

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

JUDG. 6:11 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 valour. 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 shew 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.

The Call of Gideon

Lesson Text: Judges 6:11-24

Related Scriptures: Judges 6:1-40; Psalm 77:1-20; Joshua 1:1-9; Genesis 18:3-8

TIME: 1191 B.C. PLACE: Ophrah

GOLDEN TEXT—"Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour" (Judges 6:11-12).

Lesson Exposition

GIDEON'S DOUBT—Judg. 6:11-15

Concealment (Judg. 6:11). In the verses prior to this week's lesson text, we learn that Israel once again "did evil in the sight of the Lord" (vs. 1) and for seven years was oppressed by Midian. Because of Midian's attacks in the land, "Israel was greatly impoverished" (Judg. 6:6). Along with the Amalekites, the Midianites destroyed Israel's crops, making it even more difficult to feed their livestock (vs. 4). God planned to deliver Israel from Midian. He would do so by the hand of Gideon. Rather than thresh wheat on an easily seen hill, where the wind could quickly blow away the chaff, Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress, where his activity could be somewhat hidden from the marauding Midianites. Ophrah was a city in the fertile Jezreel Valley in northern Israel, near the border of Manasseh, but its exact location is unknown. Gideon's father was Joash the Abiezrite, who seems to have been the caretaker of the local Baal shrine (Judg. 6:25-27). Being identified as an Abiezrite means that he was a descendant of Joseph's son Manasseh (I Chron. 7:17-18). This tribe had been given an area west of the Jordan following Israel's conquest under Joshua (Josh. 17:2). In spite of his connection to Baal worship, Joash defended Gideon when his son's life was threatened by the incensed townspeople (Judg. 6:28-32).

Complaint (Judg. 6:12-13). It was while Gideon was threshing wheat that an angel of the Lord appeared to him. Concerning the identity of this heavenly being, there has been much discussion. Many have suggested that the Angel of the Lord was the preincarnate Son of God. The first words spoken by the Angel should have been reassuring to Gideon, but they were not. As far as Gideon was concerned, it did not appear as though God was with him or his people. Nor did Gideon see himself as a “mighty man of valour” (Judg. 6:12). Although Gideon did not see himself as such, this title nevertheless anticipated what he would become with the Lord’s help. Because of the situation in Israel at the time, Gideon raised a question that has been frequently voiced by suffering people: “If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?” (vs. 13). Gideon reminded the Angel of the miracles God had performed for Israel in the past, especially those related to the Exodus. This would have included the ten plagues and the parting of the Red Sea. Based on all this, Gideon concluded that God had forsaken his people. Apparently it did not enter his mind that they had forsaken the Lord and their current difficulties were in fact the result of their backsliding.

Commission (Judg. 6:14-15). The angel of the Lord commanded Gideon to go in the strength he had and promised. He would be God’s instrument of deliverance for Israel. Like others who have tried to excuse themselves from God’s call, Gideon felt unqualified for the task. This is not unlike some Christians who are either asked to do something for the Lord or sense an inward call to service but then try to talk themselves out of what they have been called to do. If God calls us, He will also equip us, as He did in Gideon’s case. Gideon appealed to the low status of his family as an excuse for not responding to God’s call. While the Bible reveals that God sometimes used people of high standing to accomplish His purposes, more often than not He used people who might be seen as the least likely to succeed (cf. I Cor. 1:26-30).

GIDEON’S REASSURANCE—Judg. 6:16-18

Success (Judg. 6:16). The promise to Gideon, “Surely I will be with thee” (Judg. 6:16), is one that all true believers should cling to. It is one thing to know that the Lord is with us in troubling circumstances, but it is a further blessing to know that we will be victorious.

In Gideon's situation, victory was assured. The Midianites would be defeated "as one man" (Judg. 6:16), that is, as if they were but one man, not the vast army they constituted. As described earlier, the Midianites "came as grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their camels were without number" (vs. 5).

Sign (Judg. 6:17-18). Gideon was still not convinced that what the Angel promised was going to actually occur. Because his faith was weak, he asked for a sign. Gideon asked the Angel to remain there while he prepared a "present" (vs. 18), that is, an offering, for him. In angelic appearances in Scripture, heavenly messengers do not often linger once they have delivered their message. This is somewhat different, however, as the Angel said, "I will tarry until thou come again."

GIDEON'S GIFT TO THE ANGEL—Judg. 6:19-21

Sacrifice (Judg. 6:19). Gideon prepared a common animal sacrifice of a young goat. Along with the meat, Gideon took a large quantity of flour and made some unleavened bread for his heavenly visitor. As in the Passover (Exod. 12:8), unleavened bread could be made quickly since it did not require yeast and thus waiting for it to rise. All this was brought to the Angel, who was still under the oak tree. Although we are not told, Gideon presumably expected the Angel to consume the offering he had prepared. On other occasions in the Bible, angels appeared in a more glorious form, eliciting fear from the people they visited. This is probably more like the time when the Lord and two angels appeared to Abraham (Gen. 18:1-3).

Splendor (Judg. 6:20-21). Probably much to the surprise of Gideon, the Angel instructed him to place the meat and bread upon "this rock," possibly part of the winepress. While Gideon may have expected the Angel to consume the offering, something unanticipated was about to occur in Gideon's presence. When the Angel touched the offering, something amazing happened. Fire came from the rock and consumed what Gideon had prepared. If Gideon was expecting them to have a conversation over dinner, that was not going to happen. "The fiery consumption of the meat and bread indicated the acceptance of Gideon's offering" (Barker and Kohlenberger, eds., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Abridged Edition, Zondervan).

GIDEON WORSHIPS THE LORD—Judg. 6:22-24

Perception (Judg. 6:22). With the sudden departure of the Angel, either by ascending into heaven or simply disappearing (vs. 21), Gideon was now convinced that he had been in the presence of a divine messenger. This lends support to the view that the Angel had appeared to Gideon incognito. Coming to this awareness brought great consternation to Gideon. As stated earlier, the presence of the Angel of the Lord was equivalent to the presence of the Lord Himself. That being so, this was usually interpreted as an ominous sign, possibly a deadly one. As God told Moses, “There shall no man see me, and live” (Exod. 33:20). This is no doubt the reason Isaiah thought his days were numbered after having a vision of God on His throne (Isa. 6:5).

Peace (Judg. 6:23-24). Exactly how the Lord spoke to Gideon is not stated, but He made it clear to Gideon his life would be preserved. Usually, the familiar “fear not” comes when an angel first appears; in this case, it came as a word of reassurance after the Angel’s departure. Moreover, the promise of “peace” was to rest upon Gideon. The Hebrew word is shalom, which means not only peace but also complete well-being. Like many before him, Gideon erected an altar to the Lord. This was both symbolic of what had just occurred and represented a renewed commitment to serve God. Since the Lord Himself had pronounced a blessing of peace upon Gideon, it was only appropriate that he name the altar “Jehovah-shalom” (Judg. 6:24), literally, “The Lord is peace.” In spite of his ongoing doubts (cf. vss. 36-40), Gideon would be greatly used by the Lord to defeat the Midianites, as we will see in next week’s lesson.

QUESTIONS

1. What was Gideon's family background?
2. How did the Angel first address Gideon? Why did he address him this way?
3. What was Gideon's perspective on Israel's current situation?
4. How did Gideon attempt to excuse himself from the Angel's request?
5. What did Gideon request from the Angel?
6. What was the gift Gideon offered to the Angel?
7. What happened to the sacrifice?
8. What did Gideon think was going to happen to him?
9. What did Gideon name the place? Why?
10. In what ways do we sometimes act like Gideon?

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. The promised blessings of God are for us if we obey His Word (Judg. 6:11-12).
2. The Word of God empowers us to do His will without fear (vs. 13).
3. We are to be faithful to God and always seek to do His will (vss. 14-16).
4. God's Word reveals His great love for us and what we must do to please Him (vss. 17-21).
5. God's desire is that we experience eternal life through His Son, Jesus (Judg. 6:22-23; cf. II Tim. 1:7).
6. When God gives assurance of His grace, we should worship Him (Judg. 6:24).

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Why does God choose leaders who appear to be unqualified (cf. I Cor. 1:27-29)?
2. How did Gideon's response to the angel's message betray his doubt (Judg. 6:15)?
What would have been your response?
3. How can believers overcome moments of doubt when they are going through a time of painful crisis?
4. How can God use a person who may doubt His Word for a divine purpose?
5. What sacrifice can you bring to God?
6. Why was it necessary for the Lord to tell Gideon that he would not die after the angel departed (vs. 23)?
7. Should true believers need a sign from the Lord? Explain.

Golden Text Illuminated

“Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour” (Judges 6:11-12).

Although he did not know it, Gideon was a mighty man of valor; in Hebrew, a gibbor hayil. This description is applied to figures in Scripture such as Jephthah (Judg. 11:1), Jeroboam (I Kings 11:28), Naaman the Syrian (II Kings 5:1), Joab (II Sam. 10:7), and David’s bodyguards (23:8-9).

Gideon was counted among these warriors of renown not because of what he had done in the past but because of how God saw him. Only God knew what deeds of renown He would use Gideon to accomplish to vanquish Israel’s enemies and glorify His name. Ironically, when the Angel of the Lord found Gideon and delivered this distinguished greeting, the “man of valor” was cowering in a winepress, threshing wheat. So here was the mighty Gideon, according to the Angel’s estimation, sneaking around, trying to mill a little grain for food without getting caught by the Midianite guards—and the Lord Yahweh saw him as His latest recruit to His list of mighty warriors! Why does God so often choose people who seem least likely to succeed? To make sure that no human can take the credit for His awesome deeds; to make clear that He alone is responsible for their accomplishment—in short, to gain for Himself the glory of which He alone is worthy!