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The Sign of the Fleece

6: 33-40

The sign of the fleece DIG: How would you describe Gideon? Who is to blame for Isra'el's problems? How many times did Gideon ask for a sign from God? What does this say about him? What lesson is God trying to teach him (and us) here? Who did Gideon fear? Why was God patient with Gideon's quest for signs?

REFLECT: Where are you uncertain or afraid of God's call to you right now? Where are you on your spiritual journey? What one thing do you fear? Are you still afraid when you step out in faith despite your fear? Is sending out a fleece today a good idea? In what area of your life do you want to trust God more?

Gideon's fleece was not a sign of his spirituality, but a sign of his very weak faith.

Restoration: The Call to Arms (6:33-35): Here the author reminds us of the situation outside **Oprah** that had prompted **Gideon** to **thresh his wheat in a winepress (6:11)**. Next year, same song, next verse. **The armies of Midian, Amalek, and Bedouin raiders formed an alliance against Isra'el and had crossed over the Jordan River, camping in the Jezreel Valley. But** this year something is different: **the Spirit of ADONAI clothed Gideon (6:33-34a CJB)**. This should not be interpreted too differently from every other instance in which **the Spirit** is described as having come upon someone. This expression, reminiscent of **Numbers 24:15-16**, in which **Balaam**, the pagan Mesopotamian seer, spoke under the control of **the Ruach**, does not assume any particular level of spirituality on the part of the recipient. On the contrary, the divine intrusion into human experience seems to graphically describe **YHVH's** arresting of **men** not prepared to solve **Isra'el's** problems and **His** equipping **them** for the saving task. This will be seen in both of the cases of **Jephthah** and **Samson**.

It is easy for modern-day believers who are more familiar with the B'rit Chadashah

concepts of “indwelling” and “being filled” to read these back into the TaNaKh. But they do not really equate. To be **filled with the Spirit** in the B’rit Chadashah speaks to spirituality, that is, one who is **filled** is controlled by **the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18b-20)**. In the TaNaKh, the idea is that of empowerment for a particular task, though it’s apparent that the recipient might misuse that empowerment as **Samson** did in **14:19**. The B’rit Chadashah equivalent is perhaps closer to the idea of giftedness.

So, in the case of **Gideon**, the **Spirit’s** work reflects **God’s** sovereign will to set things in motion for **the restoration He** has planned, not **Gideon’s** condition of faith. Although **Gideon** has popular support and a considerable fighting force, **he** hesitates. **His** almost immediate “**fleeing**” of **God** speaks to **his** unbelief, to **his** lack of spirituality. In fact, **the fleeing** incidents seen here are **Gideon’s** second and third requests for **a sign** from **God**, the first request was seen in **6:17**, where **he** asked: **If you are truly going to help me, show me a sign to prove that it is really You speaking to me.**¹⁶² This lack of confidence will continue until **verses 36-40**.

Now **Gideon’s** career begins to follow the “textbook” pattern exhibited by **Othniel (to see link click [Ap - The First Cycle: Othniel](#))**. Both **Othniel** and **Gideon** were empowered by **the Spirit** to do what **he** had been chosen to do. The effect was immediate in both cases. **Othniel judged Isra’el and went out to war (3:10); Gideon sounded the shofar, and the men of the clan of Abieser, his own clan, rallied behind him. He also sent messengers throughout the western tribe of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, summoning their warriors, and all of them responded (6:34-35 Hebrew).** The news of the blowing of **the shofar** had an electrifying and rapidly widening effect on **the Israelites**: beginning with **the Abiezrites (Gideon’s own clan)**, then **the Manassites (his own tribe)**, and finally to the other **tribes** in the north (**Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali**). All these **tribes** were located adjacent to the Jezreel Valley, and were those most directly affected by the new invasion by **the raiders.**¹⁶³

Remarkably, when **Gideon** summoned **his clansmen, the Abiezrites**, to battle against the enemy, **the very people** who had just called for **his death (6:30)** responded to the sound of **the shofar** and prepared for battle. Not only **them**, but the other **northern tribes** also responded. This raises an extremely important question. Why are **Gideon’s clansmen, tribesmen**, and **countrymen** so ready to respond to **him**? Were **they** impressed with **his** leadership ability or **his** courage?

Did **they** recognize **him** as **the mighty warrior** addressed in **6:12**? Not if we may judge (no pun intended) from **his** expressed perception of **his** standing within **his** own tribe (**6:15**) when **ADONAI** called **him** to **restore Isra'el**, or from the fear with which **he** destroyed **the altar of Ba'al** (**6:25-32**). Despite being clear about the will of **God**, being empowered by **the Spirit**, and being confirmed as the divinely chosen leader by the overwhelming response of **his** countrymen to **his** own call to battle, **he** uses every means available to try to get out of the mission to which **he** was called. **The Spirit** had to take possession of **him** (**6:34a**). As I have noted earlier and will see repeatedly later, if anything positive happens to **Isra'el** in the book of **Judges**, all the credit must go to **God**.¹⁶⁴



Restoration: The First Sign of the Fleece (6:36-38): Then Gideon said to **God**. It is not insignificant that throughout both of the fleecing incidents the divine personal name of **YHVH** is missing. Instead, the rather generic designation of **Elohim (God)** is used. **Gideon said to God, "If you will rescue Isra'el through me, as You have promised, prove it to me this way. I will put a wool fleece on the threshing floor tonight. If the fleece is wet with dew in the morning but the ground is dry, then I will know that You are going to help me rescue Isra'el as You promised"** (**6:36-37 NLT**). The basis for the request for these signs was **Gideon's** need for assurance. **He** was still not **the mighty warrior** (**6:12**) **he** had been promised to be. The miraculous nature of the sign lay in the fact that, normally, the moisture in **the fleece** would be absorbed into the ground

beneath **it**. The presence of **the dew** shows that the rainy season had ended and the **dew** season had begun, with April being the month of the change. The fact that **Gideon** was threshing wheat would mean it was the month of June. Remarkably, **Gideon's** request was granted. It seems that **YHVH** was more interested in **restoring Isra'el** than to quibble with **Gideon's** lack of faith. **And it happened! He got up the next morning, squeezed the fleece and wrung out a whole bowl full of water (6:38 Hebrew).**¹⁶⁵

Restoration: The Second Sign of the Fleece (6:39-40): Then **Gideon** said to **God**, "Please don't be angry with me, but let me make one more request. Let me use the fleece for one more test. The fact that **Gideon** sought further assurance from **ADONAI** showed how desperate **he** was. It may have occurred to him that since the threshing-floor was made up of bedrock, it therefore would not have absorbed the dew. Instead, he then asked for a more remarkable sign. **This time let the fleece remain dry while the ground around it is wet with dew (6:39 NLT).** The miracle here was that, under normal circumstances, the ground would dry up more quickly than the saturated wool. This request was also fulfilled.

The fleece was dry in the morning, but the ground around it was wet with dew (6:40 Hebrew).¹⁶⁶ It's time to put this whole "putting out a fleece" madness to bed. Many believers have taken this narrative as a positive and adopted the practice of "putting out a fleece"- testing **God** in order to determine **His** will. For example, in a dating relationship someone might say, "**God**, if he sends me a card in the next six hours, then I'll know you want me to marry him." Yikes. Let me be as clear as possible: **this passage is not an encouragement to use tests to find out the will of God!** In fact, it is a sign of a lack of faith.

1. Gideon was not asking God to reveal what he should do. **God** had already told **Gideon** what **he** should do by special revelation (**6:14** and **16**). **Gideon's** fleece was not a sign of **his** spirituality, but a sign of **his** very weak faith.

2. Gideon was trying to get a guarantee that the God who was speaking to him would grant him victory. This practice was a common practice in ancient cultures, but **Gideon** was seeking confirmation on his terms rather than **God's**. In fact, **Gideon's** test betrays a Canaanite theological perspective (see below).

3. Gideon was trying to get a guarantee that the God of Isra'el was greater than Ba'al. This the least known and yet most crucial piece of information in these verses. Ba'al was the Canaanite god of the storm. In one Ba'al tale, his weakness

results in a drought of both rain and **dew**. In fact, Ba'al's daughter, Talia, is thought to be responsible for **the dew**. Guess what the Hebrew word for **dew** here is? Tal. There is no doubt that **Gideon** here is testing **God** to see if he really is greater than Ba'al. **Gideon** (the one who fought with Ba'al in **6:25-32**) isn't quite convinced that Ba'al isn't the real deal yet. So the **fleece** tests are the result of **Gideon's** Canaanite way of thinking, and **his** lack of faith in **YHVH**, the **God of Isra'el**.

4. Putting God to the test is sinful. In **Deuteronomy 6:16** **God** says: "**You shall not put ADONAI your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah.**" In **6:39** **Gideon** says: **Please don't be angry with me, but let me make one more request. Let me use the fleece for one more test.** **Gideon** even uses the same verb for testing found in **Deuteronomy 6:16**. If we count **Gideon's** request for a sign from **God's** messenger **Judges 6:17-18**, he's tested **ADONAI** three times so far.

So why does **God** put up with **Gideon's** lack of faith? Why does **He** answer the tests? Why does **He** even offer a fourth sign later in **Judges 7:8-14**? The only answer to these questions is **God's** covenant faithfulness, or **His** grace. The fact that **ADONAI** responded to **Gideon's** Canaanite worldview isn't meant to condone testing **God** or demanding signs. Instead, **Ha'Shem's** patience shown to **Gideon** highlights the greatness of **His** grace towards both **Gideon** and **Isra'el**. **He** essentially holds **Gideon's** hand throughout the entire process, thus addressing **his** lack of faith, **his** faulty theology, and **his** fear.

Yes, **YHVH** is patient with our lack of faith, with our faulty theology, and our fear. But the message is not to imitate **Gideon**, but rather to learn about **God** and ourselves from **his** experience. This narrative encourages us to believe **God** without the extra drama. Once again in **Judges**, **Othniel's** simple faith stands out when contrasted with **Gideon (3:7-11)**. Let's learn from **Gideon's** experience. **ADONAI** is greater than any false god, **He** is able and willing to save, and **He** is motivated by **His** grace. Don't test **God**. Believe **Him**.¹⁶⁷

*Dear heavenly **Father**, praise **You** for being so absolutely wonderful, almighty, and loving! Thank **You** that when we are weak, You are strong. Thank **You** for listening to our prayers. Thank **You** for **Your** grace. Help me to understand that I already know **Your** will for me, because You have given me **Your Word as a lamp for my feet and a light to my path (Psalm 119:105)**. When I want to know **Your** will for me I just need to read my Bible. And if I want to hear **Your** audible **Word** for me, I just need to read my Bible out loud. I believe in **You**. To **the One** who sits at **Your***



right hand. Amen.