

### The Book of Judges

#### Lesson 12 - Chapters 6 and 7

Last time we were still in the midst of Judges chapter 6 and the anointing by God of Gideon as His newest judge (Shophet). We got as far as verse 24.

We ended with Gideon finally understanding that this mysterious traveler who suddenly showed up under a Terebinth tree where Gideon was working, was the Lord. This physical apparition is described in the narrative as the *malach YHWH*, the Angel of the Lord, and then Gideon calls Him YHWH to which this being agrees. So we can have no doubt that this physical form was God; it was not a human and it was not a run-of-the-mill angel. And yet we also touched lightly on the rather heavy theological implications of this. We are told in several places in the Scriptures that no man can see God and live. At the same time we are told in the New Testament that if you've seen Yeshua, you've seen the Father. Some say this is evidence that the Old Testament is dead and gone and that the New Testament offers an entirely new ballgame with entirely different rules. I don't agree with that, of course; but it sure makes things easier for us if we can just throw two-thirds of the Bible in the trash.

We'll not solve this mystery today, and frankly despite some well known doctrines that purport to be absolutely certain of what God consists of and that every mention of God in the bible must be precisely one of three named persons (Father, Son, Holy Spirit), that an honest reading of the entire Holy Scriptures makes this matter hardly cut and dried. For instance, obviously if the New Testament phrase where Jesus says that 'if you've seen Me you've seen the Father' cannot be taken as rigidly or as fully literally as it is often is; because even the Trinitarian Doctrine doesn't take that statement fully literally or we would see Jesus AS the Father and the Father AS Jesus. Thus what do we do when we find Jesus praying TO the Father and always honoring the Father as above himself? Is Yeshua literally praying to Himself? Hardly.

Here in Judges Gideon did NOT see the Father in direct revelation; rather he saw some kind of manifestation of God that represented the Father, carried the authority of the Father, and acted on behalf of the Father to such an extent that He accepted being called YHWH. Although it is pretty standard in Evangelical circles to declare that this manifestation of God in the Gideon story MUST be the Son, I cannot possibly see that as a reasonable conclusion. After all the Angel of the Lord is addressed as YHWH, the official formal name of the Father as told originally to Moses. Even the most fundamental and Evangelical Christian scholars see that while there is an organic relationship of Jesus to the Father that they are not identical.

As challenging as this subject is for Christians and Messianics and adherents to Judaism, it

must have been equally as difficult for Gideon to sort out. Is this God or isn't this God? If it is God, then what do I do because this person sitting on a rock talking to him certainly LOOKS human, yet calls Himself YHWH?

Due to the religious syncretism that had occurred over the last many years in the Promised Land, the Hebrews had blended their religion with the religion of the Canaanites. The Hebrews worshipped and accepted a combination of gods including YHWH. Their rituals incorporated some elements of the Law of Moses and some elements of Ba'al worship. The Israelites' general understanding of gods and what they wanted and how they behaved blended Torah with standard pagan customs of the Mystery Babylon religions. So as difficult as it is for mere man to comprehend God under any circumstances (even from a pure and unadulterated Scriptural perspective) it is utterly impossible when pagan practices have become so entwined with Biblical truth that it's hard to tell where one ends and the other begins.

The Torah teaches that when the principle of illicit mixtures (*sha'atnez*) is violated (whether the mixture consists of people, animals, seeds, food, relationships or anything that attempts to rationalize or join together God's principles with humanistic ideas) it inevitably leads to *tevel*, confusion. Gideon was totally confused because he (and all Israel) had mixed the worship of Yehoveh with the worship of Ba'al. He didn't know how to recognize God, or how to approach God, or how to deal with God.

This is a huge flashing-red warning sign for us as followers of Messiah. It's not a question of whether or not we've mixed pagan religions with Christianity, its how do we untangle it all? Well just as with Gideon, the first step was to recognize (and end the denials) that syncretism has occurred; then we must determine to rededicate ourselves to the pure ways of the Lord and cut down and burn all those things in our congregations and in our lives that are not of God if we ever expect to please Him and be blessed by Him. And as we'll see in the story of Gideon, that's all great on paper but doing it is much harder.

Open your bibles to Judges 6. We'll continue starting at verse 25.

### **READ JUDGES 6:25 – end**

Verse 25 begins with, "...that very night YHWH..." spoke again to Gideon and gave instructions. God wasted no time in starting the purification process in order to re-educate and disentangle Gideon and Israel from the idolatrous mess they had created for themselves.

The first thing Gideon must do is to destroy the altar to Ba'al; because an altar to YHWH was about to be constructed on that same spot and it is impossible that the two could co-exist. Before we talk of those details, let me mention something that most Christians have at least some passing knowledge and interest: the coming rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem on the Temple Mount.

My dear friend Gershon Solomon (founder of the Temple Mount Faithful organization) and I discussed this matter at length only a few days ago. Jews and Christians alike have a whole

range of views about what the circumstances might be that allow the rebuilding of the Temple. One is that an earthquake might destroy the Golden Dome and make way for a Jewish Temple. However as optimistic as that might seem, there is no way politically that such an event would change much; the condition of the world's demand to keep peace with Islam would remain. Another of the more popular views held is that the Islamic Dome of the Rock Shrine that has dominated the Temple Mount for well over 1000 years is a few meters south of where Herod's Temple resided; and thus it is conceivable that if a peace accord was reached and permission was given the two edifices could co-exist side-by-side.

Now both Gershon and I agree that in fact the Rock over which the Dome of the Rock is built in fact was the place of the Holy of Holies, so the idea of twin structures sharing the Temple Mount is only fanciful and uniformed dreaming. Be that as it may, even if such a thing as both the Islamic Shrine and the Temple being built next to one another could occur politically, God would never accept such a thing from His people. The Lord does not share His standing or His land with pagan deities. Here in Judges (and we'll find it elsewhere in the Tanach as well), anywhere that the Lord instructs a monument or altar be built to His Holy Name, and where His Holy Presence is desired, all vestiges of other gods must be removed and the place purified; to this there is never compromise.

Thus the Lord tells Gideon that he is destroy the altar of Ba'al, cut down the sacred pole that stands next to it, and then replaces it with a proper altar for Adonai. Further when Gideon goes to do this task he is take with him his father's bull (it will be used as a sacrifice).

Now there has been much written about this aspect of the bull or bulls because of a strange word construction in the Hebrew that literally says "the bull of bullocks". The difficulty also is that the phrase usually translated as "the second bull" comes from the root word **shannah** that can carry the meaning of "exalted" or "higher rank". Thus it is very likely from the context that there were NOT two bulls involved but only one, and it was the highest-ranking bull of the bullocks owned by Yo'ash, Gideon's father. Rank was determined by age when it came to bulls and many other animals; the older the animal the greater its worth (to a point of course). Thus a 7-year old bull was extremely valuable.

But it is also no coincidence that the number of years of oppression from the Midianites was also 7. Not only would this Bull have been born in the first year of the oppression, but also because the purpose of the Bull was as atonement each year of it's life would pay for one year of Israel's rebellion and the accompanying wrath of God (that was pressed upon the people by means of the invading Midianites and their cohorts).

But before the Bull was sacrificed it would be used to pull down the sacred pole of the pagan god (as opposed to the usual translation that another and different bull would accomplish that task).

The sacred pole in Hebrew is called Asherah; Asherah is the fertility goddess and the wife of Ba'al that was normally expressed in the form of a tree. This combination of an altar to Ba'al accompanied by an Asherah next to it was rather typical. In what would be of course a serious swipe at the phony Canaanite gods, YHWH ordered Gideon not only to remove the Asherah

but also to chop it up and use it for firewood for YHWH's sacrificial fire.

Gideon obeys, but he's cautious. He knows full well that this isn't going to settle well with anybody: his father, his family, the nearby Israelites and especially their Canaanite neighbors. It appears that Yo'ash was actually this pagan holy site's protector and caretaker. And although I say pagan, understand that Yo'ash did this willingly and with the blessing of the Hebrew people.

We're told that Yo'ash was of the clan of Ali'ezer, which is part of Manessah. This place where Gideon lived was his own clan's village; they owned it, they controlled it, and they had adopted Ba'al, Ashtoreth, and likely other elements of Canaanite worship to go along with their traditional worship of YHWH. This high-place or strong-point where the Ba'al altar was located was revered by Yo'ash and his clan, not despised in any way. Despite any erroneous depiction to the contrary, Israel was NOT forced to worship other gods; they did it because they wanted to and they had no concept that what they were doing was wrong.

So Gideon took 10 servants along with the bull up to Ba'al's altar, and he did it at night. Now I can't help but point out that Gideon who earlier told God that maybe he was not the best choice to be Israel's savior because he was from the poorest clan in Manessah, owned at least 10 male servants. Most male servants had families who were also in servitude to the master. The Hebrew word **ebed** means servants or slaves so these 10 were in no way traditional family members. Therefore this man that God called "you valiant hero" was every bit the nervous, excuse-making skeptic that Moses had been some 250 years or so earlier. And you can bet that the job of tearing down the altar and Asherah wasn't all that big, but Gideon wanted some protection when he did it. Was this just unwarranted fear? Not at all; because in verse 28 when some men of the village went up to the altar site (meaning they went there to pay homage to Ba'al), it was gone and they went ballistic. Ba'al's altar was demolished and in its place was a brand new one, with the bull laid upon it and burned up, and the Asherah pole used for kindling under it. And by the way, remember, these men who went up and found this situation were Israelites, not Canaanites.

So they go rushing to Yo'ash and tell him that they have evidence that it was his son, Gideon, who had done this dastardly thing. One more time: this is NOT a matter that the village folks, mostly Hebrews, would have been punished by some Canaanites for this desecration. Rather it was simply that THEY worshipped Ba'al and were deeply offended; so offended that they wanted to add murder to the long list of other sins they were so guilty of. The told Yo'ash to get his son and bring him outside so that they could kill him as a penalty for defiling Ba'al.

Now Yo'ash being a good father (and apparently a pretty logical guy) says, 'wait a minute, if Ba'al is unable to defend his own altar then just how powerful of a god is he? Does Ba'al need humans to defend his deity? Then he says that anyone who even attempts to defend Ba'al will be put to death by morning. This sounds like he means that he (Yo'ash) will kill any man who goes after his son; in fact that is not the intent. It was common understanding in that era that to question the power of a god to defend himself was to impugn the divine character of that god. And the penalty for that offense was death; a penalty that Yo'ash as Ba'al's caretaker was obliged to carry out.

Yo'ash's logic was impeccable: nobody should do anything. If Ba'al were real he would avenge this sacrilege, and if he couldn't do that then he's not real and thus there was no crime. Further it would only be a human (not another god) that Ba'al would have to fight because Yo'ash says, "after all, somebody destroyed his altar"; that is that obviously a human being did it and what kind of opponent is a mere human to a god? Conclusion: let Ba'al fight his own battles he ought to be more than capable.

As a result of this Gideon became known by a new name among his clansmen: **Yeruba'al**. Remember in that era a name was assigned people based on their reputation or character, or perhaps some famous act they committed. **Yeruba'al** means, "let Ba'al defend". Or better, as it meant for Gideon, "the Ba'al Fighter". From this point on be alert in that we'll see Gideon called by both names; in fact in later books (like 2 Sam.) he's given even a 3rd name: **Yerubosheth**. That's because in later times the word **bosheth**, which means shame, became a derogatory nickname for Ba'al.

This entire episode to this point was largely about purifying Gideon and his family and ridding the village of the stench of idolatry. The God-principle is simple and logical: only a man that is in good stead with the Lord can lead His people with God's authority. It was necessary that Gideon and his family be the starting point of this cleansing.

In verse 33 the Midianites and Amalekites and the "children of the east" descend once again upon the tribes of Israel; they stopped and camped (as usual) in the valley of Jezreel because it was one of the most fertile places in all of Canaan and it was where the most abundant crops grew. Orah, Gideon's hometown, was right on the edge of the Jezreel Valley. And of course it was at the moment of need that the Lord empowered Gideon with Holy Spirit power to be the deliverer of God's people.

We studied this Old Testament concept how the Holy Spirit interacted with men prior to the 1st Pentecost (Shavuot) after Yeshua's crucifixion, that awesome day that the Holy Spirit began to indwell men. Before then we get basically 2 different descriptions of this interaction: the Holy Spirit comes upon or the Holy Spirit covers a man. And there are two different Hebrew words used that mean two entirely different things. The first word is **Hayyah**, which is a rather general term that depending on its form and context can mean, "became", or "come to pass", or even "befall". On the other hand here in Judges 6:34 where we're told that the Holy Spirit **covered** Gideon, the word is **labesh** and it usually means to wear something like a garment, or something that is put on like an article of clothing or a blanket. ). It was that a human is so fully enveloped in God's Spirit that the person becomes endowed with the ability to perform miraculous deeds including the ability to prophesy, or to perform works that far surpass the human nature from both a courage and physical strength standpoint. It was especially this ability to perform bravely in the face of humanly impossible odds against him, or showing equally impossible strength and battlefield skill that most of the **Shophetim** displayed, and it would be doubly so with Gideon.

It says next that Gideon blew a trumpet; what it actually says is that he blew a shofar. This indicates not only the typical call to battle that the shofar symbolizes for Israel, but also it shows that Gideon immediately took up the mantle of leadership and it was he who would lead



his people. Essentially this was the first thing that happened when Gideon was *labesh* (covered like a garment) with the *Ruach HaKodesh* (the Holy Spirit). Notice that it says that *Avi'ezer* joined Gideon; this would be natural because *Avi'ezer* was Gideon's own clan. Messengers were sent to other tribes to come and join the Holy War and it says Manessah answered; again, that's natural, because the clan of *Avi'ezer* belonged to the tribe of Manessah (isn't it interesting how logical and less mysterious this all becomes when we understand the social structure and the times?); Asher, Naphtali and Zevulun also came. It appears that Asher must have learned something over the last 40 years; because when Asher was called to assist Barak against King Yavin of Hatzor Asher declined and was roundly criticized for it in the Song of Deborah.

So now that Gideon has started the ball rolling, and now that he has an army, suddenly he starts having doubts and asks for a sign. The sign is that famous (or infamous, really) sheep's fleece that he laid upon the threshing floor (likely a large flat rock). Here's what Gideon says to God: "IF you are going to save Israel through me as YOU SAID you would." Folks we can cut it anyway we like but Gideon's flesh was in violent conflict with the Spirit of God that clothed him. Some Rabbi's argue that Gideon only wanted to be sure that it was actually God that promised to use him in such a mighty way; perhaps. I must say that I fight this urge myself quite regularly. I think I hear the Lord telling me to do something a certain way, but I'm also aware of my ability to conjure up my own thoughts and assign them to God. My fear is that I'm imagining things or even worse my pride or ego is working overtime and I'm not sure how to discern it. My usual answer is to ask God to show me the answer plainly in some way I can identify with; something that offers sufficient proof to me that I'm hearing from Him and that I'm not involved with self-deception.

I think I can believe that this is more or less what was happening with Gideon; but it's nothing to be proud about or satisfied with. Gideon asks for this sign: Gideon will lay a sheep's fleece on the threshing floor and if the Lord will supernaturally cause the fleece to become wet with dew while the area around it remains dry, then he'll know for sure that God is with Him. The morning arrives, and there it is: the fleece is wet but the ground is dry. Ah, but there's a problem. Gideon ponders this and thinks that it's entirely possible that this could happen naturally and he could mistake it for YHWH's approval. So he devises ANOTHER test.

I can't tell you the number of people who tell me they "lay a fleece" when they're not sure about things. Can I tell you a little secret; that is not a good indication of our spiritual maturity so we probably shouldn't be in a hurry to let others in on it. People say to me, I'm seeking God's will with a fleece. OK; but that's not what Gideon is doing. Gideon already KNOWS God's will; he's only seeking assurance to bolster his courage. That's no any better, but if one is going to choose a way to discover God's will, my opinion is that "laying a fleece" isn't the way.

There's another problem with laying fleeces, and the story of Gideon demonstrates it. When men come up with a means to test God, maybe the results aren't all that conclusive or convincing. So now what? We often come up with stuff that (for the moment) seems like a good test and then when it happens we can think of a dozen ways in which the same result could have been achieved WITHOUT God's intervention.

Gideon reasoned that fleeces attract water rather readily, and then retain it. It wouldn't be so strange for the dew to moisten the fleece, but at the same time evaporate off the rock threshing floor rather rapidly as the sun rose and thus leave him with the result he found. So he decides it's more logical to do it in the opposite manner: he asks that the same ground be wet but the fleece dry the following morning. And that's what happened; now he's convinced.

Let's move on to Judges 7.

### **READ JUDGES CHAPTER 7 all**

Verse 1 explains how the opposing forces were arrayed. Let me be clear that this is quite a different scenario in this case than it was with Joshua and the Israelite army against the Canaanites. Here the Israelites are strictly a militia of farmers, herders, craftsmen, merchants, and so on who hadn't known battle. The Midianites and Amalekites on the other side were nomadic raiders and bandits; they were in no way a trained and disciplined army but they were huge in number and hardened fighters.

Israel's men were located south of the Midianites near the spring of Harod at the foot of Mt. Gilboa. In Hebrew the place is called ***Ein Harod*** and it means spring of Harod (Harod is a tribal or clan name). The Midianites were located due north by the Hill of Moreh. The phrase "in the valley" is referring to the Jezreel Valley that the nomadic forces seemed to prefer each year that they came. Note how the valley of Jezreel is so central to practically every battle concerning Israel and the Promised Land. Barak had won the Jezreel Valley from King Yavin some 50 years earlier; and when the bible speaks of the end-times battle of Armageddon, in reality the battle is going to take place in the Jezreel valley; Har Megiddo (the mountain of Megiddo) called Armageddon in English merely overlooks the valley of that great and final battle.

In a kind of ironic twist, verse 2 tells us that God will now test Gideon whereas earlier Gideon tested God (twice). The Lord says that Gideon has way too many troops; because when they win they will be self-confident and sure that it was by their own strategies, courage, and abilities. Rather Yehoveh wants them to clearly understand that it is HE who is the one who gives Israel her victories and thus all glory and honor should go to Him. So the Lord tells Gideon to offer to his militia that any men who are fearful can return home immediately (which is in accordance with God's law of Deuteronomy 21:8). Fear is contagious and it can have disastrous and demoralizing effects on an army that can even result in mass panic and desertion. It is a rather said commentary that in the next verse we see that 2 out of 3 of those who answered the call to Holy War took Gideon's offer. Of the 32,000 men that came, only 10,000 had the courage to stay and risk their lives.

But then the Lord tells Gideon that this is still too many and devises a means to reduce the fighting force even further. God says to Gideon (in verse 4) that he won't make Gideon choose, the Lord Himself will select His elite group. And YHWH tells Gideon to take his men down to the brook so they can drink water. HOW they drink the water will be the determining factor. Here's how it works: when the men stoop over to drink from the brook all will have to go

down on their knees because there is no other natural or practical way to drink from a stream. However those who use their hands as a cup, and bring the water up to their mouths to “lap” it so to speak will be chosen as opposed to those who bend over from their knees and put their mouths to the stream. The idea was that those who lifted the water to their mouths were more instinctive fighters who were alert and wary; while those who would put their faces down to the stream were less so.

So the first test let the fearful go home; and the second cut-down eliminated those who were careless. The result was that a mere 300 men were selected and this was the right balance as far as the Lord was concerned. I can imagine that Gideon wasn't all that thrilled about now. Only 1% of the men who willingly came to fight for Gideon would be used.

We'll continue with this story the next time we meet.