
JUDGES 6:1 The children of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years.

The Israelites again do evil, and are delivered into the hands of the Midianites, by whom they are oppressed seven years, Jdg 6:1, Jdg 6:2. Different tribes spoil their harvests, and take away their cattle, Jdg 6:3-5. They cry unto the Lord, and he sends them a prophet to reprehend and instruct them, Jdg 6:6-10. An angel appears unto Gideon, and gives him commission to deliver Israel, and works several miracles, to prove that he is Divinely appointed to this work, Jdg 6:11-23. Gideon builds an altar to the Lord, under the name of Jehovah-shalom; and throws down the altar of Baal, Jdg 6:24-27. His townsmen conspire against him; he expostulates with them, and they are pacified, Jdg 6:28-32. The Midianites and Amalekites gather together against Israel; Gideon summons Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, who join his standard, Jdg 6:33-35. The miracle of the fleece of wool, Jdg 6:36-40.

Verse 1

Delivered them unto the hand of Midian - The Midianites were among the most ancient and inveterate of the enemies of Israel. They joined with the Moabites to seduce them to idolatry, and were nearly extirpated by them; Num 31:1-12. The Midianites dwelt on the eastern borders of the Dead Sea, and their capital was Arnon.

JUDGES 6:2 The hand of Midian prevailed against Israel; and because of Midian the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and the caves, and the strongholds.

Verse 2

Made them the dens which are in the mountains - Nothing can give a more distressing description of the state of the Israelites than what is here related. They durst not reside in the plain country, but were obliged to betake themselves to dens and caves of the mountains, and live like wild beasts, and were hunted like them by their adversaries.

JUDGES 6:3 So it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east; they came up against them;

Verse 3

Children of the East - Probably those who inhabited Arabia Deserta, Ishmaelites.

JUDGES 6:4 and they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, until you come to Gaza, and left no sustenance in Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor donkey.

Verse 4

Encamped against them - Wandering hordes of Midianites, Amalekites, and Ishmaelites came, in the times of harvest and autumn, and carried away their crops, their fruit, and their cattle. And they appear to have come early, encamped in the plains, and watched the crops till they were ready to be carried off. This is frequently the case even to the present day.

Till thou come unto Gaza - That is, the whole breadth of the land, from Jordan to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Thus the whole land was ravaged, and the inhabitants deprived of the necessaries of life.

JUDGES 6:5 For they came up with their livestock and their tents; they came in as locusts for multitude; both they and their camels were without number: and they came into the land to destroy it.

Verse 5

They came up with their cattle and their tents - All this proves that they were different tribes of wanderers who had no fixed residence; but, like their descendants the Bedouins or wandering Arabs, removed from place to place to get prey for themselves and forage for their cattle.

JUDGES 6:6 Israel was brought very low because of Midian; and the children of Israel cried to the LORD.

JUDGES 6:7 When the children of Israel cried to the LORD because of Midian,

JUDGES 6:8 the LORD sent a prophet to the children of Israel; and he said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you out of the house of bondage;

Verse 8

The Lord sent a prophet - The Jews say that this was Phinehas; but it is more likely that it was some prophet or teacher raised up by the Lord to warn and instruct them. Such were his witnesses, and they were raised up from time to time to declare the counsel of God to his rebellious people.

JUDGES 6:9 and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out from before you, and gave you their land;

JUDGES 6:10 and I said to you, "I am the LORD your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell." But you have not listened to my voice."

JUDGES 6:11 the LORD's angel came, and sat under the oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained to Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press, to hide it from the Midianites.

Verse 11

There came an angel of the Lord - The prophet came to teach and exhort, the angel comes to confirm the word of the prophet, to call and commission him who was intended to be their deliverer, and to work miracles, in order to inspire him with supernatural courage and a confidence of success.

Ophrah - Or Ephra, was a city, or village rather, in the half tribe of Manasseh, beyond Jordan.

His son Gideon threshed wheat - This is not the only instance in which a man taken from agricultural employments was made general of an army, and the deliverer of his country. Shamgar was evidently a ploughman, and with his ox-goad he slew many Philistines, and became one of the deliverers of Israel. Cincinnatus was taken from the plough, and was made dictator and commander-in-chief of the Roman armies. There is a great similarity between his case and that of Gideon.

Threshed wheat by the winepress - This was a place of privacy; he could not make a threshing-floor in open day as the custom was, and bring either the wheel over the grain, or tread it out with the feet of the oxen, for fear of the Midianites, who were accustomed to come and take it away as soon as threshed. He got a few sheaves from the field, and brought them home to have them privately threshed for the support of the family. As there could be no vintage among the Israelites in their present distressed circumstances, the winepress would never be suspected by the Midianites to be the place of threshing corn.

JUDGES 6:12 the LORD's angel appeared to him, and said to him, "The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor!"

Verse 12

The Lord is with thee - "The Word of the Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor." - Targum. It appears that Gideon had proved himself, on former occasions, to be a man of courage and personal prowess; and this would naturally excite the confidence of his countrymen. God chooses for his work those instruments which, in the course of his operations in nature and providence, he has qualified for his purpose. The instruments thus chosen are generally unlikely, but they will be ever found the best qualified for the Divine employment.

JUDGES 6:13 Gideon said to him, "Oh, my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? Where are all his wondrous works which our fathers told us of, saying, 'Didn't the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has cast us off, and delivered us into the hand of Midian."

Verse 13

And Gideon said unto him - This speech is remarkable for its energy and simplicity; it shows indeed a measure of despondency, but not more than the circumstances of the case justified.

JUDGES 6:14 The LORD looked at him, and said, "Go in this your might, and save Israel from the hand of Midian. Haven't I sent you?"

Verse 14

Go in this thy might - What does the angel mean? He had just stated that Jehovah was with him; and he now says, Go in This thy might, i.e., in the might of Jehovah, who is with thee.

JUDGES 6:15 He said to him, "O Lord, how shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is the poorest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house."

Verse 15

Wherewith shall I save Israel? - I have neither men nor money.

Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh - הנה אלפי הדל, Behold, my thousand is impoverished. Tribes were anciently divided into tens, and fifties, and hundreds, and thousands; the thousands therefore marked grand divisions, and consequently numerous families; Gideon here intimates that the families of which he made a part were very much diminished. But if we take אלפי alpey for the contracted form of the plural, which is frequently in Hebrew nouns joined with a verb in the singular, then the translation will be, "The thousands in Manasseh are thinned;" i.e., this tribe is greatly reduced, and can do little against their enemies.

JUDGES 6:16 The LORD said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man."

Verse 16

Thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man - Thou shalt as surely conquer all their host as if thou hadst but one man to contend with; or, Thou shalt destroy them to a man.

JUDGES 6:17 He said to him, "If now I have found favour in your sight, then show me a sign that it is you who talk with me.

Verse 17

Show me a sign - Work a miracle, that I may know that thou hast wisdom and power sufficient to authorize and qualify me for the work.

JUDGES 6:18 Please don't go away, until I come to you, and bring out my present, and lay it before you." He said, "I will wait until you come back."

Verse 18

And bring forth my present - My minchah; generally an offering of bread, wine, oil, flour, and such like. It seems from this that Gideon supposed the person to whom he spoke to be a Divine person. Nevertheless, what he prepared and brought out appears to be intended simply as an entertainment to refresh a respectable stranger.

JUDGES 6:19 Gideon went in, and prepared a young goat, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of meal. He put the meat in a basket and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out to him under the oak, and presented it.

Verse 19

Made ready a kid - the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot - The manner in which the Arabs entertain strangers will cast light on this verse. Dr. Shaw observes: "Besides a bowl of milk, and a basket of figs, raisins, or dates, which upon our arrival were presented to us to stay our appetite, the master of the tent fetched us from his flock according to the number of our company, a kid or a goat, a lamb or a sheep; half of which was immediately seethed by his wife, and served up with cucasoe; the rest was made kab-ab, i.e., cut to pieces and roasted, which we reserved for our breakfast or dinner next day." May we not suppose, says Mr. Harmer, that Gideon, presenting some slight refreshment to the supposed prophet, according to the present Arab mode, desired him to stay till he could provide something more substantial; that he immediately killed a kid, seethed part of it, and, when ready, brought out the stewed meat in a pot, with unleavened cakes of bread which he had baked; and the other part, the kab-ab, in a basket, for him to carry with him for some after-repast in his journey. See Shaw's and Pococke's Travels, and Harmer's Observations.

Brought it out unto him under the oak - Probably where he had a tent, which, with the shade of the oak, sheltered them from the heat of the sun, and yet afforded the privilege of the refreshing breeze. Under a shade in the open air the Arabs, to the present day, are accustomed to receive their guests.

JUDGES 6:20 The angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened cakes, and lay them on this rock, and pour out the broth." He did so.

Verse 20

Take the flesh, etc. - The angel intended to make the flesh and bread an offering to God, and the broth a libation.

JUDGES 6:21 Then the LORD's angel stretched out the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes; and fire went up out of the rock, and consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes; and the LORD's angel departed out of his sight.

 Verse 21

The angel - put forth the end of the staff - He appeared like a traveler with a staff in his hand; this he put forth, and having touched the flesh, fire rose out of the rock and consumed it. Here was the most evident proof of supernatural agency.

Then the angel - departed out of his sight - Though the angel vanished out of his sight, yet God continued to converse with him either by secret inspiration in his own heart, or by an audible voice.

JUDGES 6:22 Gideon saw that he was the LORD's angel; and Gideon said, "Alas, Lord GOD! Because I have seen the LORD's angel face to face!"

Verse 22

Alas, O Lord God! for because I have seen - This is an elliptical sentence, a natural expression of the distressed state of Gideon's mind: as if he had said, Have mercy on me, O Lord God! else I shall die; because I have seen an angel of Jehovah face to face. We have frequently seen that it was a prevalent sentiment, as well before as under the law, that if any man saw God, or his representative angel he must surely die. On this account Gideon is alarmed, and prays for his life. This notion prevailed among the heathens, and we find an instance of it in the fable of Jupiter and Semele. She wished to see his glory; she saw it, and was struck dead by the effulgence. See the notes on Exo 33:20. We find that a similar opinion prevailed very anciently among the Greeks. In the hymn of Callimachus, Εἰς Λουτρα τῆς Παλλάδος, ver. 100, are these words: - Κρονιοὶ δ' ὠδε λεγοντι νομοὶ· Ὅς κε τιν' ἀθανατῶν, ὅκα μὴ θεὸς αὐτοῦ ἐλήται, Αἰθρησῆ, μισθῶ τουτοῦν ἰδεῖν μεγαλῶ. "The laws of Saturn enact, that if any man see any of the immortal gods, unless that god himself shall choose it, he shall pay dearly for that sight."

JUDGES 6:23 The LORD said to him, "Peace be to you! Don't be afraid. You shall not die."

Verse 23

Fear not: thou shalt not die - Here the discovery is made by God himself: Gideon is not curiously prying into forbidden mysteries, therefore he shall not die.

JUDGES 6:24 Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD, and called it "the LORD is Peace." To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

Verse 24

Gideon built an altar - and called it Jehovah-shalom - The words יהוה שלום Yehovah shalom signify The Lord is my peace, or The peace of Jehovah; and this name he gave the altar, in reference to what God had said, Jdg 6:23, Peace be unto thee, לך שלום shalom lecha, "Peace to thee;" which implied,

not only a wish, but a prediction of the prosperous issue of the enterprise in which he was about to engage. It is likely that this is the altar which is mentioned in Jdg 6:26, and is spoken of here merely by anticipation.

JUDGES 6:25 That same night, the LORD said to him, "Take your father's bull, even the second bull seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that your father has, and cut down the Asherah that is by it;

Verse 25

Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock - There is some difficulty in this verse, for, according to the Hebrew text, two bullocks are mentioned here; but there is only one mentioned in Jdg 6:26, Jdg 6:28. But what was this second bullock? Some think that it was a bullock that was fattened in order to be offered in sacrifice to Baal. This is very probable, as the second bullock is so particularly distinguished from another which belonged to Gideon's father. As the altar was built upon the ground of Joash, yet appears to have been public property, (see Jdg 6:29, Jdg 6:30), so this second ox was probably reared and fattened at the expense of the men of that village, else why should they so particularly resent its being offered to Jehovah?

JUDGES 6:26 and build an altar to the LORD your God on the top of this stronghold, in an orderly way, and take the second bull, and offer a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah which you shall cut down."

Verse 26

With the wood of the grove - It is probable that אֲשֵׁרָה Asherah here signifies Astarte; and that there was a wooden image of this goddess on the altar of Baal. Baal-peor was the same as Priapus, Astarte as Venus; these two impure idols were proper enough for the same altar. In early times, and among rude people, the images of the gods were made of wood. This is the case still with the inhabitants of the South Sea Islands, with the Indians of America, and with the inhabitants of Ceylon: many of the images of Budhoo are of wood. The Scandinavians also had wooden gods.

JUDGES 6:27 Then Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the LORD had spoken to him. Because he feared his father's household and the men of the city, he could not do it by day, but he did it by night.

Verse 27

He feared his father's household - So it appears that his father was an idolater: but as Gideon had ten men of his own servants whom he could trust in this matter, it is probable that he had preserved the true faith, and had not bowed his knee to the image of Baal.

JUDGES 6:28 When the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was broken down, and the Asherah was cut down that was by it, and the second bull was offered on the altar that was built.

Verse 28

The second bullock was offered - It appears that the second bullock was offered because it was just seven years old, Jdg 6:25, being calved about the time that the Midianitish oppression began; and it was now to be slain to indicate that their slavery should end with its life. The young bullock, Jdg 6:25, is supposed to have been offered for a peace-offering; the bullock of seven years old, for a burnt-offering.

JUDGES 6:29 They said one to another, "Who has done this thing?" When they inquired and asked, they said, "Gideon the son of Joash has done this thing."

Verse 29

Gideon the son of Joash hath done this thing - They fixed on him the more readily because they knew he had not joined with them in their idolatrous worship.

JUDGES 6:30 Then the men of the city said to Joash, "Bring out your son, that he may die, because he has broken down the altar of Baal, and because he has cut down the Asherah that was by it."

Verse 30

The men of the city said - They all felt an interest in the continuance of rites in which they had often many sensual gratifications. Baal and Ashtaroth would have more worshippers than the true God, because their rites were more adapted to the fallen nature of man.

JUDGES 6:31 Joash said to all who stood against him, "Will you contend for Baal? Or will you save him? He who will contend for him, let him be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because someone has broken down his altar."

Verse 31

Will ye plead for Baal? - The words are very emphatic "Will ye plead in earnest תריבן for Baal? Will ye תושיען really save him? If he be God, אלהים Elohim, let him contend for himself, seeing his altar is thrown down." The paragogic letters in the words plead and save greatly increase the sense. Joash could not slay his son; but he was satisfied he had insulted Baal: if Baal were the true God, he would avenge his own injured honor. This was a sentiment among the heathens. Thus Tacitus, lib. i., c. 73, A.U.C. 768, mentioning the letter of Tiberius to the consuls in behalf of Cassius and Rubrius, two Roman knights, one of whom was accused of having sold a statue of Augustus in the auction of his

gardens; and the other, of having sworn falsely by the name of Augustus, who had been deified by the senate; among other things makes him say: Non ideo decretum patri suo coelum, ut in perniciem civium is honor verteretur. Nec contra religiones fieri quod effigies ejus, ut alia nu minum simulachra, venditionibus hortorum et domuum accedant. Jusjurandum perinde aestimandum quam si Jovem fefellisset: deorum injuriae diis curae - "That Divine honors were not decreed to his father (Augustus) to lay snares for the citizens; and if his statue, in common with the images of the gods in general, was put up to sale with the houses and gardens, it could not be considered an injury to religion. That any false oath must be considered as an attempt to deceive Jupiter himself; but the gods themselves must take cognizance of the injuries done unto them." Livy has a similar sentiment, Hist. lib. x., c. 6, where, speaking of some attempts made to increase the number of the augurs out of the commons, with which the senators were displeased, he says: Simulabant ad deos id magis, quam ad se pertinere; ipsos visuros, ne sacra sua polluantur. - "They pretended that these things belonged more to the gods than themselves; and that they would take care that their sacred rites were not polluted."

JUDGES 6:32 Therefore on that day he named him Jerub-Baal, saying, "Let Baal contend against him, because he has broken down his altar."

Verse 32

He called him Jerubbaal - That is, Let Baal contend; changed, 2Sam 11:21, into Jerubbesheth, he shall contend against confusion or shame; thus changing baal, lord, into bosheth, confusion or ignominy. Some think that Jerubbaal was the same with Jerombalus, who, according to Sanchoniatho and Porphyry, was a priest of Jevo. But the history of Sanchoniatho is probably a forgery of Porphyry himself, and worthy of no credit.

JUDGES 6:33 Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east assembled themselves together; and they passed over, and encamped in the valley of Jezreel.

Verse 33

Then all the Midianites - Hearing of what Gideon had done, and apprehending that this might be a forerunner of attempts to regain their liberty, they formed a general association against Israel.

JUDGES 6:34 But the Spirit of the LORD came on Gideon; and he blew a trumpet; and Abiezer was gathered together after him.

Verse 34

The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon - He was endued with preternatural courage and wisdom.

JUDGES 6:35 He sent messengers throughout all Manasseh; and they also were gathered together after him: and he sent messengers to Asher, and to Zebulun, and to Naphtali; and they came up to meet them.

JUDGES 6:36 Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand, as you have spoken,

Verse 36

If thou wilt save Israel - Gideon was very bold, and God was very condescending. But probably the request itself was suggested by the Divine Spirit. On the miracle of the fleece, dew, and dry ground, Origen, in his eighth homily on the book of Judges, has many curious and interesting thoughts, I shall insert the substance of the whole: - The fleece is the Jewish nation. The fleece covered with dew, while all around is dry, the Jewish nation favored with the law and the prophets. The fleece dry, the Jewish nation cast off for rejecting the Gospel. All around watered, the Gospel preached to the Gentiles. and they converted to God. The fleece on the threshing-floor, the Jewish people in the land of Judea, winnowed, purged, and fanned by the Gospel. The dew wrung out into the bowl, the doctrines of Christianity, extracted from the Jewish writings, shadowed forth by Christ's pouring water into a basin, and washing the disciples' feet. The pious father concludes that he has now wrung this water out of the fleece of the book of Judges, as he hopes by and by to do out of the fleece of the book of Kings, and out of the fleece of the book of Isaiah or Jeremiah; and he has received it into the basin of his heart, and there conceived its true sense; and is desirous to wash the feet of his brethren, that they may be able to walk in the way of the preparation of the Gospel of peace. - Origen, Op. vol. ii., p. 475, edit. Benedict. All this to some will doubtless appear trifling; but it is not too much to say that scarcely any pious mind can consider the homily of this excellent man without drinking into a measure of the same spirit, so much sincerity, deep piety, and unction, appear throughout the whole: yet as I do not follow such practices, I cannot recommend them. Of dealers in such small wares, we have many that imitate Benjamin Keach, but few that come nigh to Origen.

JUDGES 6:37 behold, I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then shall I know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you have spoken."

JUDGES 6:38 It was so; for he rose up early on the next day, and pressed the fleece together, and wrung the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water.

JUDGES 6:39 Gideon said to God, "Don't let your anger be kindled against me, and I will speak but this once. Please let me make a trial just this once with the fleece. Let it now be dry only on the fleece, and on all the ground let there be dew."

JUDGES 6:40 God did so that night: for it was dry on the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.
