

## Gideon Throws Out a Fleece

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*Gideon was an Old Testament judge, one of the leaders God sent to lead Israel before they had a king. The judges were rarely what we would think of as heroes. Rather, they tended to be just regular folks who were willing to trust and obey God when He called them to follow Him. The story of Gideon takes two chapters in the Bible (Judges 6 and 7) but this story focuses on the more famous sixth chapter. If you've ever heard a prayer described as "throwing out a fleece," this is where that came from.*

The land of Israel had been at peace for forty years.

But then they started worshipping idols  
of the pagan god Baal and the pagan goddess Asherah.

So God punished them. He let the Midianites overrun their land.

For seven whole years they abused the Israelites.

All the Israelites could do was hide in caves up in the mountains and,  
when the Israelites planted their gardens,  
the Midianites would ride through on their camels  
and their cattle would run through the fields,  
destroying everything the Israelites grew.

Soon the Israelites were on the brink of starvation.

That's when they finally cried out to God for help  
and He answered their prayers.

He sent a prophet to the people,

to remind them that they were HIS people  
and that He would not tolerate the worship of any god but Him.

But, unknown to the rest of Israel,

He also sent an angel in disguise to the town of Ophrah,  
to a winepress owned by a man named Joash.

There, hiding in the bottom of that winepress

so the Midianites wouldn't find him,  
Joash's son Gideon was busy hiding the little bit of food he had found.

And the angel said to Gideon,

"Greetings, mighty hero! God is with you!"

Now Gideon didn't know it was the angel of the Lord.

He said, "Sir, if the Lord is with us,  
why are the Midianites doing this to us?

Where are all the great miracles our grandparents told us about?  
No, I think God has abandoned us."

"I haven't abandoned you," the angel said.

"And I'm going to use YOU to deliver Israel from your enemy!"

Gideon was shocked! "How can you use me?"

My family is the least in our tribe,  
and in my family I'm a nobody!"

"It doesn't matter," the angel said. "I'll be with you,

and you'll crush the Midianites as if THEY were nobody."

Now Gideon didn't believe things easily

so he asked the angel for a miracle to prove what He said.

The angel agreed. He asked Gideon to make a food offering—

which, given how little Gideon had, showed that he had some faith—  
and the angel made fire appear and burn it up.

THAT got Gideon's attention!

So later that night, at the Lord's command,

Gideon tore down an altar built to Baal

and a wooden pole, which was an idol set up for Asherah.

Then he built a new altar

and used the Asherah pole as firewood to make a sacrifice to God.

But he did it in secret because he was afraid of the townsfolk...

and when they found out, *they were mad!*

But Joash stood up for his son and said,

"Let Baal defend himself!

If he's such a great god, he shouldn't be scared of my son!"

But of course, Baal didn't do anything to Gideon,

and that made the townsfolk think more highly of their God.

*Maybe it even made them think more highly of Gideon.*

Because not long after that, the Midianites attacked Israel again

and the Spirit of God took hold of Gideon.

He inspired Gideon to ask for men to join him and fight the Midianites.

So Gideon blew a ram's horn to call the local men

and he sent word for Israelites around the country to come.

**And surprise!** *An entire army showed up, and set up camp around his house!*

Maybe that's when Gideon realized

that God was doing something much bigger than he expected,

because Gideon got a little nervous.

Tearing down some pagan altars and idols was one thing;

leading an army was another!

*And after all, he wasn't a warrior. He was just a nobody!*

So Gideon prayed and said,  
    “God, You said You intend to have me rescue Israel...  
        but I think I need some more proof.  
I’m going to leave a fleece on the floor here tonight.  
    If I wake up tomorrow and the fleece is wet but the floor is dry,  
        I’ll know I heard You correctly.”  
And sure enough, when he checked the next morning,  
    the wool on the fleece was soaking wet but the floor was dry.

So Gideon prayed again and said,  
    “God, please don’t be mad at me  
        but Your plan scares me!  
I’m going to leave the fleece on the floor again tonight.  
    If I wake up tomorrow and the floor is wet but the fleece is dry,  
        I’ll lead this army for You.”  
And God answered that prayer too. When Gideon checked the next morning,  
    the fleece’s wool was completely dry but the floor was soaking wet.

So Gideon finally believed God would use him,  
    and that God loved him enough  
        to help him overcome his fear of God’s plan.  
And then he wasn’t afraid to do what God wanted—  
    *at least, not until he learned exactly what God had in mind.*

***But that’s a tale for next month.***