

# THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL

## the PROMISED *land*

### GOD THE JUDGE

### *God Makes a Mighty Warrior*

After the time of Deborah, Israel was at peace for 40 years. But, the sin cycle returned. **Judges 6:1 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> *The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD gave them into the hand of Midian seven years.* The Midianites were ‘half-brothers’ to the Israelites. Abraham married Keturah after Sarah died and descendents of their son, Midian, became known as the Midianites. The Midianites were almost always in conflict with Israel.

About the time of the eighth Midianite invasion, God called a farmer in Manasseh named Gideon to become the deliverer of His people. Gideon started his life as coward, then became a conqueror, and sadly ended his career as a compromiser.

The intensity of God’s judgment on His people was strong. The historian Josephus writes, “Now when they had done this for three years, the multitude of the Israelites retired to the mountains, and forsook the plain country. They also made themselves hollows underground, and caverns.” God’s people were fearful. They would rather hide than fight. We read in **Judges 6:6 (ESV)** <sup>6</sup> *And Israel was brought very low because of Midian. And the people of Israel cried out for help to the LORD.*

Yes, the people cried out to the LORD as most of us do when we are in trouble. However, the nation gave no evidence of real repentance, but their affliction still moved God's loving heart. This reminds me of **Romans 5:8 (ESV)** <sup>8</sup> *but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Our strength comes from God who sends us.

**Read Judges 6:11-16 (ESV)** <sup>11</sup> *Now the angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites.* <sup>12</sup> *And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, “The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor.”* <sup>13</sup> *And Gideon said to him, “Please, sir, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us, saying, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?’ But now the LORD has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian.”* <sup>14</sup> *And the LORD turned to him and said, “Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?”* <sup>15</sup> *And he said to him, “Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house.”* <sup>16</sup> *And the LORD said to him, “But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man.”*

As we have studied in other scriptures, the Angel of the LORD is a special form in which God manifested Himself to humans in the Old Testament. This visual manifestation of God is known as a theophany.

The Midianites would swarm over the Jordan at about harvest time and sweep away the produce of the rich plain of Jezreel and did not spare anything alive. They invaded the land to ravage it. Gideon was using his winepress as a place to sift his wheat. The winepress would have been located at the foot of a hill. They would carry the heavy grapes downhill to the lowest place to press them. In contrast, he should have been on the threshing floor which would be located at the top of the hill, the highest place available, in order to catch the wind which would drive the chaff away.

We see from his conversation that Gideon felt deserted by God. Gideon was like we are at times. He could see where the hand of God had worked in the past, but he was unable to recognize God's power in the present.

The Angel said: *The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor.* Those words must have astonished Gideon. He didn't feel valiant. Paul in the New Testament helps us understand how the LORD was calling Gideon. ***1 Corinthians 1:26-27 (ESV)*** <sup>26</sup> *For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.* <sup>27</sup> *But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.* Take courage! What the LORD did with Gideon He can do with us!

Gideon was focusing on his circumstances. We are no different. We often give in to our fears by allowing our thoughts to 'eat us up' with worry. We focus on 'what ifs' and borrow trouble. We need to remember even in the midst of genuine trouble, we can confidently claim God's promise in ***Hebrews 13:6 (ESV)*** <sup>6</sup> ... *"The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"*

In the process of their conversation the LORD promised to be with Gideon and Gideon asked for a sign. And, then he asked the LORD to wait while he prepared an offering.

***Read Judges 6:19-21 (ESV)*** <sup>19</sup> *So Gideon went into his house and prepared a young goat and unleavened cakes from an ephah of flour. The meat he put in a basket, and the broth he put in a pot, and brought them to him under the terebinth and presented them.* <sup>20</sup> *And the angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened cakes, and put them on this rock, and pour the broth over them." And he did so.* <sup>21</sup> *Then the angel of the LORD reached out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes. And fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes. And the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight.*

Gideon asked for a sign to assure him that it was really the LORD who was speaking to him, and the LORD was gracious to do so. Gideon prepared a sacrifice, which was a costly thing to do at a time when food was scarce. An ephah of flour was about a half a bushel, enough to make bread for a family for several days. Wiersbe conjectures it would have probably taken at least an hour to dress the meat and prepare the unleavened cakes, but God waited for him to return and then consumed the offering by bringing fire from the rock. The LORD departed out of his sight immediately; however, he did not walk off as a man, but vanished and disappeared as a spirit. This was a glorious sign. ***Judges 6:22 (ESV)*** <sup>22</sup> *Then Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the LORD. And Gideon said, "Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face."* And that realization moved their conversation forward.

Before striking down the Midianites, the LORD directed Gideon to strike down the cause of the Midianite oppression – Israel’s idol worship of Baal. Gideon’s own father had an altar to Baal. Gideon’s first assignment was to tear down his father’s Baal idol and build an altar to the LORD in its place. This would involve using one of his father's valuable bullocks and using the wood of the pagan altar for fuel.

The LORD worked in Gideon’s father’s heart and he defended his son in front of the angry town mob. At about that time, the Midianites and their allies, the Amalekites, began gathering and encamped in the Valley of Jezreel. Remember, this was the same place that Barak had fought Sisera about 47 years before and it is the same place where the battle to end all battles – Armageddon will one day be fought.

Our assurance comes from God who shows patience.

**Read Judges 6:36-40 (ESV)** <sup>36</sup> Then Gideon said to God, “If you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said, <sup>37</sup> behold, I am laying a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece alone, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said.” <sup>38</sup> And it was so. When he rose early next morning and squeezed the fleece, he wrung enough dew from the fleece to fill a bowl with water. <sup>39</sup> Then Gideon said to God, “Let not your anger burn against me; let me speak just once more. Please let me test just once more with the fleece. Please let it be dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground let there be dew.” <sup>40</sup> And God did so that night; and it was dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground there was dew.

Gideon already knew the LORD’s will. He was struggling with his own fear and doubt when he requested a miraculous sign. Sometimes we hear Christians say that they are going to “put out the fleece” before the LORD to determine God’s will. Gideon already knew God’s will when he put out the fleece. Gideon’s putting out a fleece is not a prescription for finding the LORD’s will. It is about Gideon’s lack of faith and pictures how tender and understanding our LORD is with us even in our fears and doubts. **Psalm 103:13-14 (ESV)** <sup>13</sup> As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. <sup>14</sup> For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.

When we remember this story, let’s think of the dew that fell on the fleece alone and then fell on the ground alone. In the Bible, dew is a symbol of refreshment. Moses said of the Word of the LORD in his song in **Deuteronomy 32:2 (ESV)** <sup>2</sup> May my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, like gentle rain upon the tender grass, and like showers upon the herb. We read in **Proverbs 19:12 (ESV)** <sup>12</sup> A king’s wrath is like the growling of a lion, but his favor is like dew on the grass. There are numerous references to dew in scripture. The next time you think of Gideon’s fleece, remember the dew that fell from God and allow your refreshing to come from His Word instead of asking for a sign. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is our sign!

I did not find a specific number for the Midianite army but **Judges 7:12**, says the army was as numerous as locusts. Scripture does reveal that Gideon started out with 32,000 men. **Judges 7:2 (ESV)** <sup>2</sup> The LORD said to Gideon, “The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me.’ So, the LORD told Gideon to allow whoever was afraid to go home.

22,000 men went home! Certainly, Gideon was now stepping out on faith by relieving 22,000 men of their duties – 10,000 men remained. But, the LORD said 10,000 was still too many!

The next sifting of the army came by watching the men drink. Some knelt to drink while some lapped water like a dog would – only 300 lapped water and this small group was chosen to do battle. Scripture does not differentiate between the two groups. So, we should not read anything into it other than the number of the army was decreased to a minute number of men for the specific purpose of acknowledging the power of God in the victory that would come. Our victory comes from God who saves us through our weakness!

**Read Judges 7:16-22 (ESV)** <sup>16</sup> *And he divided the 300 men into three companies and put trumpets into the hands of all of them and empty jars, with torches inside the jars.* <sup>17</sup> *And he said to them, “Look at me, and do likewise. When I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do.* <sup>18</sup> *When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then blow the trumpets also on every side of all the camp and shout, ‘For the LORD and for Gideon.’”* <sup>19</sup> *So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, when they had just set the watch. And they blew the trumpets and smashed the jars that were in their hands.* <sup>20</sup> *Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the jars. They held in their left hands the torches, and in their right hands the trumpets to blow. And they cried out, “A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!”* <sup>21</sup> *Every man stood in his place around the camp, and all the army ran. They cried out and fled.* <sup>22</sup> *When they blew the 300 trumpets, the LORD set every man’s sword against his comrade and against all the army. And the army fled...*

Gideon's plan was simple but effective. He gave each of his men a trumpet to blow, a jar to break, and a torch to light. They would encircle the enemy camp, the torches hidden inside the jars (they were not clear glass) and their trumpets in their hands. The trumpets were rams' horns (the *shofar*) similar to what Joshua used at Jericho. At Gideon's signal, the men would blow the trumpets, break their jars, raise their lights, and then shout, *A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!* God would do the rest. The enemies screamed and ran for their lives.

This victory is a picture of the destruction of Satan’s kingdom in this world. The jars the LORD’s army carried contained lights inside. **2 Corinthians 4:7 (ESV)** <sup>7</sup> *But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.* The jars of clay in the LORD’s army picture His body of believers! When we are broken the Light of Christ spills out for the world to see. The blowing of the trumpets pictures the sound of the testimony of believers going around the world. The gospel is a sword not in our hand but in our mouth.

**Judges 8** reveals that along the way Gideon forgot the source of his power. He later did some things in his own power but God was not in them. Often we fall after great triumph. Even with his failures, Gideon is mentioned in the Hebrews roll call of faith. His presence there is an encouragement when we falter in our faith. Remember, the most spiritual Christian may fall, and that's why we need to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith.