

Exegetical Notes – Judges 6:1-7:25
Prepared by Charles H. Jensen for Cornerstone Fellowship
101 Kylies Road, Coatesville, PA 19320
610-384-1375
charleshjensen@aol.com

Background: When Joshua died, the conquest of The Promised Land was only partially completed. In large part, Israel had followed the instructions of YHWH regarding the taking of the land and the destruction of the indigenous population who lived there, but Israel had not followed God completely. Large sections of the indigenous population remained and were not under Israeli control.

From the time of the occupation (around 1380 BC) until the beginning of the Monarchs (1050 BC) Israel was a THEOCRACY, a nation whose king was God. Israel was supposed to listen to and follow the word of the Lord, but as we have already seen, Israel was not good at following the instructions of YHWH. Her failure to do so left her in trouble time and again. Partial obedience to the word of the Lord is disobedience to the word of the Lord and always leads to disaster. “Judges provides many examples of the principle that OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW BRINGS PEACE, WHEREAS DISOBEDIENCE MEANS OPPRESSION AND DEATH” (Charles Ryrie). This is the constantly repeated lesson of the Book of Judges. Judges is the story of the time in Israel’s early history when “Every man did what was right in his own eyes” (17:6 and 21:25). This always results in chaos and disaster.

In the Book of Judges a recurrent theme emerges: Step one - The people are following the will of YHWH; Step two - The people stop obeying the word of the Lord; Step three - An enemy arises that oppresses the people of God; Step four - The people cry out to God for help; Step five - God answers Israel’s prayer by sending them a deliverer (a judge to lead her, a Messiah); Step six - The people repent and return to the Lord. Then, the process begins again. Judges simply repeats this pattern over and over again. God’s people are “stiff necked and disobedient.” God is forever faithful. If God’s people would follow God’s word, they could save themselves hardship, worry, pain, etc. But they choose to do what seems right in their own eyes.

Judges 6:1-7:25

Verses 6:1-6

The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. ² Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds. ³ Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. ⁴ They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. ⁵ They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count them or their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it. ⁶ Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the LORD for help.

- The land of Israel had peace for 40 years (see Judges 5:38), but then Israel again lapsed into “evil.” She ceased to follow the word of the Lord. When Israel ceased to follow the word of the Lord and did evil in his sight, YHWH lifted his hand of protection from over her. The Midianites, joined by the Amalekites and other nomadic tribes, took control.
- These tribes invaded Israel, but not militarily. They roamed over the land of Israel and seized everything that belonged to the people of Israel. They took Israel’s crops as food. They took Israel’s flocks and herds. They were ruthless oppressors who drove the Israelites out of their homes and forced them to live in caves in the mountains. They were terrorists in the true sense of the word. They burned and looted and made Israel afraid.
- At last, Israel remembered YHWH and cried out to him for help.

Verses 7-10

When the Israelites cried out to the LORD because of Midian, ⁸ he sent them a prophet, who said, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ⁹ I rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians. And I delivered you from the hand of all your oppressors; I drove them out before you and gave you their land. ¹⁰ I said to you, ‘I am the LORD your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.’ But you have not listened to me.”

- In response to Israel’s cry for help God sent a prophet, a preacher, who is unnamed. This prophet did what prophets do. He said to Israel, “THUS SAITH THE LORD.”
- The prophet named the problem. Israel did not listen to the word of the Lord. Instead, Israel worshiped other gods, the gods of the very people who were oppressing them.

Verses 11-16

¹¹ The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. ¹² When the angel of

the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior."

¹³ "Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian."

¹⁴ The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?"

¹⁵ "Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."

¹⁶ The LORD answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive."

- Then, "the angel of the Lord," a messenger from YHWH, appeared to a man named Gideon. Gideon was the son of Joash from the Hebrew tribe of Manasseh. When the messenger of YHWH appeared to Gideon, Gideon was "threshing grain in the wine press." Normally grapes were pressed in the wine press. Since it was not time to harvest grapes, Gideon thought it safe to use the wine press for threshing grain because the Midianites would not look for him in the wine press at threshing time. He was there because he was afraid of the Midianites.
- The messenger of YHWH greeted Gideon with the words, "YHWH is with you, mighty warrior." But Gideon took exception to the angel's words. He recognized that, according to the legends, YHWH had acted on Israel's behalf in the past. But considering the oppression which was upon Israel, Gideon asked the angel to explain why YHWH had not acted to protect his people now.
- There is a change in the title given to the angel as this passage unfolds. It begins by speaking about a messenger sent from YHWH, an angel. In verse 13, Gideon addresses the messenger respectfully using the Hebrew word Adonai which is translated correctly as "sir." However, it could be translated "Lord" (note the use of small [lower case] letters in the English word.) In verse 13, when Gideon speaks of God, he uses God's proper name, "YHWH." In English translation the proper name of God is always "LORD." Notice the use of the smaller capital (upper case) "ORD" in the way the word is written. By this we know that it is not the Hebrew word,

“Adonai” in the text but the proper name of God which appears in the text. When we get to verse 14, the text says, “The LORD turned to Him...” The person with whom Gideon is speaking appears to be an angel, but it is YHWH himself who addresses Gideon. However, verse 15 indicates that Gideon does not know who it is that is speaking to him. He does not use the proper name of God when addressing God but continues to call him “Sir/Lord/Adonai.”

- In verse 14, YHWH says that he is sending him to save Israel out of the hands of the Midianites. But in verse 15, Gideon rejects YHWH’s call saying that he is not strong enough to save Israel. But YHWH responds, “I will be with you.” Gideon’s hope must be in the Lord and not in himself.

Verses 17-24

¹⁷ Gideon replied, “If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me. ¹⁸ Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you.”

And the LORD said, “I will wait until you return.”

¹⁹ Gideon went inside, prepared a young goat, and from an ephah of flour he made bread without yeast. Putting the meat in a basket and its broth in a pot, he brought them out and offered them to him under the oak.

²⁰ The angel of God said to him, “Take the meat and the unleavened bread, place them on this rock, and pour out the broth.” And Gideon did so. ²¹ Then the angel of the LORD touched the meat and the unleavened bread with the tip of the staff that was in his hand. Fire flared from the rock, consuming the meat and the bread. And the angel of the LORD disappeared. ²² When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the LORD, he exclaimed, “Alas, Sovereign LORD! I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!”

²³ But the LORD said to him, “Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die.”

²⁴ So Gideon built an altar to the LORD there and called it The LORD Is Peace. To this day it stands in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

- At this point in the story, Gideon begins to suspect that he is actually speaking to God and not just an angel. He asks the person to whom he is speaking to receive an offering from him to prove to Gideon that the speaker is YHWH. YHWH agrees to accept the offering. So, Gideon prepares the offering and brings it to the speaker.
- But the identity of the speaker seems to change again in verse 20. When the offering is brought in it is “the angel of the Lord” who greets Gideon and gives him instructions about the offering. When the offering is consumed by fire which came from the rock, the “angel” disappears.

- It is only then that Gideon understands that the “angel” was YHWH and that he has been in the presence of God.
- YHWH (note how the word is spelled) then speaks to Gideon. YHWH tells Gideon not to be afraid. Gideon will not die even though he has stood in the actual presence of YHWH.

Verses 25-27

²⁵ That same night the LORD said to him, “Take the second bull from your father’s herd, the one seven years old. Tear down your father’s altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. ²⁶ Then build a proper kind of altar to the LORD your God on the top of this height. Using the wood of the Asherah pole that you cut down, offer the second bull as a burnt offering.”

²⁷ So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the LORD told him. But because he was afraid of his family and the townspeople, he did it at night rather than in the daytime.

- That night, YHWH spoke to Gideon again telling him to take his father’s second bull and offer it as sacrifice to YHWH.
- First, Gideon is to tear down his father’s altar to Baal. That means that Joash worshiped Baal. He is to cut down his father’s Asherah pole. That means that Joash worshiped Asherah. Joash is worshiping the gods of the cultures which are oppressing Israel. Gideon is then to build a proper altar dedicated to YHWH. He is to kill the bull and, using the wood of the Asherah pole as fuel for the fire, Gideon is to offer the bull to YHWH.
- Gideon did as YHWH commanded, but, because he was afraid of his father and others, he did it secretly at night. He is still afraid and despite the sign (verses 20-22), he is not sure that God is truly with him.

Verses 28-30

²⁸ In the morning when the people of the town got up, there was Baal’s altar, demolished, with the Asherah pole beside it cut down and the second bull sacrificed on the newly built altar!

²⁹ They asked each other, “Who did this?”

When they carefully investigated, they were told, “Gideon son of Joash did it.”

³⁰ The people of the town demanded of Joash, “Bring out your son. He must die, because he has broken down Baal’s altar and cut down the Asherah pole beside it.”

- Come morning, Gideon’s secret act of obedience is seen by the people he fears.

- They investigate the crime done in secret and discover that Gideon is responsible (see verse 27 - there were ten eyewitnesses to the act).
- The town's people demand that Gideon be killed because he has offended the false gods, Baal and Asherah.

Verses 31-32

³¹ But Joash replied to the hostile crowd around him, "Are you going to plead Baal's cause? Are you trying to save him? Whoever fights for him shall be put to death by morning! If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar." ³² So because Gideon broke down Baal's altar, they gave him the name Jerub-Baal that day, saying, "Let Baal contend with him."

- Joash defends Gideon. His argument is that Baal, if he is truly a god, can defend himself.
- Since Baal does not move against Gideon, Gideon is given a nickname. He is known among the people as Jerub-Baal. The name means "let Baal fight for himself" or "let Baal contend."

Verses 33-40

³³ Now all the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples joined forces and crossed over the Jordan and camped in the Valley of Jezreel. ³⁴ Then the Spirit of the LORD came on Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him. ³⁵ He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, calling them to arms, and also into Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, so that they too went up to meet them.

³⁶ Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised— ³⁷ look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said." ³⁸ And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew—a bowlful of water.

³⁹ Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece, but this time make the fleece dry and let the ground be covered with dew." ⁴⁰ That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew.

- Because of what Gideon had done, all of the forces which served Baal and Asherah moved against Israel to avenge their gods.
- Gideon summoned the men of Israel to come to him to prepare to do battle against these forces.

- But Gideon was still a sceptic. He asked YHWH for two more confirming signs before he was ready to lead Israel into battle. YHWH grants both requests and confirms his presence to Gideon. While God is gracious, demanding that God prove his presence by sign, is not recommended procedure. We walk by faith. We trust God. Confirming signs are not necessary for people of faith. Gideon does not walk by faith.

Verses 7:1-3

7 Early in the morning, Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) and all his men camped at the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh. ² The LORD said to Gideon, "You have too many men. I cannot deliver Midian into their hands, or Israel would boast against me, 'My own strength has saved me.' ³ Now announce to the army, 'Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.'" So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained.

- Now YHWH tests the sceptic. He tells Gideon that the army of Israel is too large. If Israel wins with a large force, they will claim victory for themselves and not learn that the battle belongs to the Lord.
- Gideon is told to send home anyone in the army who is afraid (might that not also include Gideon himself?). 22,000 men withdrew, leaving Gideon with an army of 10,000 soldiers.

Verses 4-8a

⁴ But the LORD said to Gideon, "There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will thin them out for you there. If I say, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go; but if I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go."

⁵ So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the LORD told him, "Separate those who lap the water with their tongues as a dog laps from those who kneel down to drink." ⁶ Three hundred of them drank from cupped hands, lapping like dogs. All the rest got down on their knees to drink.

⁷ The LORD said to Gideon, "With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the others go home." ⁸ So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites home but kept the three hundred, who took over the provisions and trumpets of the others.

- Again, God declared that Israel's army was too large.
- Through what appears to be an unrelated test, YHWH cuts Israel's army from 10,000 to 300 (the test involves how the men drink water from the stream. Some lap up the water with their tongues, others cup their hands and lift the water to their mouths. The ones who cup the water in their

hands are chosen, the others are rejected. Some scholars make suggestion as to why those who cupped water are acceptable and the others are not. THIS IS NOT THE POINT OF THE TEXT! The point is found in verse 2, “the Lord said...” and in verse 4, “I will sift them for you.” YHWH IS IN CONTROL.)

- The army of Israel, reduced to 300 men, cannot win the battle without the help of the Lord.

Verses 8b-12

Now the camp of Midian lay below him in the valley. ⁹ During that night the LORD said to Gideon, “Get up, go down against the camp, because I am going to give it into your hands. ¹⁰ If you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah ¹¹ and listen to what they are saying. Afterward, you will be encouraged to attack the camp.” So he and Purah his servant went down to the outposts of the camp. ¹² The Midianites, the Amalekites and all the other eastern peoples had settled in the valley, thick as locusts. Their camels could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore.

- Now YHWH gives the sign. It is unrequested by Gideon.
- Gideon is to go down to the enemy camp. There, God will give him a confirming sign. If he is afraid to go alone, which he is, he is to take his servant, Purah, with him. He does.
- There are so many enemy soldiers in the enemy camp that their camels cannot be counted.

Verses 13-15

¹³ Gideon arrived just as a man was telling a friend his dream. “I had a dream,” he was saying. “A round loaf of barley bread came tumbling into the Midianite camp. It struck the tent with such force that the tent overturned and collapsed.” ¹⁴ His friend responded, “This can be nothing other than the sword of Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite. God has given the Midianites and the whole camp into his hands.”

¹⁵ When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he bowed down and worshiped. He returned to the camp of Israel and called out, “Get up! The LORD has given the Midianite camp into your hands.”

- In the enemy camp Gideon heard two enemy soldiers talking. One of them had had a dream which, to them, predicted Midian’s defeat at the hand of Israel.
- When Gideon heard this he worshipped YHWH and then returned to the Israeli camp. He awakened his soldiers and called them to prepare for battle informing them that YHWH had given them victory.

Verses 16-18

¹⁶ Dividing the three hundred men into three companies, he placed trumpets and empty jars in the hands of all of them, with torches inside.

¹⁷ “Watch me,” he told them. “Follow my lead. When I get to the edge of the camp, do exactly as I do. ¹⁸ When I and all who are with me blow our trumpets, then from all around the camp blow yours and shout, ‘For the LORD and for Gideon.’”

- Gideon divided his small force into two groups. Probably not a good strategy. Gideon put jars with burning torches inside them into the hands of 200 soldiers. He gave each soldier a trumpet to blow. He filled their hands so that they could not carry military weapons. Probably not a good strategy. He told them to follow his lead. When he and the men with him blew their trumpets, all the men in his army were to blow theirs and shout, “For YHWH and Gideon.”

Verses 19-25

¹⁹ Gideon and the hundred men with him reached the edge of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just after they had changed the guard. They blew their trumpets and broke the jars that were in their hands. ²⁰ The three companies blew the trumpets and smashed the jars. Grasping the torches in their left hands and holding in their right hands the trumpets they were to blow, they shouted, “A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!” ²¹ While each man held his position around the camp, all the Midianites ran, crying out as they fled.

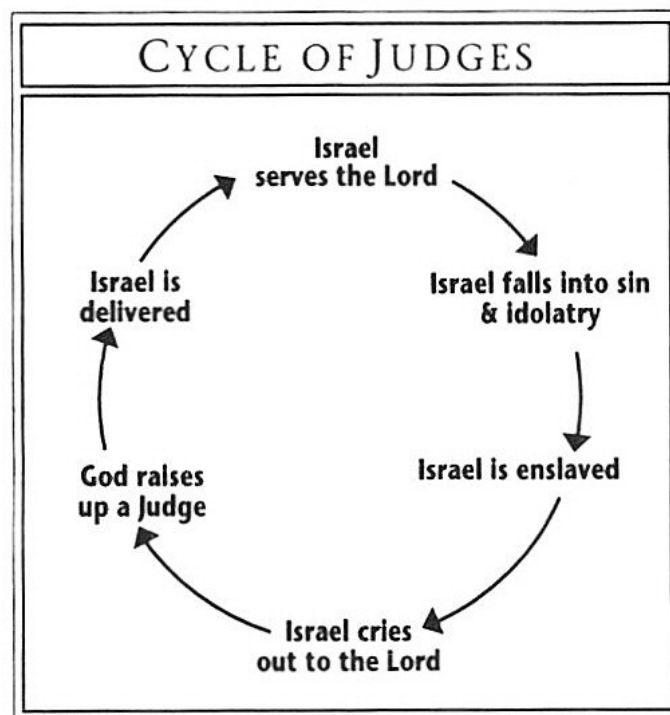
²² When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the LORD caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords. The army fled to Beth Shittah toward Zererah as far as the border of Abel Meholah near Tabbath. ²³ Israelites from Naphtali, Asher and all Manasseh were called out, and they pursued the Midianites. ²⁴ Gideon sent messengers throughout the hill country of Ephraim, saying, “Come down against the Midianites and seize the waters of the Jordan ahead of them as far as Beth Barah.”

So all the men of Ephraim were called out and they seized the waters of the Jordan as far as Beth Barah. ²⁵ They also captured two of the Midianite leaders, Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb at the winepress of Zeeb. They pursued the Midianites and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon, who was by the Jordan.

- At about 10pm, Gideon and 100 of his men went to the edge of the Midianite camp. The guard had just changed. They blew their trumpets and broke the jars which concealed their torches. The other soldiers in his army

did the same thing. The 300 men with Gideon shouted out together, “A sword for YHWH and for Gideon.” The sudden noise and the sight of the torches threw the Midianite army into panic. The Midianite soldiers turned on each other killing their fellows. The Midianite army began a disorganized retreat.

- Word was sent to the tribes of Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh to join in the battle. The tribe of Ephraim was called upon to seize the waters of the Jordan at Beth Barah to cut off the Midianite retreat. The Ephraimites captured and killed two important Midianite leaders, Oreb and Zeeb.
- God gave Israel victory over their oppressors through Gideon in such a way as to show that the battle belonged to the Lord.



(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Gideon*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship*, Coatesville, Pennsylvania, & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. They are used here by permission.)