

CHAPTER 6

INTRODUCTION TO JUDGES 6

In this chapter we have an account of the distressed condition Israel was in through the Midianites, ^{<0061>}Judges 6:1-6 , of a prophet being sent unto them to relieve them for their sins, ^{<0067>}Judges 6:7-10 of an angel appearing to Gideon, with an order to him to go and save Israel out of the hands of the Midianites, ^{<0061>}Judges 6:11-16 and of a sign given him by the angel, whereby he knew this order was of God, ^{<0067>}Judges 6:17-24 , and of the reformation from idolatry in his father's family he made upon this, throwing down the altar of Baal, and building one for the Lord, ^{<0065>}Judges 6:25-32 , and of the preparation he made to fight the Midianites and others, ^{<0063>}Judges 6:33-35 , but first desired a sign of the Lord, that Israel would be saved by his hand, which was granted and repeated, ^{<0065>}Judges 6:36-40 .

Ver. 1. *And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord* , etc.] After the death of Deborah and Barak, during whose life they kept to the pure worship of God, and who, perhaps, lived pretty near the close of the forty years' rest, or of the twenty years from their victory over Jabin; but they dying, the children of Israel fell into idolatry, for that that was the evil they did appears from ^{<0060>}Judges 6:10 , even worshipping the gods of the Amorites:

and the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years : this was not the Midian where Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, lived, which lay more southward, but that which joined to Moab, and was more eastward. This people had been destroyed by the Israelites in the times of Moses, in their way to the land of Canaan, ^{<0601>}Numbers 31:1 wherefore they might bear them a grudge, and now took the opportunity to revenge themselves on them, God permitting them so to do for their sins; and though the destruction of this people by Israel was very general, yet as some of them might make their escape, and afterwards return to their own land, and this being about two hundred years ago, might, with others joining them, repeople their country by this time, and become strong and powerful.

Ver. 2. *And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel* , etc.] They were too strong for them, and overcame them, and brought them into subjection to them, and no wonder, when the Lord delivered them into their hand:

and because of the Midianites ; because of their usage of them, their manner of coming upon them yearly, and pillaging and plundering their substance, as after related:

the children of Israel made them dens which are in the mountains ; the word for “dens” has the signification of light in it, and are so called either by an antiphrasis, because they were dark, or, as Kimchi thinks, because they had a window at the top of them, which let in the light ^{f121} but Ben Gersom conjectures they were torches, which gave a great light, and when they that held them saw from the mountains the Midianites, by these torches they made a signal to the Israelites to take care and hide themselves and their substance:

and caves, and strong holds ; the caves were for the poorer sort, and the strong holds for the richer to retire to with their goods; though, according to Jarchi, the latter were no other than fences they made in woods, by cutting down trees, and setting them round about them, perhaps much the same as the thickets, ⁴⁹³⁶1 Samuel 13:6 .

Ver. 3. *And so it was, when Israel had sown* , etc.] Their land, and it was grown up, and near being ripe, or quite; for the Midianites gave them no disturbance in the winter, and during seedtime, when they came out of their lurking holes, and manured their land, and sowed it:

that the Midianites came up ; into the land of Canaan, from the other side Jordan, where their country lay, and which it seems lay lower than the land of Israel:

and the Amalekites, and the children of the east : the former were implacable enemies of Israel, and on every occasion would join other nations in oppressing them; and the children of the east were Arabians, as Josephus ^{f122} expressly affirms:

even they came up against them ; all these three sorts of people in a confederacy.

Ver. 4. *And they encamped against them*, etc.] Formed a camp, from whence they sent out parties to plunder the people; or

“they were fixing their tents among them,”

as the Vulgate Latin version; and so the Targum,

“they dwelt by them,”

or fixed their habitations by them; for they seem not to have come as a regular army, but as a sort of banditti to pillage, and plunder, and destroy the fruits of the earth; and the Midianites and Arabians dwelt in tents chiefly:

and destroyed the increase of the earth; the corn and grass before they were well ripe, and fit to cut down; this they did, and gave it to their cattle, and the rest they carried off:

till thou come unto Gaza; a principality of the Philistines, which lay in the western part of Canaan, on the shore of the Mediterranean sea; so that as these people came out of the east, and entered the eastern part, they went through the whole land from east to west, cutting down all the fruits of the earth for forage for their cattle:

and left no sustenance for Israel; nothing to support life with, cutting down their corn and their grass, their vines and olives, so that they had nothing to live upon:

neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass; not anything for those creatures to live upon, nor did not leave any of them, but carried them all away.

Ver. 5. *For they came up with their cattle, and their tents*, etc.] Brought their flocks and their herds with them, to eat up the increase of the earth, and their tents, which they pitched and removed from place to place, for the convenience of feeding their cattle, and while they cut down the fruit of the earth everywhere, which serves to confirm the sense of the Targum and Vulgate Latin version of (^{<0065>}Judges 6:5)

and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; or “as locusts”^{f123}, they were like them for their number, and for devouring all they came to:

and their camels were without number; which they brought with them, to load and carry off their plunder they could not eat. Midian was a place famous for camels and dromedaries, (^{<2306>}Isaiah 60:6) and so Arabia, the people of which joined the Midianites in this expedition; of whom Leo Africanus says^{f124}, that they reckon of their riches and possessions by their

camels; wherefore if anyone speaks of the riches of such a prince or nobleman, he says that he is possessed of so many camels, and not of so many thousands of pieces of gold, (see ~~BOOK~~ Job 1:3)

and they entered into the city to destroy it; this was their sole view. In suchlike manner as this did Alyattes king of the Lydians make war with the Milesinns, as Herodotus^{f125} relates; which passage Grotius has quoted at large.

Ver. 6. *And Israel was greatly impoverished, because of the Midianites,* etc.] Were reduced very low, brought into famishing circumstances through the Midianites thus destroying the fruits of the earth year after year:

and the children of Israel cried unto the Lord; which they should have done at first, instead of going into dens and caves; however, better late than not at all; they cried, not to the idols they had served, being sensible they could not help them, though so as to worship them; but to Jehovah the God of the whole earth, and who was in a special sense their God, though they had forsaken him.

Ver. 7. *And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, because of the Midianites.*] Because of their oppressions and ill usage of them, and not because of their sins, which had brought those evils on them, of which, at present, they seemed not to be sensible; and yet such was the goodness and compassion of God to them, that having a mind to deliver them, he immediately, on their crying to him, sends them a messenger to bring them to a sense of their sins, and prepare them for the deliverance he designed to work for them, as follows.

Ver. 8. *And the Lord sent a prophet unto the children of Israel,* etc.] “A man, a prophet”^{f126}, as in the Hebrew text, not an angel, but a man; and this not Phinehas, as say some Jewish writers^{f127}; for it is not probable he should live so long as more than two hundred years; and had he been living, it is very much he should not have been heard of in the times of the preceding judges, and that he was not made use of before now to reprove the people for their sins; but who the prophet was we have no account now nor hereafter, here or elsewhere. Abarbinel supposes he was raised up for a short time:

which said unto them, thus saith the Lord God of Israel; he came in the name of the Lord, and using the form and manner of speech the prophets

of Israel did, putting them in mind of the true God they had forgot, and who yet was their Lord and God:

I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage; reminding them of the benefits they received from God, and the obligations they lay under to serve him, who, when they were bond slaves in Egypt, he appeared for them, and brought them out of their miserable condition.

Ver. 9. *And I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians*, etc.] Even after they were brought out of Egypt, when the Egyptians pursued after them, and overtook them at the Red sea; where they were in the utmost distress, and the Lord wrought salvation for them, gave them a passage through it, and destroyed the Egyptians in it:

and out of the hand of all that oppressed you: the Amalekites who made war with them at Rephidim, Sihon, and Og, kings of the Amorites, who came out to fight with them, and oppose their passage through their land into Canaan, and the kings of the Canaanites also, who combined against them:

and drave them out from before you, and gave you their land: not only the land of Sihon and Og, but the whole land of Canaan, out of which more properly the inhabitants of it may be said to be driven.

Ver. 10. *And I said unto you, I am the Lord your God*, etc.] The covenant God of them and their fathers, and they ought not to have owned and acknowledged any other besides him:

fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; meaning not a fear of being hurt by them, but such a fear and reverence of them as to worship them, which was only to be given to the Lord. The Amorites are here put for all the Canaanites, they being a principal people among them:

but ye have not obeyed my voice; to cleave to him, fear and worship him; they had been guilty of idolatry, and this is the sin the prophet was sent to reprove them for, and bring them to a sense of.

Ver. 11. *And there came an angel of the Lord*, etc.] This was not the prophet before mentioned, as Ben Gersom thinks, but an angel of God, as expressed, and not a created one, but the Angel of Jehovah's presence, the

Word and Son of God, and who is expressly called Jehovah himself, (~~<0614>~~Judges 6:14,23,24)

and sat under an oak; or stayed there a while, as Kimchi interprets it, seeing, according to his observation, angels are not said to sit, but stand:

which was in Ophrah, that pertaineth to Joash the Abiezrite; which shows that this Ophrah is different from a city of this name in the tribe of Benjamin, (~~<0682>~~Joshua 18:23) for the oak that was in it, under which the angel sat, belonged to Joash an Abiezrite, a descendant of Abiezer, son of the sister of Gilead, who was the son of Machir the son of Manasseh, (~~<0670>~~Joshua 17:2 ~~<0307>~~1 Chronicles 7:17,18,14), it is called by Josephus^{f128} Ephra, and by Jerom^{f129} Ephrata:

and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites; lest they should take it away, and bereave his father's family of their sustenance, as they were wont to do, wherever they could find it; and all circumstances attending this affair were on this account; he threshed it himself, this he chose to do, and not trust his servants, lest it should be discovered; and he beat the wheat out with a staff, that it might be more silently done, and not with oxen, which was the usual way of treading out corn, who, bellowing^{f130}, would discover it; and this was done not on a threshing floor, but where a winepress stood, where there could be no suspicion of such work being doing.

Ver. 12. *And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him*, etc.] He stayed some time under the oak, and Gideon being busy in threshing, took no notice of him wherefore he came and stood before him, in his sight:

and said unto him, the Lord is with thee; the gracious presence of God was with Gideon while he was threshing, who very probably was sending up ejaculations to heaven, on account of the distressed case of Israel, and was deep in meditation about the affairs of the people of God, and contriving how to deliver them; or the angel might mean himself, who was no other than Jehovah, the eternal Word of God, who was present with him, and spake unto him; and so the Targum,

“my Word is thy help:”

thou mighty man of valour; who very probably was a stout man in body, and of a courageous mind naturally, and might at this instant have an increase both of bodily strength and greatness of soul; or, however, this

was said to animate and encourage him to do what he was about to be sent to do.

Ver. 13. *And Gideon said to him, oh my Lord,* etc.] Taking him not to be an angel, but some illustrious and eminent person:

if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? all these troubles and calamities through the oppression of the Midianites; for he understood what was said to him in the salutation, respecting not himself personally and privately, but the people of Israel; and he could not tell how to reconcile the Lord's being with them, and yet suffering such sad things to befall them they groaned under:

where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? when God was with his people, and brought them out of Egypt, he wrought miracles for them, whereby they were delivered out of their bondage; of this their fathers had assured them, but nothing of this kind was wrought for them now, and therefore there was no appearance of the Lord being with them, but all the contrary, as follows:

but now the Lord has forsaken us, and delivered us into the hand of the Midianites; and there was good reason for it, because they had forsaken the Lord, and worshipped the gods of the Amorites.

Ver. 14. *And the Lord looked upon him,* etc.] The same before called the angel of the Lord, and who was no other than Jehovah himself; who looked upon him with great earnestness, and with great delight and pleasure smiled upon him, and thereby showing he had a kindness for him, and meant well to him: and

said unto him, go in this thy might; both of body and mind, which had been before given unto him, and was now increased, and which no doubt Gideon was sensible of:

and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites; as he did, and therefore justly reckoned among the saviours and judges of Israel:

have not I sent thee? to do this great work, save the people of Israel, from whence Gideon might perceive who it was that talked with him, and having a command and commission from God, had authority enough to go about this service.

Ver. 15. *And he said unto him, oh my Lord,* etc.] Whether he had yet suspected who he was, or took him still for some eminent person, is not certain; it is very probable he began to think he was some extraordinary person sent of God, and speaking in his name, and therefore expostulates with him about the work he put him upon:

wherewith shall I save Israel? in what way is it possible for me to do it, who had neither men nor money sufficient for such an undertaking?

behold, my family is poor in Manasseh; of which tribe he was, and the “thousand” in it, as the word^{f131} here used signifies, was the meanest of all the thousands in that tribe; some render it, “my father”^{f132}:

and I am the least in my father’s house; perhaps the youngest son; though some take him, and others his father, to be the Chiliarch, or head of the thousand; but by these words of his it does not seem as if either was true; not but that he was of some wealth and substance, power and authority, by having such a number of servants as to take “ten” of them with him, (~~AND~~ Judges 6:27) however, this he says in great humility and modesty, having no high thoughts of himself and family, nor any dependence on his own strength, and on an arm of flesh.

Ver. 16. *And the Lord said unto him, surely I will be with thee,* etc.] The Targum is,

“my Word shall be thy help,”

which was sufficient to answer all objections taken from his meanness, unworthiness, and weakness:

and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man; all together, and as easily as if thou hadst but one man to deal with, and the destruction be so entire and general that none shall be left.

Ver. 17. *And he said unto him, if now I have found grace in thy sight,* etc. Or seeing he had, as appeared by his salutation of him as a man of might, by the work he gave him a commission to do, and by the promise of assistance and success:

then show me a sign that thou talkest with me; in the name of God, as a messenger sent by him, whether an angel or a man; for who he was as yet Gideon was not clear in it, and that what he had said was truth, and would be certainly fulfilled; and which Gideon might desire, not so much, or at

least not only for his own sake, and the confirmation of his faith, for which he is renowned, as that he might be able to satisfy others that he had a commission from God, by a messenger of his, to attempt the deliverance of Israel.

Ver. 18 *Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee*, etc.]

Intending to go to his own, or his father's house, to fetch some food to entertain him with, and therefore entreats he would not quit the place where he was until he returned:

and bring forth my present, and set it before thee; to treat him with, as a stranger and a messenger of God; and perhaps he thought, by this means, the better to discover who he was, whether an angel or a man: the word for the "present" is "minchah", often used for a meat offering, therefore some have thought of a sacrifice; but it appears by what follows that it was not of the nature of a sacrifice; and, besides, Gideon was no priest, nor was this a place for sacrifice, nor was there here any altar; and, besides, as Gideon did not yet know that it was the Lord himself, he could never think of offering a sacrifice to him:

and he said, I will tarry until thou come again; which was a wonderful instance of divine condescension, it being some time he waited ere Gideon could prepare what he brought, as follows.

Ver. 19. *And Gideon went in*, etc.] Into his own house, or his father's:

and made ready a kid; boiled it, as appears by the broth he brought, at least part of it was so dressed; and perhaps it was only some part of one that he brought, since a whole one was too much to be set before one person, and if even he himself intended to eat with him:

and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour; that is, probably those were made out of an ephah of flour; not that the whole ephah was made into cakes; since an omer, the tenth part of an ephah, was sufficient for one man a whole day; and, according to the computation of Waserus^{f133} an ephah was enough for forty five men for a whole day; unless it can be thought that this was done to show his great hospitality to a stranger, and the great respect he had for him as a messenger of God: the rather unleavened cakes were brought, because of dispatch, being soon made. Jarchi says, from hence it may be learned that it was now the time of the passover, and of waving the sheaf; but this is no sufficient proof of it; besides, if this was new wheat Gideon had been threshing, it shows it to be about the wheat

harvest, which was not till Pentecost; it was the barley harvest that began at the passover:

the flesh he put in a basket; the flesh of the kid which was boiled, or if any part of it was dressed another way, it was put by itself in a basket for more easy and commodious carriage:

and he put the broth in a pot; a brazen pot, as Kimchi interprets it, in which the kid was boiled; and this, as he says, was the water it was boiled in:

and brought it out unto him under the oak; where he appeared, and was now waiting the return of Gideon there:

and presented it; set it before him, perhaps upon a table, which might be brought by his servants, or on a seat, which was placed under the oak to sit upon under its shade for pleasure.

Ver. 20. *And the angel of God said unto him*, etc.] Instead of sitting down and partaking of the entertainment made for him, he bid him do as follows:

take the flesh, and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock; not as a table to eat it from, but as an altar to offer it upon; and which rock and altar might be typical of Christ, who sanctities every gift, present, and offering of his people: this rock was undoubtedly in sight, and very probably the oak, under which they were, grew upon it, or at the bottom of it, where it was no unusual thing for oaks to grow, (^{<OR38>}Genesis 35:8), but it was upon the top of the rock that these were to be laid, where afterwards an altar was built, (^{<OR35>}Judges 6:26)

and pour out the broth; upon the flesh and cakes, and upon the rock also, which by bringing from his house must have been cool and it became cooler by being poured out, and cooler still by being poured upon a cold rock:

and he did so; he readily obeyed his orders; though he had reason to wonder he should have so ordered the food he brought for his entertainment to be thus made use of; perhaps he might expect that he intended to give him a sign, as he desired, and therefore the more readily, without any objection, complied with his order.

Ver. 21. *Then the angel of the Lord put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand*, etc.] With which he walked, appearing as a traveller, and

which was one reason of Gideon's providing for his refreshment, before he proceeded on in his journey:

and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; did not strike the rock with it, as Moses did with his rod, to fetch out water for the Israelites, but touched the provisions brought him; not using it instead of a knife to separate any part of them, but for the working of a miracle, as follows:

and there rose up fire out of the rock; had he struck the rock with his staff, the miracle would not have appeared so great, because it might be thought there was an iron ferrule at the end of it, which striking on a flinty rock might cause fire; but it was the flesh and cakes only that were touched, and these also as having broth poured on them, and the rock likewise:

and consumed the flesh, and the unleavened cakes; though they had the broth poured on them, and were sodden with it; so that the miracle was similar to that wrought by Elijah on Mount Carmel, (¹⁸⁸³1 Kings 18:33-38), and those who think that this angel was the man, the prophet before mentioned, and he Phinehas, and Phinehas Elijah, are confirmed in their opinion by this likeness; though there is no sufficient ground for it:

then the angel of the Lord departed out of his sight: not went on his journey, as he might seem, but vanished immediately; which circumstance plainly showed, and fully convinced Gideon, that he was not a man, but an angelic spirit, as well as the miracle wrought proved him to be more than a man; and so Gideon had what he desired, a sign that he might know who talked with him, and that what he talked of would certainly come to pass.

Ver. 22. *And when Gideon perceived he was an angel of the Lord*, etc.] By the miracle wrought, and the manner of his departure:

Gideon said, alas! O Lord God; woe to me, what will become of me, or befall me, I shall surely die:

for because I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face; and whom he had reason to believe was the Lord himself, a divine Person, by the miracle wrought; and it was a commonly received notion even among good men, in those times, that the Lord was not to be seen by them and live, as appears from Jacob, Manoah, and others; at least the appearance of a divine Person, and even of any messenger from heaven, was startling, surprising, and frightful to them; which arose from a sense they had of the divine Being, and of their own sinfulness and frailty.

Ver. 23. *And the Lord said unto him,* etc.] Either by a secret impulse upon his spirit, or by a voice from heaven; and even, as Kimchi observes, the angel, after he ascended, might cause this voice to be heard, seeing him in great fear, because he knew he was an angel; and which is another proof of this angel being Jehovah himself, the eternal Word:

peace be unto thee, fear not, thou shalt not die; let not thy mind be ruffled and disturbed, but serene and calm; fear not that any evil shall befall thee, and particularly death; thou shalt be safe from any danger whatever, and especially from death, which he expected in his flight would immediately follow.

Ver. 24. *Then Gideon built an altar there unto the Lord,* etc.] On the top of the rock where he had laid his provisions, and which had been consumed by fire issuing out of it, as a token of divine acceptance, and as an assurance of his destroying the Midianites as easily and quickly as the fire had consumed them, and therefore had great encouragement to erect an altar here for God:

and called it Jehovahshalom; the Lord is peace, the author and giver of peace, temporal, spiritual, and eternal; so Jarchi,

“the Lord is our peace,”

a fit name for the angel that appeared to him, who was no other than the man of peace; who is our peace, the author of peace between God and man. This name he gave the altar, with respect to the words of comfort said to him in his fright,

peace be to thee; and by way of prophecy, that peace would be wrought for Israel by the Lord, and prosperity given them; or by way of prayer, the Lord grant or send peace:

unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abiezrites; that is, the altar Gideon built remained to the times of Samuel, the writer of this book, and was then to be seen in the city of Ophrah, which belonged to the family of the Abiezrites, who were of the tribe of Manasseh.

Ver. 25. *And it came to pass the same night,* etc.] The night which followed the day in which the angel appeared to Gideon as he was threshing:

that the Lord said unto him; perhaps in a dream, since it was in the night: take thy father's young bullock: or "the bullock, the ox"^{f134}; a bullock which was a large grown ox, and was not only his father's property, but what his father designed and set apart for the service of Baal; and though it was his father's, yet having a divine warrant for it, it was sufficient for him to take it without his leave, and especially as it was designed for such an ill use:

even the second bullock of seven years old; which, according to Hesiod^{f135} is in its prime and full strength at nine years old, and lives much longer. In Homer^{f136}, one of five years old is said to be sacrificed: this further describes what he was to take, the second that stood in the stall of the bullocks, or that drew in the second row at plough, or the second in age and value, or the second that was set apart for the service of Baal; though the words may be rendered, "and the second bullock"^{f137}; besides that of his father's, he was to take another, which perhaps belonged to the people, and was the second in birth or age with respect to the former, being seven years old; or, as the Targum is, that had been fatted seven years, and had been so long preparing for the sacrifice of Baal; which was as long as the tyranny of the Midianites over them, and was occasioned by the idolatry of the people of Israel; and such a bullock was ordered to be taken with respect to that, and to show that it would end with the sacrifice of this creature:

and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath; upon his ground, in some part of his possessions, and perhaps built at his own expense, though for public use:

and cut down the grove that is by it; or "about it", as the Vulgate Latin version; it being usual with the Heathens to plant groves near or around their altars and temples where religious worship was performed; partly to make them more pleasant and venerable, and partly for the commission of deeds which would not bear the light; or "over it", for they were commonly tall trees which grew over the altar they erected. Some render it, "upon it"^{f138}, and understand by it an idol placed on it: so the Arabic version is,

"cut down the female idol Asira (perhaps the same with Astarte), which is upon the same altar;"

and so the Syriac version to the same purpose, which calls it the idol Estere, set upon the altar.

Ver. 26. *And build an altar to the Lord thy God upon the top of this rock,* etc.] Where the provisions were laid, and out of which came forth fire that consumed them; and where the altar, called by the name of Jehovahshalom, had been built by him, near it very probably; and there might be room enough for both upon the top of the rock; for this seems to be a distinct altar from that that was erected as a monumental altar, in memory of the miracle there wrought, and in gratitude by Gideon for the preservation of his life, and the peace and prosperity there and then promised, and which altar was to continue, and did; but this was for sacrifice, and only for the present time; for the proper place for sacrifice was the tabernacle: and this was to be built in the ordered place; either in the place where Gideon was ordered to put the flesh and the unleavened cakes; or in an orderly way and manner, according as was commanded in the law, as that it should be of earth and unhewn stones, and so framed as that it might be fit to have the wood and sacrifice laid in order on it; or in a plain place, as Kimchi, upon the top of the rock, where he might lay in order the stones of the altar:

and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shall cut down; mention being made only of one bullock that was to be offered, has made some think that only one was ordered to be taken, namely, this second, which agrees with our version of (~~OFES~~ Judges 6:25) for if two were taken, what became of the first, since only the second was ordered to be sacrificed? to which Kimchi makes answer, that he was ordered to take it away, that his father might not offer it to an idol, as he intended, and therefore this was done to prevent idolatry; and as this second bullock was to be a burnt sacrifice, and to be burned with the wood of the grove just cut down, it seems to confirm the sense of such versions and interpreters who understand it of an idol on the altar of Baal; since wood just cut down would not be fit to burn, whereas an idol of wood, that had been of some standing, would be very proper: everything ordered and done were different from the laws and usages directed to by Moses, and practised by the Jews. Gideon was no priest, and yet bid to offer sacrifice, and that on an altar of his own erecting, and not the altar of God; and upon the top of a rock, and not at the tabernacle; and the wood of a grove or idol was to be made use of, which in other cases was not allowed; and all this done in the night, which was not the time of sacrificing; but the divine warrant was sufficient for Gideon. The Jews say ^{f139}, there were eight things that were made free or allowed now, which were not at another time: and it was necessary, before Gideon acted the

part of a deliverer, that he should become a reformer, and it was proper to begin at his own family.

Ver. 27. *Then Gideon took ten men of his servants,* etc.] Not only whom he could command, but could confide in, and whom he knew would cheerfully engage in this work, being like himself, who had not bowed the knee to Baal; and as there was much work to do, and it required dispatch, such a number was necessary; since he had not only the altar of Baal to throw down, and his grove or idol to cut down, but an altar to build, and a sacrifice to be taken and offered:

and did as the Lord had said unto him; all the above things, he set about them at once, and dispatched them all in one night; so ready and cheerful was he in obedience to the divine command:

and so it was, because he feared his father's household, and the men of the city, that he could not do it by day, that he did it by night; for both his father's family, and the inhabitants of the city of Ophrah, were all idolaters, worshippers of Baal; and this fear of them was not a fear of being reproached or punished for what he did, or of any harm coming to him for the fact, which as he might expect would be known, so the risk was the same, be it done when it would; but it was a fear of being restrained and hindered from doing it, and therefore in point of prudence, and consulting the honour of God and religion, and not his own safety, he took the time of the night to do it in.

Ver. 28. *And when the men of the city arose early in the morning,* etc.] And came to the place where the altar of Baal, his grove and image, were, to pay their morning devotions to him: behold,

the altar of Baal was cast down, and the grove was cut down that was by it, and the second bullock was offered upon the altar that was built; upon the new altar that Gideon built, and which very probably was burning when they came: and it is very likely that the place, where the altar of Baal had stood, was not far from the rock where this new altar was erected.

Ver. 29. *And they said one to another, who hath done this thing?* etc.] They were struck with amazement, and could not devise who could be so daring and wicked as to do such an action:

and when they inquired and asked; one and another, everyone present, or they could think of as proper to inquire of; they were very diligent and

industrious to find it out; and perhaps they inquired of the family and servants of Joash and Gideon, in whose ground the altar stood:

they said, Gideon the son of Joash hath done this thing; when they had inquired of everybody they could, and thought of one person and another, there was none appeared to them more likely to have done it, than Gideon; partly because they knew he was no friend of Baal, and partly because he was a man of spirit and courage, and they concluded none but such an one would have ventured to have done it; and besides, they considered he was the son of Joash, who perhaps was their chief magistrate, and that he might presume on his father's protection, as they might surprise; and being near the premises, he was the most likely person they could think of; and it is not improbable, that upon inquiry they got it out of the servants concerned, or that had knowledge of it from them, or from some that saw him that morning at the sacrifice, or returning from it, and therefore peremptorily assert he was the man that did it.

Ver. 30. *Then the men of the city said unto Joash*, etc.] The principal inhabitants of the place met together, and in a body went to Joash their chief magistrate, to have justice done in this case:

bring out thy son, that he may die; they do not ask to have the cause tried by him, to hear what proof they had of the fact, or what Gideon had to say in his own defence; nor do they wait for the sentence of Joash, but determine it themselves, and require the delinquent to be given up to them, that they might put him to death; a strange request of Israelites, whose law judged no man before it heard him; and besides, according to that, the worshippers of Baal, and not the destroyers of him, and his altars, were to be put to death, which shows how strangely mad and infatuated these people were:

because he hath cut down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove that was by it; they take no notice of the bullock which he had taken and offered, it being his father's property; and which seems to confirm the sense of our version, that there was but one, (^{<0165>}Judges 6:25) for had the second been a different one, and the people's property, they would have accused him of theft as well as sacrilege respecting that.

Ver. 31. *And Joash said unto all that stood against him*, etc.] Against his son; that were his accusers and adversaries, and required him to be given up to them, that they might put him to death:

will ye plead for Baal? what, Israelites, and plead for Baal! or what need is there for this, cannot he plead for himself?

will ye save him? what, take upon you to save your god! cannot he save himself? he ought to save both himself and you, if he is a god, and not you save him:

he that will plead for him, let him be put to death, while it is yet morning; immediately, before noon, for it was now morning when they came to him; this he said to terrify them, and to express the hatred he now had of idolatry, and the just sense of its being punishable with death by the law of God. This he may be supposed to say, to save his son from their present wrath and fury, hoping by that time to find out some ways and means for his safety:

if he be a god, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar; if he is a god, he knows who has done it, and is able to avenge himself on him, and put him to death himself that has done it, and therefore leave it with him to plead his own cause, and avenge his own injuries; this he said, deriding the deity; for though Joash had been a worshipper of Baal, yet he might be now convinced by his son of the sinfulness of it, and of the necessity of a reformation, in order to a deliverance from the Midianites, for which he had a commission, and had perhaps informed his father of it; or however he was not so attached to Baal, but that he preferred the life of his son to the worship of him.

Ver. 32. *Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal,* etc.] That is, Joash called his son Gideon by that name; who, some think, is the same with Jerombalus, the priest of the god Jevo, or Jehovah; from whom Sanchoniatho, an ancient Phoenician writer, as Philo Byblius says^{f140}, received the principal things in his history respecting the Jews:

saying, let Baal plead against him, because he hath thrown down his altar; giving this as the reason of the name of Jerubbaal he called him by, which signifies, “let Baal plead”; let Baal plead his own cause, and avenge himself on Gideon for what he has done to him, and put him to death if he can.

Ver. 33. *Then all the Midianites, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east,* etc.] The Arabians, (^(Arab)Judges 6:3) were gathered together; not as being alarmed with this fact of Gideon in destroying the altar of Baal, and so came to avenge it; but it was their usual time of gathering together

to come into Canaan, being harvest time, as appears by Gideon being employed in threshing, to fetch away the increase of the earth, as they had done for some years past:

and went over; the river Jordan, which lay between the Midianites and the Israelites:

and pitched in the valley of Jezreel; a very large, delightful, and fruitful plain; of which (see Gill on “~~2006~~ Hosea 1:5”); a very proper place for such a large number to pitch on, and from whence they might receive much; and a suitable place to bring the increase of the land to, from the several parts of it, which was the business they came upon; and as this lay on the borders of Issachar and Manasseh, it was not far from Gideon, and this gave him an opportunity of exerting himself, and executing his commission.

Ver. 34. *But the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon*, etc.] Not the spirit of prophecy, as Maimonides^{f141}, who calls this spirit the first degree of prophecy, but a spirit of fortitude and courage, as the Targum; the Spirit of God filled him, or, as in the Hebrew text, “clothed”^{f142} him with zeal, strength, and might, moved and animated him to engage with this great body of people come into the land, to ravage and waste it, and to attempt the deliverance of Israel from their bondage:

and he blew a trumpet; as an alarm of war, and as a token to as many as heard to resort to him, and join with him in the common cause against the enemy:

and Abiezer was gathered after him; the Abiezrites, one of the families of the tribe of Manasseh, of which Gideon and his father’s house were; and even it is probable the inhabitants of Ophrah, who were Abiezrites, being now convinced of their idolatry, and having entertained a good opinion of Gideon as a man of valour, and who, in the present emergence, they looked upon as an hopeful instrument of their deliverance, and therefore joined him.

Ver. 35. *And he sent messengers through all Manasseh*, etc.] Of which tribe he was; not only he called by the trumpet that part of the tribe, the Abiezrites, who were within the sound of it, but the rest of the tribe at a greater distance from him he sent messengers to, acquainting them with his design, and inviting them to his assistance. Some think this refers both to the half tribe of Manasseh within Jordan, and the other half tribe on the

other side Jordan; but that is not very probable, only the half tribe within it is meant:

who also was gathered after him; obeying the summons and invitation he gave them by the messengers:

and he sent messengers unto Asher, and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali; which three tribes lay nearest to him on the north; but he sent not to the inhabitants of the tribe of Ephraim, which lay to the south, and which afterwards occasioned a quarrel, (~~1080~~Judges 8:1)

and they came up to meet them; that is, the inhabitants of the above three tribes, at least many of them, came up from the places of their habitations to meet Gideon, and those that were associated with him, at their place of rendezvous.

Ver. 36. *And Gideon said unto God*, etc.] Not to a prophet of God who was there, of whom he asked the following signs to be done, as Ben Gersom, but to God in prayer, as Abarbinel:

if thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said; not that he doubted of it, but was willing to have a confirmation of his faith; and perhaps his view was more for the encouragement of those that were with him than himself, that he desired the following signs; and though he had had one before, that was to show that he was truly an angel that spoke to him, and not to ascertain the salvation that should be wrought by him; though that might be concluded from his being an angel that spoke to him, and assured him of it.

Ver. 37. *Behold, I will put a fleece of wool on the floor*, etc.] On the floor where he was threshing, where the angel first appeared to him, and which lay exposed to the open air, so that the dew might easily fall upon it:

and if the dew be on the fleece only; the dew that falls from heaven in the night, when he proposed it should lie on the floor till morning:

and it be dry upon all the earth beside; meaning not upon all the world, nor even upon all the land of Israel, but upon all the floor about the fleece: then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by my hand, as thou hast said; for the dew being a token of divine favour, (see ~~2345~~Hosea 14:5) it would show that Gideon would partake of it, while his enemies would be dry and desolate, and ruin and destruction would be their portion.

Ver. 38. *And it was so*, etc.] The Lord condescended to work this miracle for the confirmation of his faith, and for the encouragement of those that were with him; the fleece was wet with the dew of heaven, and all the ground about it dry:

for he rose up early in the morning; being eagerly desirous of knowing whether his request would be granted, and how it would be with the fleece:

and thrust the fleece together; to satisfy himself whether the dew had fallen on it, and there was any moisture in it, which by being squeezed together he would more easily perceive:

and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water; so that it appeared it had not only fallen on it, but it had taken in a large quantity of it; the word here used is the same as in (⁴⁰⁶²⁵Judges 5:25); the Targum calls it a flagon.

Ver. 39. *And Gideon said unto God*, etc.] In the same way as before, and on the morning when he had been favoured with the sight of the above miracle:

let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once; he was conscious to himself that it showed great presumption and boldness in him to repeat his request, and that it had the appearance of great diffidence and distrust in him, after he had been indulged with such a sign to confirm his faith; but as it was not so much on his own account as others, and promising to ask no more favours of this kind, he hoped his boldness would not be resented:

let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece one time more with it, and that not to try the power of God, of which he had no doubt, but the will of God, whether it was the good pleasure of God to save Israel by his hand, and whether now was the time, or another:

let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew; which might seem to be a greater, at least a plainer miracle than the former, and less liable to cavil and objection; for it might be urged, that a fleece of wool naturally draws in and drinks up moisture about it; wherefore that to be dry, and the ground all around it wet, would be a sure sign and evidence of the wonderful interposition of the power and providence of God, in directing the fall of the dew on the one, and not on the other.

Ver. 40. *And God did so that night*, etc.] The night following, the night being the season in which the dew falls:

for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground; and this might signify, that not Gideon only, as before, should partake of the divine favour, but all the Israelites, who would share in the salvation wrought by him. Many interpreters observe, that all this is an emblem of the different case and state of the Jews and Gentiles under the different dispensations; that whereas under the former dispensation the Jews partook of the divine favour only, and of the blessings of grace, and enjoyed the words and ordinances with which they were watered, when the Gentiles all around them were like a barren wilderness; so, under the Gospel dispensation, the Gentiles share the above benefits to a greater degree, while the Jews are entirely destitute of them.