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THE BAPTIST HERITAGE

VOLUME XXV ISSUE 7

JULY 20, 2001

What made Gideon stay?

Recently, Pastor Chester Keith, visiting this church, preached on the character of Judge Gideon. *[Brother Keith is planting a church in Mobile, Alabama. If you would like to help a black Baptist preacher start a Baptist church, this is an excellent man to help. Pastors, he will bless your people and do you no harm. Contact Chester Keith, 5505 White Pine Drive, Mobile AL 36693, 334-665-3725.]* As he preached, a never-before-considered question formed in my mind. Good preaching is like that; it will always stimulate another preacher to 'expand' the message. The thought germinated that day was one that likely many of my readers will have considered years ago and reached a much better message explaining the matter than have I. Yet, for any other novices as I, I pose this question for their consideration. "Why was it that Gideon with all of his own apparent self-doubt, hesitation, and fears did not leave when 'the fearful' were excused?" I again confess that I had never thought about this.

No one can dispute that Gideon was a fearful man. Scripture distinctively identifies his fears. Every sermon on Gideon that I can recall hearing or reading described Gideon as a man of many fears. Yet, I have no recollection of hearing or reading a single discussion as to why Gideon did not consider himself excused with the fearful. Judges 7:3 records that

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this and that

Editors

Jerald L. Manley

Dorothy Gundersen

Gary Roland

Jody Wolf

As I write this column, America seems focused on the disappearance of a young woman in Washington, D.C. Frankly, it is difficult to determine if the public is actually concerned about her or is consumed with the tawdry circumstances of her affair with a conservative democrat Californian congressman and his dirty secrets. American politicians, as a whole, have never been moral giants.

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Among the founding fathers were several with immoral lives. Among the presidents of the past century were those who had illicit affairs. The White House has been a place of ill repute during more than one administration. Congressmen have long had a reputation for boozers and womanizers. Any parent who sends a

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this and that

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daughter to Washington as an intern is not placing her within a great net of safety. Several members of congress and administrations have proven that sons are not safe there either. Thus, nothing in this latest soap opera, tabloid special is new. It is just another verse of the same song.

Hollywood and television are not the only sewers polluting the stream of American youth. It is a very brazen deed for politicians to seek to rebuke television and movies for their corrupting influences. How about a public hearing on the influence of Washington on the morals of American youth?

—Pastor Manley

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WHAT MADE GIDEON STAY?

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Why did Gideon stay when he could have gone home? Gideon had the “shalom” of the LORD. This word conveys much more than just a greeting. It means “peace”; but contains the thoughts of all that peace entails: safety, security, wellness, rest, stability, prosperity, and so much more. This is the “all is well.” JEHOVAH promised to go with Gideon and so he stayed when he wanted to leave. The LORD had not promised to be with him if he left so he chose to stay. He realized that the presence of the LORD was the only comfort for his fears. That “shalom” was promised while he obeyed the LORD. Therefore, fearful or not, Gideon obeyed for the “shalom.”

I wish we had room to fully contrast King Saul and his fears and the disobedience that he chose with the this man Gideon and his fears. There are clear parallels but you will have to do that on your own. May I simply direct you to consider that when King Saul had fears he used devices of his own planning to handle them? He concentrated on his fears and not on the LORD. Gideon was just the reverse. King Saul never understood what Gideon demonstrated and what the prophet Samuel knew.

1 Samuel 15:22 And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

The LORD honored Gideon for his obedience and never rebuked him for his fears. When Gideon had fears, the LORD gave him instructions to be obeyed and promises on which to trust. The only thing that Gideon ever had was the word of JEHOVAH and there he placed his trust and his hopes. If you desire the “shalom” of JEHOVAH for your life, you too will have to obey the commands of the LORD and you too will have to trust in the promises of the LORD.

Trust and obey, for there is no other way.

---Pastor Manley

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JEHOVAH Himself provided a specific exemption for all Israelites who were “fearful and afraid.” Though the LORD Himself explicitly describes Gideon as afraid and fearful only seven verses after issuing the provision of deferment, Gideon stayed. He apparently never considered going home. I wondered why and then I found that Samuel knew the reason---but I am far ahead of my message. Let me back up and have you reflect with me on,

“What made Gideon stay,
when he could have gone home?”

The story begins in Judges chapter 6 with the recurrent theme of the book: the backsliding of Israel and the repeated, heavy, but ever merciful, chastening of the LORD. A chastening given again as always before and continued afterwards for the purpose of causing Israel to see her wicked rebellion and disobedience and to seek the forgiveness and the intervention of JEHOVAH.

1 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD:

This phrase always conveys a deliberateness in the sin. Israel knew that JEHOVAH was holy and that sin and iniquity was an offense to the LORD. Israel knew that JEHOVAH was everywhere present—that they could not hide from His eyes or escape His notice; yet, sin they chose to do and did it defiantly “in the sight of the LORD.” JEHOVAH saw and the LORD brought the penalty of that sin to bear.

and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years. 2 And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds. 3 And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them; 4 And they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass. 5 For they came

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up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their camels were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it. 6 And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the LORD. 7 And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of the Midianites, 8 That the LORD sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage; 9 And I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drave them out from before you, and gave you their land; 10 And I said unto you, I am the LORD your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but ye have not obeyed my voice.

The prophet came with the message from the LORD. His name is unknown; there is not even a clue of his relationship to a particular tribe. He is the first of the prophets to rise in the land and we do not even know his name. Be assured we will one day. That which is newsworthy on earth may not be of note in Heaven and that of which Heaven takes notice often is ignored on earth. Never fear, this prophet will receive a full prophet's reward; not a sparrow falls without the knowledge of the Heavenly Father and a prophet's faithfulness (or unfaithfulness) will not escape recompense and reward. There is a message for all who will hear in this. Serve the Master not for earthly recognition, but for the pleasure of the Master. It is His "well done, thou good and faithful servant" that is the highest of honor.

We are to understand that the coming of this prophet has a connection with what follows, which is the commissioning of Gideon to deliver Israel from the oppression of the Midianites. These are both to be understood as answers to the cries of Israel. Moreover, I believe that it is implied that Gideon is engaged in just such meditation and prayer while he

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down unto the host. Then went he down with Phurah his servant unto the outside of the armed men that were in the host. 12 And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the sea side for multitude. 13 And when Gideon was come, behold, there was a man that told a dream unto his fellow, and said, Behold, I dreamed a dream, and, lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along. 14 And his fellow answered and said, This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host. 15 And it was so, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he worshipped, and returned into the host of Israel, and said, Arise; for the LORD hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian.

Only now does Gideon display signs of boldness and confidence. Gideon never again shows any symptoms of fearfulness. Every act from this point forward is one of boldness and confidence—his boldness was in obedience and his confidence was in the LORD. The turning point was at the altar and the change came while he was hiding in the bushes near the Midianite camp. When he returned from his nocturnal visit to the Midianite camp, he devised a battle strategy that glorified the LORD and not himself or Israel. Scripture does not state that the plan came from divine revelation. Gideon used the battle of Jericho as a model and gave the glory to the LORD. The victory would never be misconstrued as belonging to either Gideon or the three hundred—except by preachers trying to raise money. Three hundred and one fearful and afraid fellows just stood in the gap and the LORD gave the victory. Gideon witnessed his miracle—the LORD fought for Israel again as He when He used the stars in their courses to give victory in the time of Deborah and Barak.

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ful and afraid warriors. Gideon is a leader of men just like himself. The LORD will not share His glory with any other.

1 Corinthians 1 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 26 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*: 27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; 28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, *yea*, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: 29 That no flesh should glory in his presence.

Why had these three hundred not gone home when opportunity was given? As was Gideon, they were more fearful and afraid of having Midianites as conquerors than as enemies. Duty was more constraining than was fear. They stayed not because of bravery, but because it was right. Gideon never doubted what the LORD could or would do; he doubted himself. He had no confidence in his flesh; his greatest fear may well have been that he would desert his post. Gideon displays a consistent confidence in the ability of JEHOVAH and a consistent lack of confidence in himself. His faith (Hebrews 11) was never in himself or in his three hundred. He fully realized that they were the weak things used by God to confound the mighty.

Gideon has now lost over ninety-nine percent of his army but his fears remain and are fully recognized by the LORD and by Gideon. Read on just two verses. Gideon was afraid to even slip down as a spy; he was certainly afraid to enter into battle.

9 And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand. 10 But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host: 11 And thou shalt hear what they say; and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go

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is threshing wheat.

11 And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites. 12

And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.

Considered in the best “public relations” presentation, this Gideon presents the image of a very cautious “mighty man of valour.” In this passage, we meet a man who displays what commentators universally describe in terms of fearfulness. Generally, writers explain the expression “mighty man of valour” as either prophetic of what Gideon will become or as expressing a character that only God could see in Gideon. While neither explanation has ever been entirely satisfactory to me, I have difficulty in seeing Gideon’s actions in any other light. He is hiding his wheat from the Midianites; there is, at the very least, extreme caution displayed. A “mighty man of valour” should, it would seem, have a certain confidence, even a boldness, about him. Neither quality is observed in this man threshing wheat by a winepress. Gideon in that vineyard exhibits no evidence of boldness or confidence. While one may explain his actions as the discretion of cautiousness, no explanation can show that he is acting courageously. Were we to come upon him engaged as he was, we would not identify him as a mighty man of valour.

I quickly admit that he had cause for watchfulness and carefulness and for avoiding recklessness and carelessness. He is living and working in ‘occupied territory.’ The Midianites with their allies have arrived, invading the covenant land, the land of promise, for the sole purpose of destruction (verse 5). Israel has abandoned the cities and is hiding in dens made in the mountains, in caves and in strongholds. My mother insisted that cavemen were not evolving common ancestors of humanity, but were fugitives, either from the claims of justice or the pursuit of enemies. Cave living was never by choice, but always of necessity, for outlaws and refugees from oppression.

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She maintained, quite correctly, that David the poet and musician was a short-term caveman, who might, she said, even have left carvings behind on a cave wall; but she was certain that Adam was never a caveman. Mom was certain that Eve would never have lived hundreds of years in a damp, moldy, dirty hole that Adam dug in the side of a hill; instead, Eve, having been in Eden, had a memory of what a good home looked like and would have 'encouraged' Adam to build a suitable home. Mom's theology was far more biblical than a dozen theologians whose books are on my shelves.

In the passage of time, spurred by her teaching, I believe that we can show that unless there was a catastrophic change in the structure of the earth involving sudden, massive water-flow erosion as an immediate consequence of the fall, and no biblical evidence of such exists, there were no caves on earth until after the flood of Noah's day. Think about this, my friend, if there were no caves, then there were no cavemen possible until after Noah's day. There is no reason to attempt to reconcile science with the Bible when the science is derived from false premises. Theistic evolution is as anti-biblical as is the Darwinian variety. One may accept the declarations of the word of God or believe the theories of philosophers and scientists (falsely so called).

These Midianites made many of Israel into temporary cavemen and (verse 2) "den mothers." Fear drove Israel into the caves and dens, not choice. Fear was the common commodity of Israel in those days. Gideon, not an exception, is using carefully designed means to avoid detection by the marauding bands of Midianites or their scouting parties. Fear of losing his wheat compelled Gideon to thresh wheat by a winepress.

Many things connected with this choice speak of his fears. Notice first that Gideon does not use his servants, which he had and would use ten of them later as co-workers, to help with this task, perhaps lest they would talk among themselves and attract attention. Second, he is not using oxen, most likely to avoid their bellowing, which would alert any Midianite spy or scout within a wide area of this activity. Third, he is

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ever. A translation that removes the "whosoever" is seriously flawed and unworthy of use. "Whosoever" included Gideon. Anyone, including Gideon, was free to leave if he would admit being fearful and afraid. Sixty-nine percent of the army went home. This did nothing to relieve Gideon's fears. However, worse news was yet to come.

4 And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people *are* yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, *that* of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go. 5 So he brought down the people unto the water: and the LORD said unto Gideon, Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink. 6 And the number of them that lapped, *putting* their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water. 7 And the LORD said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the *other* people go every man unto his place. 8 So the people took victuals in their hand, and their trumpets: and he sent all *the rest* of Israel every man unto his tent, and retained those three hundred men: and the host of Midian was beneath him in the valley.

Those who bowed on the knees and put their mouth down near the water were sent home. Those who brought the water to the mouth were allowed to stay. Many will see this differently, but I believe the ones who bowed on the knees and stooped near the water were those who had a boldness and confidence. They were not fearful of having the Midianites surprise them while they drank. The nervous fellows were those who could not look down but had to keep their eyes darting all around, fearful of finding a Midianite behind every bush. Gideon now has an entire army of three hundred fear-

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of the LORD removed his fearfulness.

34 But the spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; and Abiezer was gathered after him. 35 And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh; who also was gathered after him: and he sent messengers unto Asher, and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali; and they came up to meet them. 36 And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said, 37 Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said. 38 And it was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water. 39 And Gideon said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew. 40 And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.

Judges 7 1 Then Jerubbaal, who is Gideon, and all the people that were with him, rose up early, and pitched beside the well of Harod: so that the host of the Midianites were on the north side of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley. 2 And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me. 3 Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand.

Gideon could have gone home. He was fearful and he was afraid. The word is "whosoever." That is the emphatic form (current English usage—consult any dictionary) of who-

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not throwing the mulch into air to sift the chaff, as this would attract birds, with their cheerful noise. Fourth, he is not using a threshing floor, instead he is using a winepress—much smaller, "not in season" for use and therefore unlikely to be watched, and a place that would be surrounded by a vineyard providing a measure of security. Fifth, he is threshing a small amount of harvest, probably in case he must flee the scene quickly; but also because there was less to carry or to lose. This was a clandestine operation, designed, and conducted from motives generated by fear. If prudence caused his secretiveness, that prudence was fear induced. We cannot avoid concluding that even as the angel of the LORD titles him "a mighty man of valour," Gideon is a "mighty" fearful man.

He also is a man that is not thinking as clearly as he believes himself to be. A serious flaw in his scheme completely escaped his attention; working next to the vat of the winepress, his attention is focused downward so that he may direct the blows of the stalks or the staff he was using to knock the wheat grains from the stalks. He is therefore unaware that while he works, an angel of the LORD seats himself under the nearby oak tree, silently observing Gideon. Gideon is oblivious of the presence of this angel who guards his efforts. I must observe that the angel under the oak tree is identified in the text as "an angel of the Lord." While I would not press the issue, but it would seem to me that this angel described in verse eleven ought to be distinguished from the angel, identified as "the" angel of the LORD that we shall meet in verse twelve. This angel of verse eleven is ministering unto one who is an heir of salvation. It seems that Gideon is never aware of the presence of this angel, never realizes that this angel is not only observing him, but also protecting him. As Elisha's young servant did, Gideon needs his eyes opened; he does not see the angel sitting under the oak tree only a few feet from him.

There are abundant, precious lessons for us in this simple act of an angel sitting under that oak tree. "Except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh, but in vain" (Psalm 127:1). With all of his precautions, Gideon could

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not keep a single grain of wheat out of the hands of the Midianites unless JEHOVAH kept it for him. His security was in the hands of the LORD and not in his prudence or preparation. This was true whether Gideon recognized it or not. This truth is also real in our lives whether we realize it or not. It is the LORD Who gives us our daily bread. Without His providential supply, we would starve. It is JEHOVAH Himself Who watches over us.

I also wonder how many angels the LORD of Glory has sent to minister to you and to me. Angels are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Hebrews 1:14). Therefore, I have no doubt that angels have ministered to us individually and that, even as Gideon, we have not known of their presence. It may well be that they have guarded us at times as did this angel protectively observe Gideon. I wonder through how many times of "dangers, toils, and snares" they have seen us. I wonder from how many hands of the Midianites they have protected us. I wonder if we may also, by our sins, "offended" angels. I wonder if we are under the observation of angels at this very moment. Whether we are or not, you cannot deny that we are under the observation of Three Witnesses at all times—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. A fact we also do not allow to motivate holiness in our lives, as it should.

Modern Baptists have a sad habit of forfeiting doctrine whenever the ungodly appropriate and pervert a truth of Scripture. Rather than oppose heresy by proclaiming truth, rather than fighting apostasy by exposing error, today's Baptists seek to find some way to keep the peace through quiet acquiescence or open accommodation. The bible unquestionably teaches the existence of angels and the activities of angels, both the angels of God and fallen angels. However, the concept of angels, stolen by the followers of the diabolical new age philosophy, has become so popular that it finds lodging in Baptist homes. The biblical teaching regarding angels is rejected for the popular fantasies and lying deceptions. This has resulted in angel-worship. The paganism is so great that many

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the grove that is by it: 26 And build an altar unto the LORD thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down. 27 Then Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the LORD had said unto him: 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. 28 And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, 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. 29 And they said one to another, Who hath done this thing? And when they inquired and asked, they said, Gideon the son of Joash hath done this thing. 30 Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die: because he hath cast down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove that was by it. 31 And Joash said unto all that stood against him, Will ye plead for Baal? will ye save him? he that will plead for him, let him be put to death whilst it is yet morning: if he be a god, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar. 32 Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, Let Baal plead against him, because he hath thrown down his altar. 33 Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel.

Gideon's destruction of the altar of Baal was an act of war in the eyes of the Midianites. Gideon responds by stepping forward into leadership. Under the stirring of the Spirit of the LORD, he "blew a trumpet," that is, he called Israel to assemble. Even accepting the leadership and assembling the people did not mean that Gideon was confident or bold. He was as fearful and insecure as ever. He is so fearful that one sign will not suffice; he requires two signs to gain assurance. Please take note that not even the coming upon Gideon of the Spirit

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finds fearful in this entire encounter is the sudden departure of the angel of the LORD.

21 Then the angel of the LORD put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the LORD departed out of his sight. 22 And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord GOD! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face.

23 And the LORD said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die.

The LORD directly addresses this fear of Gideon with “shalom.” The response of Gideon is very interesting. He builds an altar. I have no doubt but that he used the rock that the LORD had utilized as an altar. It is important to note that the fire did not come down from heaven; rather it rose up out of the rock. As in the offering of the parents of Samson, the fire did not come out of heaven as a sign of the acceptance of the LORD. The LORD (God the Son) was on the earth and showed His approval from the earth. Gideon built the altar and named the altar. Two very important acts.

24 Then Gideon built an altar there unto the LORD, and called it Jehovahshalom: unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

This altar is the only key I find to answer the question of why Gideon with all of his fears remained when the fearful were excused. Gideon is just as fearful as he ever was. In fact, his fear may be worse. That very night he receives a command from the LORD that he finds himself unable to obey in daylight. He would risk the wrath of the Midianites to thresh wheat in the daylight but he could not risk the wrath of his relatives and neighbors. We will also find that, having done the deed, his fear caused him to hide in his father’s house.

25 And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Take thy father’s young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down

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believers simply refuse even to try to understand the doctrine of angels.

One cannot purchase an angel in the jewelry department of a store or among the statuary in the lawn and garden section. That concept is paganism. Angels are not worn, not perched, not hung, and not placed. Angels in pictures do not watch over a home. Statuary angels do not guard the entrance or the garden. Idols are used for such purposes, but not true angels. I believe the biblical injunction against making graven images [Exodus 20:4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth:] is specifically a warning against creating angelic representations.

Whether we understand as we should or not, angels—both the angels of God and the fallen angels—are real creatures and are involved in our lives. Much as was Gideon, we remain unaware of the presence and involvement of angelic beings (righteous and fallen) in our lives.

We notice next that “the angel of the LORD” approaches Gideon, but is also not recognized as any but perhaps a traveler. He is not dressed as a Midianite and, speaking Hebrew, addresses Gideon in terms Gideon would find respectful—not at all the language or the words that would characterize the arrival of a band of Midianites. A conversation follows that was, in Gideon’s view, normal. Gideon might believe that he is talking with that prophet or another prophet. He addresses the person in respectful terms, but entirely as a human, not as an angel, and certainly not as Deity.

12 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.

Gideon certainly does not consider himself a mighty man—the phrase is given to us as “champion” when used in reference to Goliath. Gideon did not view himself as a candidate for the title “champion of Israel.” There is little apparent evidence in our passage for the application of either “mighty” or “valour” in connection with Gideon. I cannot believe that

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WHAT MADE GIDEON STAY?

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the LORD is speaking sarcastically or mockingly, nor is He jesting. With his fears and his prudence, Gideon is still the only one threshing wheat in Israel. He is not in the dens or the caves with the others; he is in a vineyard. His defiance of the Midianites may be more back page than front-page news; but he is in defiance.

His response to this One with Whom he speaks but Whom he does not recognize is worthy of attention. Gideon talks of spiritual things. Gideon expresses the condition of Israel in terms of spiritual issues—not mere foreign invasion.

13 And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.

This is not a spur of the moment comment; it would seem that Gideon has been rehearsing this speech in his heart and mind. He may well have been praying regarding the matter. He does not seem to understand the “thee” to be directed to himself. He applies it to all Israel. It is very human to hear but not to hear what was said, instead, to “translate” what was said into the words we are thinking. Gideon is so focused on the condition of Israel that he does not grasp that in a most literal manner the LORD is indeed with him and is speaking of and to him individually.

He challenges the possibility of the presence of the LORD with Israel. Three times, he uses the covenant name of the LORD, JEHOVAH. It is as though, he says, “We are not being blessed. There is no evidence of the LORD being with us. We are being chastened by the Midianites. We need a deliverer and that will take miracles.” This is not an argument to dispute the statement, but a reasoning of the situation. Gideon is saying, “We need an Othniel, an Ehud, or a Shamgar to bring deliverance. We need the LORD to let us see what Deborah and Barak saw—miracles. This is the attitude that the LORD is addressing in His response. “Gideon, the deliverance you seek will come to Israel through you. I have sent you.”

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WHAT MADE GIDEON STAY?

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14 And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?

I find the “have not I sent thee?” to be interesting. The tense of the verb implies a prior call. Gideon had already been sent. Gideon’s response is couched in terms that suggest he had been wrestling with that call. His excuses are already prepared.

15 And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I *am* the least in my father’s house. 16 And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.

Though Gideon continues not to fully understand with Whom he is speaking, the LORD clearly states, “Surely I will be with thee.” It is not an angel promising, “The LORD will be with thee,” but the LORD declaring, “I am the One Who will be with thee.” The insecurity of Gideon show as Gideon now begins to display his desire for continual “signs” or proofs of the promise of the LORD to be with him in what he is to do.

17 And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then show me a sign that thou talkest with me. 18 Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again. 19 And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it. 20 And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so.

It seems that Gideon’s “present” was an offering; the same Hebrew word is used for the “meat offerings” of Exodus and Leviticus. The picture is of a voluntary bloodless sacrifice. There seems no surprise or hesitation on the part of Gideon at the instructions to place the flesh and unleavened cakes on the rock or to pour out the broth. The only thing Gideon

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