

## EXPOSITION OF JUDGES

### Message #9

### Judges 6:33-40

Gary Inrig, who wrote a great commentary on the book of Judges back in 1979, tells an amazing story from the life of the very theologically troubled John Wesley (*Hearts of Iron, Feet of Clay*, pp. 109-110).

When John Wesley was a thirty-two year old bachelor he was pastoring a church in Savannah, Georgia. A young lady caught his eye. She was pretty, intelligent, and he fell in love. The problem was, he belonged to a weird religious club called the “Holy Club,” and one of their tenets was they remain single. He decided to put out a fleece to see if it was God’s will for him to marry the girl. So he had his friend write on three pieces of paper: 1) Marry; 2) Don’t marry this year; 3) Do not think of marriage anymore. They put all three pieces in a container and drew out one to determine the will of God and it turned out to be number three. So John Wesley thought this must be God’s will and with a broken heart he got on a ship and sailed back to England.

Not long after getting to England, Wesley came to faith in Christ and he had met another woman, a widow whose name was Grace and he fell in love with her. This time he decided he would determine God’s will by different means. He listed seven factors: 1) Housekeeper; 2) Nurse; 3) Companion; 4) Friend; 5) Fellow worker in the Gospel; 6) Her gifts; 7) Fruit of her labors. Wesley believed she was the one because she met the criteria; and to finally determine the will of God, he went and asked his brother Charles who didn’t like Grace. So Wesley didn’t get the sign he was looking for and he called it off, broken-hearted again.

Finally, at age forty-seven, he supposedly fell in love again with a wealthy widow whose name was Molly. We are not sure what fleece he used this time, but he concluded this was the one God wanted him to marry. He couldn’t have been more wrong. Molly ended up leaving John Wesley and a few years later he died.

John Wesley never did figure out God’s will for his life on marriage because, frankly, putting out fleeces never works. There is a point you will see tonight that is very important:

**GOD WANTS HIS PEOPLE BELIEVING HIS WORD AND RELYING ON HIS SPIRIT FOR VICTORY AND NOT RELYING ON FLEECES.**

Now probably at some time or another, most of us here have either heard about the idea of “put out a fleece” or perhaps have even asked God for some fleece. I am convinced that the reason for this is our ignorance in that we are as dull as Gideon. **Asking God for a fleece is never a sign of faith; it is always a sign of a lack of faith. We are told by God that we are to ask Him for wisdom (James 1:5), not for fleece signs.**

Last time we were together, we saw God give victory to Gideon when he obeyed God and tore down the altar of Baal. This is setting the stage for the biggest victory of his life. We would like to analyze this text tonight by breaking it down into three parts:

**PART #1** – The context of asking God for the fleece of wool miracles. **6:33-35**

As we come to **verse 33**, we notice that the Midianites and Amalekites were forming their coalition for their annual pillaging raid. Gideon had won a big victory at home, but a much bigger challenge was on the horizon. “All” the Midianites and Amalekites and the Arabs (sons of the east), assembled themselves together in the Valley of Jezreel for their annual looting of Israel. Gideon was seeing this all begin to form and this is the context for his instability.

Now there are five key realities on which Gideon could depend for victory without ever asking for a fleece:

**Contextual Reality #1** - God personally visited Gideon. 6:11, 12, 22

Gideon had a personal encounter with the angel of the LORD, which was none other than Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ had paid Gideon a personal visit and Gideon knew He was God.

**Contextual Reality #2** - God had told Gideon that He would give Him victory. 6:14, 16

So Gideon has God’s Word on this. He doesn’t need a sign. He doesn’t even need to pray about it. God’s Word told him exactly what to do.

**Contextual Reality #3** - God had shown Gideon that when he obeys Him, he gets victory.  
6:25-32

Even though Gideon had been threatened, God had shown him that when he obeyed God he was fine; things came out good.

**Contextual Reality #4** - God sent the Spirit of the LORD to Gideon. **6:34-35**

Now there are big distinctions between the way the Holy Spirit worked in O.T. times and the way He works in N.T. times:

- 1) In O.T. times only a few had God’s Spirit on them, and in N.T. times every believer has God’s Spirit in them (John 14:16-17).
- 2) In O.T. times the purpose of God’s Spirit was to anoint a very special individual for service, and in N.T. times God’s Spirit anoints every believer for service.
- 3) In O.T. times the time of God’s Spirit being on a person was temporal, and in N.T. times the time of God’s Spirit being in a person is forever (John 14:16-17).
- 4) In O.T. times the result of God’s Spirit being on a person was physical, and in N.T. times the result of God’s Spirit being in a person is spiritual.

God had a specific job for Gideon to do, and His Spirit came upon him to enable him to do it. In order for God’s Spirit to enable us to do the job He wants us to do, we must be obedient. Gideon was obedient to God.

It is possible for us to quench God’s Spirit and resist His work in our lives and grieve God’s Spirit, but we cannot ever lose God’s Spirit (Eph. 4:30; I Thess. 5:19).

**Contextual Reality #5** - God caused people to follow Gideon as their leader. **6:34-35**

God's Spirit came upon Gideon and all he did was blow a trumpet like back in Joshua's day, and many Israelites started coming to follow him. Now you would think Gideon would say - "You know just a couple of days ago I was trying to hide some food in a wine press, and now great numbers of people are looking to me as a leader of God. God surely must be in this."

In fact, notice carefully from **verse 34**, people started to be stirred by God in Gideon's own home area of the Abiezrites (6:11). When God's Spirit came upon Gideon, local people from his own hometown realized it and they rallied behind him. These were some of the same people who wanted to kill him.

Not only that, but according to **verse 35**, word spread that we have a true man of God here and look who else shows up - volunteers from Asher. Those were the same tribal people who had been duds during the days of Deborah and Barak (5:17).

Zebulun and Naphtali were faithful to go to war during the days of Deborah (5:18). All they needed was someone to take the lead and they would follow, but this was a new step of faith for Asher. God gives His people plenty of time to make adjustments and get it right. Asher would not make the same mistake again. Gideon was called by God to go to war and they wanted to be part of it.

So think about this; God has done all of these amazing things for Gideon. What extra evidence could you possibly need?

**PART #2** – The actual requests of Gideon for fleece miracles. **6:36-40**

Now we come to **verses 36-40** which give us Gideon's famous fleece. The idea of "putting out a fleece" is familiar to many who go to church, but most that do go to church have no idea of what this is actually about:

- 1) Some view this fleece as something praise worthy for Gideon, a pattern for believers to follow, which as you will see is not at all the truth.
- 2) Some view this fleece of Gideon as actual sin against God - rejecting His Word and will.
- 3) Some view this fleece of Gideon as evidence of a lack of faith in God - doubting His Word.

If we put this in the context of Judges 6, what we conclude is this:

**BECAUSE GIDEON LACKED FAITH IN GOD'S WORD, HE WANTED TO SEE A FLEECE SIGN MIRACLE.**

Gideon does not look more faithful here; he looks more faithless. In fact, as Clinton McCaan said, in view of the fact of the things God had already done, "he is beginning to look a little ridiculous" (*Judges*, p. 66). Truth is, because Gideon did not fully believe God's Word, he takes a literal fleece of wool and asks God to perform nature miracles with it.

Now before we actually look at this, there are three key observations you do not want to miss:

**(Observation #1)** - Gideon knew exactly what God's will was. **6:36-37** (11, 14)

This is extremely important to see because most fleece-seeking believers completely miss this point. Most that put out fleeces before God do so because they are trying to determine what God's will is.

Contrary to popular suggestions, Gideon knew exactly what God's will was - lead Israel to wipe out the Midianites. In fact, notice from **verses 36-37** that two times Gideon says "as you have spoken." In other words, not only did Gideon know God's will, but He knew God's Word that revealed that will.

**So, this fleece is not about Gideon discovering or knowing or determining God's will.** As Dan Duncan of Believers Chapel said, this fleece business is not about Gideon "seeking guidance, but confirmation." Gideon knew exactly what God wanted him to do before he ever put out a fleece.

**(Observation #2)** - Gideon's fleece is a sign that Gideon doubts God and doesn't believe the Word of God.

Asking God for signs is not evidence of solid faith in God's Word; it is evidence of lack of faith. Gideon is basically saying to God, "I know what You have said by Your Word and I know what You have already done in showing me what I am supposed to do; but I really don't believe You or trust You, so I need to put out a fleece.

Putting out fleeces does not show God we trust Him; it says to God we don't trust Him. Dr. Warren Wiersbe said that he had met all kinds of people who got into serious trouble by putting out fleeces (*Be Available*, p. 68).

Now there were two fleece miracles that Gideon requests of God. By the way, notice this. All through this chapter Gideon has used the name Adonai and Jehovah, but in these verses he uses the name "God" (Elohim), which is the plural Trinitarian name for God, which is used often in Genesis 1 in presenting God as the Sovereign Creator.

**(Observation #3)** - Gideon's fleece is a sign that asks God to perform a miracle in God's nature .

Let's say you ask God for the phone to ring at a certain time so that you may discern His will. You do not know for sure if God had the phone ring or Satan had the phone ring since he is a powerful force at work in this world. Let's say you are trying to determine if you should move, so you put out a fleece that God will sell your home by a certain date. Here is the problem. What if it is God's will for you to move and Satan tries to stop you from doing God's will by not allowing the house to sell. Or, what if it is not God's will that you move, but Satan sells the house to get you to move.

Gary Inrig tells the story of a time a church called him and he had plenty of evidence that it was God's will that he take the church. This was confirmed to him by God, by the church, and by the elders of the church. He decided to put out a fleece that God would sell his house by a specific date, which God didn't do. Gary said, but I knew it was God's will to go to this other church. So by faith he stepped out and went. He said God did not sell that house until the first Sunday he preached in his new church. He said the fleece didn't work, but God confirmed in many other ways that it was His will to move (*Hearts of Iron, Feet of Clay*, pp. 116-117).

These kinds of fleeces are dangerous. However, Gideon takes it out of Satan's world and asks God for a miraculous nature sign. It would be like asking God to pour rain on one side of your house but not the other.

**Fleece Sign Miracle #1** - The miracle of water only on the fleece of wool. **6:37-38**

**Now let's be very clear on this point - Gideon is asking God for an amazing miracle here.** He is asking God to miraculously change normal nature here as the Creator. He wants God to put His dew only on the fleece and not the ground.

I love something Gary Phillips said on this point: "Gideon was not asking God for a coincidence ("If I sell my car by 5:00 on Friday, I will know God wants me to move to Seattle"); Gideon was asking God for a miracle ("If my car develops organs of speech and utters 'Seattle,' I will know God wants me to move there"). As he goes on to say, if you really want to be guided by a fleece, then go get a sheep's fleece and ask God to literally reverse turf wetness and dryness as Gideon did. "And then repent" (*Judges*, p. 104).

According to **verse 8**, Gideon got up early and God had performed the miracle. The miracle was so amazing in that the ground was completely dry, and the fleece of wool was so wet that you could squeeze out a bowl of water.

But notice this was not good enough for Gideon. Even though God had performed an amazing miracle, it wasn't enough to convince Gideon to believe God's Word. So Gideon again asked God for another miracle.

**Fleece Sign Miracle #2** - The miracle of water only on the ground, not the fleece of wool. **6:39-40**

It is very clear from **verse 39** that Gideon knew he was on very dangerous ground here and risked angering God. God is not pleased with people who do not believe His Word. **God starts to get angry with His people who are fleece-seekers who don't believe His Word.** But he asked God to make the ground wet and not the fleece of wool, which God did.

What God apparently decided to do was to accommodate Himself to Gideon's lack of faith. God is a gracious God who puts up with a lot of faulty things with His people. Gideon does not look like a "valiant warrior" here but a "doubting Thomas." **Think about what putting out a fleece actually says to God: "You must do what I tell You to do before I'm willing to do what You tell me to do."**

Asking God for these miracle signs shows that Gideon lacks faith. Do you understand this point? We live in a religious world where religious frauds take in millions and millions of dollars through their so called “miracle crusades.” They advertise that if you come you will see miracles. They present the idea that this is really a strong faith crusade. It is anything but that. This kind of crusade shows that people do not have faith in God and His Word. What these crusades actually say is we don’t believe the Word of God, so we must see tangible miraculous signs.

**PART #3** – The practical application for the New Testament believer.

**There is nothing more important for the New Testament believer than knowing and following God’s will.** God made you, God gave you your skills and abilities, and God saved you. Nothing is more important than knowing what God wants for your life. However, putting out fleeces is not the way to know God’s will or discover God’s will. Putting out fleeces does not say we believe God, it says we doubt God and we won’t do God’s will if He doesn’t do something for us first. What are the proper biblical principles we may use to determine God’s will? Let me suggest ten biblically based discovery principles for determining God’s will.

**(Will Discovery Principle #1)** - The specific activity of prayer. James 1:5; Philippians 4:6-7; Proverbs 2:3

Prayer that determines God’s will is prayed by the individual and by other individuals. If we want to have the wisdom to know God’s will and to do God’s will we must go to God and pray and ask Him to give us wisdom. We do not ask for signs, but wisdom. Also it is critical that we get other believers praying for us in the decision (Philippians 1:19; I Corinthians 15:30).

**(Will Discovery Principle #2)** - The specific guidance from God’s Word. Proverbs 2:1; II Timothy 2:15

If it is God’s will, it will be in harmony with the written Word of God and not against the written Word of God. In fact, most of the time God’s will may be discerned by knowing the written Word of God. Obedience to the written known will of God will lead to discovering the unknown will of God. In God’s Word there are specific commands and there are general principles to obey and follow, and the more we know them and follow them, the better position we are in to know God’s will.

**(Will Discovery Principle #3)** - The specific guidance of knowing you are in fellowship with God. I John 1:6

If we are living our lives in accordance to the Word of God, and we are not involved in practicing any known sin, then we are in a good position to determine God’s will because we are in fellowship with God. You cannot determine God’s will by living in sin.

**(Will Discovery Principle #4)** - The specific guidance of a non-grieved, non-quenched Holy Spirit. Ephesians 4:30; I Thess. 5:19

If it is God’s will, it will not quench or grieve God’s Spirit, because it isn’t if it does.

**(Will Discovery Principle #5)** - The specific guidance of having a deep inner peace that rules your heart about the decision. Colossians 3:15; Philippians 4:6-7

One must be very careful here, because a conscience may be so hardened that one can have peace about many things. Jonah was completely at peace with himself sound asleep on a ship when he was running from God's will; and Jesus Christ was not at peace in the Garden doing God's will, that He was sweating as it were great drops of blood. However, if all the other biblical principles are in place, this is a legitimate guide.

**(Will Discovery Principle #6)** - The specific guidance that comes through the counsel of other godly believers who are wise in God's Word. Prov. 11:14

This proverb is critical - where you have no guidance but your own, you are very likely to fail. But, when you can seek counsel from others right with God, there is a good likelihood that your decision will be victorious.

**(Will Discovery Principle #7)** - The specific guidance of what God has already done that you have seen in the past. Acts 15:4; II Timothy 4:17-18

You cannot look into the future, but you can look back at the past and see what God has done and how He has led in previous times.

**(Will Discovery Principle #8)** - The specific guidance of doors God has sovereignly opened. I Corinthians 16:8-9; Revelation 3:8

God does open and shut doors. One way to determine His will is walk through doors and see which ones He continues to open and which ones He continues to shut.

**(Will Discovery Principle #9)** - The specific guidance of what your heart desires. Psalm 37:3-4; 145:19

Again, one must be careful here, but there is nothing wrong with honestly analyzing self before God, and seeing if your heart is really desirous of the opportunity.

**(Will Discovery Principle #10)** - The specific activity of implicitly trusting in God. Proverbs 3:5-6; Psalm 73:23-24

Anything we do for God is done by faith. In fact, without faith it is impossible to please God. So if it is God's will, there will be a moment when we will have to, by faith, step out to do His will.

Applying these ten biblical principles is a far greater method of determining God's will than putting out fleeces.