?
 - v) First, the reason God condemned the Amalekites is it representing the fact that we are to fight sin "from generation to generation" and that's the temptation to sin!
 - vi) As to the Midianites, it's a reminder that God can and does want us to battle things that we think are bigger than we can handle.
 - vii) Let me explain. When you read the text, what is obvious is Israel's enemies greatly outnumbered them. So how does God want us to face problems bigger than we can handle? Thought you'd never ask!

- b) The point of these verses is that the Israelites were focused on their problems and not on God. Did these people outnumber the Israelites? I'm positive of that. Were their weapons better? Probably. The text said the Israelites suffered at their hands. The text states these people would steal the crops the Israelites planted and took all their animals. This means the Israelites had to hide for their lives and had minimal food to live upon.
 - c) OK John, we can read. What does this have to do with us? One of the bible promises for Christians is bad things happen we're making a difference for Jesus. Why? Because demons want to delay as long as possible Jesus' return. They work against us when we in any capacity act as a witness for Jesus. Over and above that, bad things happen. We may get into a car accident or age catching up with us. The question is when we're facing some sort of situation bigger than we can handle, the first thing, not the last thing is to turn back to God in prayer and ask for His guidance as to what to do. Often God allows bad things to occur just so it drives us to Him! Sometimes things occur just because they do. When it comes, the answer of course is to seek His guidance and then do what is the logical step to help deal with the problems. Be willing to let others minister to you as opposed to making a difference for others. That's part of being a good witness too.
 - d) In this case, the oppression got the Israelites to turn back to God. This caused God to do a great sense of miracles that we'll see in the next few chapters. Why? Because God desires us to be a good witness to the world around us. The "thieves" in this story get theirs. It is another example that there are consequences for our actions. Yes a lot of people get away with stuff in this lifetime, but there is a God who judges all people fairly.
 - e) So should I pray for a miracle in horrid times? Sure. What we have to remember is God's in charge and He has every right to say no. When I was in horrid pain a few months back, I would yell out in pain a handful of times per day. God never did a great miracle, but He did get me through that period and it worked out for His glory! What about people who get killed due to the horrors of others? Nobody ever said this life is fair. If there's no next life, then yes it's very unfair. If we're going to live forever in His presence, then suffering in this lifetime is nothing versus eternity. For what its worth, I've watched many a person get saved based on the testimony of Christians killed by evil events. To those who die say from cancer, again, being a good witness for Jesus through it and through the pain makes one a great witness for Jesus despite the pain.
 - f) OK enough lecturing on having a good attitude through hard times, back to the Israelites:
5. Verse 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.
- a) One of the lessons one sees over and over again in the bible is 1) Look at my problem that is overwhelming or 2) look to God for guidance. Does this mean if I need a million dollars to solve my problem God's going to bail me out? Of course not? At the same time, I have seen some amazing things of people who're really suffering and hungry and help came to help them out. I never put it past God to do anything. We can pray for a miracle but God is the one who says yes or no. Also, we can't bargain with God. We can't say if we do this or that God then owes us! The truth is God owes us nothing. He does things for us simply because He loves us. It's especially true for new believers as God works to increase faith as to do His will. We'll see some of that here in this chapter.
 - b) In the meantime, these verses paint the picture of just how much the Israelites suffered as they turned their backs on God. The good news is they realized their situation can only be better with God's guidance. What I wonder is why the seven-year period? They must have figured out "Day 1" they were messing up. I wonder if it took that long to realize the problem or for word to spread before they collectively cried out to Him.
 - c) Anyway, time to see what God did because collectively they cried out to Him. This shows that God does care about not just our salvation, but our witness for Him. Let's read on:

6. Verse 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."
- a) We have an unnamed prophet in Verse 7. This prophet wasn't a judge, just someone who was given a message by God and was told to spread that message all over Israel.
 - b) Why this guy? The answer is God picks who God picks and we must accept it.
 - c) One of the fascinating things to me is that a recurring message over and over again in the Old Testament is the fact that God lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Of all miracles why is that one emphasized? Think of Egypt as being the world. It's the idea that God separated us from the world to be a living witness for Him! God chose the Israelites to be His! This is a case where God says, "I chose you, deal with it". The same way God calls you and me to be a witness for Him, He called them and emphasizes that fact here.
 - d) Let me ask the classic question: How do we know God calls us? If you believe Jesus died for every sin you'll ever commit and dedicated your life to serving Him then forget about feelings, you've been called, period. The big question is do we want to answer that call?
 - e) Then God reminds the Israelites that it is He who gave them that land and a requirement He made is that the Israelites are not to worship any other god. That was the lecture that I gave earlier how the local deities appeal to power, success and fame but in the end do not deliver. God seems pretty ticked off here about that. He allowed all sorts of suffering just to get the Israelites to listen to Him. This means that yes, God will allow His people to go through horrid things if that's what it takes to have a relationship with Him!
 - f) Let me talk about prophets for a moment. It's not a switch one turns on and off. It's just a person God uses to deliver a message or a series of messages. This verse teaches us not all of the prophets of the bible are named. Keep in mind the book of Judges was not written until after the 400-year period of Judges was over. It may be a simple case that the name was not recorded. If God wanted us to know the name, it'd be stated.
 - g) With that said, it's time to move on to the main character of the chapter, Gideon, who will go on to be the next judge in Israel in Chapter 7 and 8. Chapter 6 is the background story of how God not only called, Him but encouraged Him to take on tasks that threatened his life and made him a good witness for God!
7. Verse 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."
- a) Here we get the first big plot twist. All of a sudden an angel shows up. Notice the angel is not whacking Gideon on the head saying, "God called you to lead an army against Israel's enemies so stop standing there and get going!"
 - b) Instead the angel sat under a tree and apparently watched Gideon. Let me get out of the way the fact that some Christian scholars argue that this angel is an appearance of Jesus in the Old Testament. It's a classical debate among bible scholars and I won't solve it!
 - c) I'll come back to the angel in the moment. First, notice what Gideon was doing. When one harvests wheat, one has to separate the valuable part from a worthless part. The way it is done is one would throw up it up in the air. The worthless part would blow away and the valuable part would fall back to the ground. However, the Israelites were living in fear of their enemies stealing their crop. Therefore, Gideon was doing this in a pit used to stomp grapes to make wine. I'm guessing it may even have occurred in a cave. Gideon is typical of the Israelites being scared of their enemies. He worked in secret so Israel's enemies did not find out what they were doing.

- d) That leads me back to the angel. He sat there watching this occur as opposed to whacking Gideon on the head to say, "God called you to lead a victory, let someone else sift wheat!"
 - e) The text also mentions Gideon's father, Joash the Abiezrite. We'll get to him in Verse 30.
 - i) The point is this angel was sitting on the family's land and all the angel said here is that Gideon is a mighty warrior.
 - ii) A couple of thoughts. First, grasp the idea that God works on our level. If later in our life, God wants to use us for a great deed, but at this moment in our life, what we mainly have is doubts about God because let's face it, our problems are huge as we don't see God doing anything about it. I'm sure Gideon wanted a great miracle like say all of Israel's enemies dying all at once.
 - iii) So why does God work the way He does? Why pick this guy? Why pick you and me? The answer is God loves to work through people to increase their faith in who He is. God loves to take "foolish things" like raising up a nobody to defeat an issue that's too big for us to handle. He's working at His pace on His timing with a goal of Gideon being a great judge. Did God know all of this would occur? Of course. Yet God loves to work with individuals who are willing to trust Him with the goal of increasing their faith and trusting Him more.
 - iv) OK then, why hasn't an angel sat under a tree at my place? Maybe he has and we are not aware of it. God does not call all people to be "judges". God has plans for all who trust in Him. The secret is to do what one enjoys doing and has a talent to do and combine those to make a difference for God. He doesn't always lead us by some great message. Often it's trial and error. Often it's seeing the situation around us and figuring out a logical way we can make a difference for God.
 - v) OK, enough setting the scene. Let's get back to the story.
8. Verse 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."
- a) OK, time for Midian to moan and complain about the problems at hand. Gideon isn't sure that whoever he's talking to is an angel. He thought this is just someone who knows about God. Midian is saying, "Hey, if God is there, why isn't He doing some great miracle as like the time He brought us out of Egypt? Why has God allowed us to suffer so badly?"
 - b) Think how often we've prayed to God, "Hey why are you allowing me to suffer so bad? I don't want all this pain. Hey God, why aren't you doing something about this?" God can respond, I am doing something, My way on My timing. Our job's simply to make the best decisions we can given the situation in front of us. In other words, we let God do what He wants to do and we do the best we can given the situation at hand.
 - c) Little did Gideon know the plans God has for Him. The same applies for us. God doesn't "skywrite" His plans for us. Our job is to obey, follow His word and be a good witness for Him as we go about our lives. However, sometimes God does speak in a mighty way as to accomplish some mission. The point is God's in charge, we must accept it and if He's got a message for us, as He did for Gideon here He'll communicate it His way on His timing.
 - d) OK then, onto God's response through the angel.
9. Verse 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?"
- a) The essential point is God is calling Gideon to lead a fight to win a war against enemies of Israel who are stealing what belongs to them.
 - b) Now comes the way most of us act. Very few people have the boldness to say, "OK Lord, if that's what You want, tell me what to do next, I'll do what you ask." Instead to often we make excuses. Moses Himself complained to God that He's a bad speaker. God made Him the greatest leader in Israelite history. The point is if God calls us, He'll enable us to act.

10. Verse 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." ¹⁶ The LORD answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together."
- a) It's so easy to laugh at excuses when it's not us. The God who created everything just told Gideon he's going to win a war. Like when Moses said, "But I don't speak well", (That's from Exodus 4:10.) we're reading of excuses. Before you laugh, ask yourself what excuse have you made when you have been asked to do something for someone else!
 - b) Let me discuss volunteering versus doing something out of guilt. First I hold the view that everybody has to do their share! Nobody has the spiritual gift of "taking the trash out". To make a difference for Jesus sometimes means doing things we aren't crazy about doing. I would argue over and above that, the way we tell when He calls us to do something, is to ask, 1) Do I have a gift to do that, 2) Can I make a difference for Jesus by doing that? Ask yourself when you look back at your life, do you want to list all the things that made a big difference in life or how much money you made? One of the most common things said at the end of many lives is "I should have spent more time with those I love versus trying to make money". That's a simple example of doing things to make a difference for Jesus!
 - c) Meanwhile, God's working on Gideon's level. God's reassuring Gideon despite the fact he thinks he's a "nobody", God picked him and he's got to deal with it. For the bible novices, Manasseh is one of the 12 tribes of Israel. The nation was divided into 12 tribes based on 12 half brothers from one man. Each tribe has it's own territory in Israel. Even today, no Israelite knows what tribe their from but Israel as a territory is still divided that way. We see Gideon saying, "Hey, I'm nothing special and my family's nothing special!" All that means is God can and does pick anyone and none of us believers are "nobodies".
 - d) OK then, how do I know when God's picked me? Again, it's not a matter of waiting for a voice. I've heard some amazing stories of God leading people that way, but I figure if He has got something to say to me, He'll make it obvious on His timing. In the meantime all I can do is use my life to make a difference for Him based on what's logical in front of me!
11. Verse 17: Gideon replied, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me." 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."
- a) Meanwhile Gideon still had his doubts. I suspect the angel looked like a normal human. I think Gideon heard, "This guy tells me God wants to use me. How do I know for sure that this man is from God?"
 - b) My first thought as I read this verse was "Return from what?" Here is this man claiming a message from God. Yet, I have to go prepare an offering for Him? Why not just start on what He wants? One has to think "Jewish". One does not approach a holy God without a proof of loyalty and a desire to serve Him. We're going to learn later in this chapter that Gideon's father built an altar to "Baal". Therefore, I suspect Gideon felt guilty and desired to prove his loyalty to God. Therefore Gideon went to prepare an offering to God.
12. Verse 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.
- a) Apparently Gideon knew how to cook. He killed a lamb, made bread and cooked some "lamb stew". Remember the Israelites were being robbed of their crops and animals, so Gideon was taking a chance with what was assumedly a goat that was a rare thing. He believed that this man was from God enough to make the "lamb stew".
 - b) Notice that Gideon was also convinced this was a man and not an angel. Can angels eat? I have no idea? Revelation mentions us eating in heaven. I admit I've thought about that. I suspect we eat and it disappears in our stomach so there is no sewer system in heaven. I may be wrong, but I spend way too much time thinking about those things.
 - c) Meanwhile, it's time for Gideon to serve the stew!

13. Verse 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. 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!"
- a) A few pages back, I stated that many scholars argue the angel's a preincarnate appearance of Jesus. One of the basis for that argument is that the most holy name of God is used, or "Jehovah" as it's sometime spelled. When you see "LORD" in capitals, that's what it means.
 - b) Anyway, Gideon laid the lamb stew and the bread on a rock. Instead of eating it, the angel took a staff he was holding, touched the food and fire appeared out of nowhere so that all of it instantly disappeared.
 - c) OK then, what's the deal? Remember the angel could have zapped Gideon by saying, I've been sent from God, listen up! Instead, God worked on Gideon's level and did a cute little miracle of food instantly disappearing to prove the guy Gideon's speaking too is in fact an angel sent from God. One of the things one must grasp in life is that God likes to go out of His way to do strange things to get our attention. Sometimes I suspect this is God's sense of humor as if to say to the angels, "Watch how I work here, let's see how He reacts!"
 - d) Bottom line is it worked. The disappearing food convinced Gideon that he was speaking to an angel. Again we got a strange story to convince Gideon he's talking to God's rep.
14. Verse 23: But the LORD said to him, "Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die." 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.
- a) Gideon just figured out he wasn't talking to a person, but an angel. Let's be honest, that is enough to scare anyone. Notice that Gideon had enough of a Jewish upbringing that he is aware what an angel is! Then the angel calms Gideon down and says in effect, "Relax, it's going to be ok, you'll not die because you're sacrifice in this tough time is accepted!"
 - b) Let me quickly talk about God and sacrifices. Obviously I don't believe Christians have to earn their salvation or prove their worth to God. We're picked because we are. The point of a sacrifice is our way of "putting our money where our mouth is!" I'm not impressed by someone who says they're Christian. I'm impressed with someone who's done something about it. In that sense a sacrifice impresses me. When we give or volunteer at church, that is an example of our own sacrifice. Making lamb stew is not required for salvation!
 - c) Gideon was so impressed that God picked him, he took the next step and built an altar to God. Don't take that lightly. We're about to read how the Israelites looked at altars to the God of the universe when they're turning to idols. The text says it "stands to this day". It is believed that Samuel organized the book after the 400-year period of Judges ended. The reference to "this day" simply is the time when Samuel lived.
 - d) So should we build altars? Church building are in effect altars. The "church" technically is the people not the buildings. But the altars are effectively a place to gather to worship the God of the Universe. So in that sense, I don't have a problem with altars.
15. Verse 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."
- a) I can just see Gideon at this point thinking, "Ok now what"? I made the lamb stew for this angel. I built an altar to God. He said He wants me a lead an army, but how do I do that? What is the next step? I find with God, it's "always our move". He made it obvious what is the next thing to do. Stop and think what God wants of Christians, to be a good witness to those called to serve the living God. By telling Gideon to tear down an altar in Israel to a false God is a logical next step in this progress.

- b) By the way, some translations imply there are two bulls and the 2nd one is specified. This translation in my opinion is better, as it specifies which bull is the do the "dirty work" as it is to be used to tear down an altar and being rewarded by being sacrificed to God.
 - c) Keep in mind that most of the animals were stolen. I'd bet this cow was well hidden.
 - d) Now notice that Gideon's father was the one who built the altar to Baal. For those who do not know "Asherah" was a female deity in the worship of Baal and phallic symbols were a common site in these altars. It's a simple reminder how the appeal to cheap sex was a part of the worship of Baal.
 - e) Think about this from Gideon's perspective. He just got a visit from God's angel. His own father built an altar to Baal. Having God tell you to tear down something your father built had to require a lot of faith on Gideon's part. Gideon used the bull to pull down the altar to this false god. Then Gideon built an altar to the true God and sacrificed the bull on that altar as if to make a public proclamation that "God is God, deal with it". In fact the wood of the Asherah pole was used for the fire. God makes it possible to provide the resources to accomplish what it is He desires us to accomplish!
16. Verse 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.
- a) First the text says Gideon had 10 servants. Was he rich? Doubt it. The Israelites suffered at the hands of their enemies. What I suspect it means is that Gideon found ten men who believed a statue to a false god in Israel was wrong and they helped Gideon to remove it. I wonder if these ten men believed the story of the angel and that's why they helped. This is also a sign that Gideon had leadership qualities as others followed his lead.
 - b) However, a lot of people in that town wanted to worship Baal. Again, sin is appealing. It says that this act occurred after dark out of fear of retaliation. It shows that Gideon has to deal with real fear. Again, it's God working on our level to make a difference for Him. The act was successful as we read here.
17. Verse 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."
- a) Now comes the consequences: Notice God didn't zap dead all these people who are angry for this altar to a false god being torn down. God loves all people and wants all people to turn to Him. Will all people? Of course not. However, God wanted to build Gideon's faith and even change the faith of Gideon's father!
 - b) Stop and consider that the chapter opened with the fact the Israelites turned from God. As we read of life in a small town in Northern Israel, we can see how much the Israelites had turned from God when they made this statue and were mad at whoever did it!
 - c) Anyway, the townsfolk asked around and "the jig was up". Someone confessed that it was Gideon who lead the effort to do this! Apparently Gideon's father who feared for the life of his son, put him in the house. (See Verse 25). As all parents know, blood is thicker than water, and Gideon's father worked to protect his son, even though "dad" built this.
 - d) If you want proof that God wanted to use Gideon to convert people back to God, notice it was his father that converted. That is coming up in the next verse.
 - i) Time for a quick sidebar. One of the hardest people to convert is one's own family. Our parents changed our diapers. We're going to lecture them about God? Jesus said that no man is a prophet in his home town (Luke 4:24). I pray daily for all my family members that don't believe in Jesus, but I figure if Jesus couldn't convince His own brothers that He was the Messiah prior to the resurrection, how can I tell my family members Jesus is God? Yes I pray for them and try to be a witness. The most important thing is to pray for their hearts to be open to His truth!

18. Verse 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." ³² So that day they called Gideon "Jerub-Baal," saying, "Let Baal contend with him," because he broke down Baal's altar.
- a) I have to admit, I love this little part. Here is Gideon's father, who worshiped Baal to the point he built an altar to him. Maybe the father heard about Gideon's angel encounter and it changed him. Don't know. I just know he turned from Baal to God in these verses. He stopped the crowd from wanting to kill his son by pleading the fact, "If Baal cared, let him defend this!"
 - b) This little scene is a good lesson on how to calm a crowd! Preach what's right. Preach the truth of the bible. These people were raised with bible stories. They knew their ancestors came to this land and God was going to protect them. Sometimes it just takes someone to stand up for what is right to really change things!
 - c) I remember hearing a story from the Roman Empire a few centuries after Christianity was getting prominent in that culture. For centuries, the entertainment was to have Christians killed. It was to have slaves fight to the death. One man who stood up in the middle of an arena in Rome and essentially said, "Enough is enough". That practice died after that! My point is standing up for what is right will eventually change things. Maybe not today, but being willing to take a stand for God is always the right thing to do!
 - d) Now stop and think about the fact God didn't just "zap" the men who wanted the altar to be torn down. At the least, one person (Gideon's father) turned to God because of what he said and maybe others turned their hearts to God. Remember that the only unforgivable sin is a lifetime denial that Jesus is God. Turning to Him can happen at any time and any place and that's a point of these little verses.
19. Verse 33: Now all the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples joined forces and crossed over the Jordan and camped in the Valley of Jezreel. 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.
- a) OK, we just finished the "little problem" of the Israelites in one town turning back to God in spite of the statue they made to an idol! They still have the much bigger problem of the people who outnumbered them greatly and were robbing them of their food!
 - b) Bottom line, is it's time for God to work, because they listened to the prophet who spoke earlier and people were recognizing that God is using Gideon to rescue them from all that oppression. It shows that sometimes all it takes is someone to take a stand for God. That act of boldness will cause others to say, "You're right God called us to conquer this land as well as protect us. Yes our enemies greatly outnumber us. When the Israelites first got to the promised land, I suspect they were outnumbered greatly as well. Many centuries later when David conquered all the lands around Israel, I'm sure there were many battles with the Israelites being outnumbered. My point is God will work with us to defeat issues that are much bigger than us.
 - c) OK then, let's say we're facing a huge problem. We have enemies far greater in number. It may be a case of huge debt and not being able to get out of it. As I said earlier, God is not a "genie in a bottle" to grant our wishes. Many a Christian was martyred to lead the way for others to be a witness for God. The goal of Christians in this life is to be a witness for Him no matter the consequences. When we face problems way too big for us to handle, do what we can, do what is logical (without violating biblical principals) and continue to be a good witness for God. In the next chapter, God's going to use a few hundred men to beat a much larger army. It's not saying to do anything foolish. It's saying what God wants to accomplish, He will on His timing, period.

- d) Meanwhile, back to Gideon. As he watched God give him the victory over the men that wanted to kill him, it "embolden" Gideon to want to take on Israel's enemies. Remember we can only do things for God by His power (think the Holy Spirit) working in us to what it is God wants us to do! First he called members of his town. That's the reference to those living in Abiezrites. However, with Gideon embolden by God, he took it one step further as to call men from three of the 12 tribes of Israel. Why not all the tribes? Don't know. I'd suspect he figured if God's going to help him, this is all he needed. For those who don't know, when the Israelites came into the land about 200 years ago, they numbered about 2,000,000 people based on statistics in the book of Numbers. I don't know Israel's numbers at this point in history. All I know is God picked Gideon and emboldened him with God's Spirit as to make a difference for Him.
 - e) OK, how do I get the Holy Spirit to embolden me? Great question. Pray for it. Tell God that you want to do His will. You want to surrender your life to His. Yes we still have to support the family and "take the trash out". God knows all of that. Still nothing He loves more than a willingness to surrender our lives to Him and trust in Him. He picks who He picks and we must accept that. At the same time, God's willing to use anyone willing to commit their lives to Him. To state a famous proverb, "God's not looking for ability, He's looking for availability!
 - f) Bottom line, Gideon got men from four of the 12 Israel tribes to follow him and take on all the raiding parties who suppressed them. Stop and think about the fact God used a bunch of farmers to take on professional soldiers! It shows that making a difference for God will make a difference no matter what we think of the situation.
 - g) Speaking of "thinking of the situation", I now present a famous bible story to consider:
20. Verse 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.
- a) Ok, what is fleece? The wool that covered a sheep. Gideon wanted to put God to the test! Gideon said in effect, "If the ground is dry the next morning and the fleece is all wet, then I will lead this army to go conquer the Midianites. On a foggy morning, or a rainy day, all of the ground will be wet. By having something wet and something dry, Gideon will see it as a sign from God to go ahead!
 - b) This story is known as "Gideon's fleece". A classic question in Judaism and Christianity is whether or not it is ok, to test God. Let's face it the angel came earlier in the story and told Gideon what to do. Gideon was convinced it was an angel. Was it a lack of faith here for this test? Many people argue it that way.
 - c) Stop and think about the situation. Gideon was well aware that Israel's enemies were far greater in number. I'm sure he was scared to death to take a bunch of farmers and go fight a large army of professional soldiers. Therefore, he still faced real fears that were right in front of him. Being scared is a natural thing to occur. Fear is the opposite of faith. If we focus on our fears, they will grow. If we focus on the fact God is greater than our fears, it is possible to overcome our fears!
 - d) Time to pause to discuss fears for a moment. Sometimes we need "baby steps". That just means we think, "For the next 10 seconds I'm not going to worry about that!" Nobody can control what happens to them in life. What we can control is our attitude! We can always choose our attitude at any given moment. Can we mess up? Of course. Do I mess up that way? All the time. God doesn't expect perfection. He expects trust in Him and an attitude to trust Him no matter what! Yes it takes practice, but we can overcome our fears if we're willing to trust Him through those fears! OK then, is it ok to test God? Again, it's a classic debate and good Christians come down on both sides of the debate.

- e) I will say that I'm positive God works on our level. Think about it: God does not reveal to us how long we're going to live or all that will happen to us in our lives. God asks that we trust Him through whatever we're going through. Therefore, if you're scared to take what is the next logical step, ask God for the strength and the boldness to do what He desires of us. I find that "baby Christians" tend to get more miracles that way as God is working on their faith to increase it in Him.
 - f) Anyway, the answer to the question of whether or not it was ok, is that God answered the request of Gideon and the wool was all wet and the ground was dry.
 - g) However, Gideon still lacked faith at this point and wanted to try the opposite:
21. Verse 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.
- a) Notice God didn't zap Gideon and say, "What does it take for you to trust Me?" If there's one thing I've learned in my life as a Christian is God "will do what it takes to help us to trust Him with our lives". Does God have limits in testing? Of course. Recall how Jesus told the Pharisee's that unless you see signs, you will not believe. (John 4:48). Therefore I would say there is a limit to God's patience in allowing tests, but if that's what we need to trust Him, He allows some testing in order to draw us closer to Him.
 - b) On that note, we finished the chapter. The next chapter talks about Gideon as he'll lead a great victory for the Israelites. Chapter 8 deals with mistakes He made as I suspect Gideon now had a big ego after God worked through him. However, those are the topics for the next lesson. It's time to wrap up this lesson on trusting God, increasing our faith and for us to have a willingness to use our lives for His glory. Let's close in prayer.
22. Heavenly Father, You've called us to use our lives to be a good witness for You. Help us to take the most valuable thing we own and use our time for Your glory! Fill us with your Spirit and give us the boldness to make a difference for You. Make it obvious to each of us how it is You want us to be a witness for You. Keep us strong against temptation and help us to turn to You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.