



REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

REASON TOGETHER STUDY



# THE FLEECE AS A TEST

JUDGES 6:33-40

*The fleece was wet. Then dry. But Gideon was still afraid.*



SERMON & PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

*Pastor & Teacher*

**REASON TOGETHER CHURCH**

# **SERMON TRANSCRIPT**

## **The Fleece as a Test**

*Judges 6:33-40*

*Was Gideon Testing the Will of God the Word of God or God Himself*

**Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley**

Pastor and Teacher

Aloha.

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

Whether you have worshipped with us many times...

or whether this is your first time with us...

you are welcome here.

We are especially grateful for every honored guest who has joined us today.

Our invitation is simple.

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father...

You are faithful in every generation.

You spoke to Gideon when he was hiding.

You remained patient when he was afraid.

You kept every promise You made.

Open our understanding today.

Show us where fear has made us ask for more than You have promised to give.

Show us where we have confused coincidence with revelation.

Show us where we have delayed obedience while waiting for another sign.

Give us wisdom for the choices Your Word permits.

Give us courage for the duties Your Word commands.

And lead every heart toward Jesus Christ.

We ask this in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Our opening Scripture is Judges chapter six, beginning with verse thirty-three.

*"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."*

*"But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; and Abiezer was gathered after him."*

*"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."*

Then we reach the familiar fleece.

*"And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said..."*

Please notice those final words.

*"As thou hast said."*

Gideon continued...

*"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."*

There it is again.

*"As thou hast said."*

*"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."*

*"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."*

*"And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground."*

Before we begin the study, I want our guests to know how we handle giving.

We do not pass an offering plate.

Guests are not expected to give.

If you are a member of another church, please continue supporting your home church.

For anyone who desires to give as the Lord leads, there is a giving box in the back.

If this is your first time with us, a guest card is available.

We ask only for your first name and email address.

After the service, you are invited to Reason Together Cafe.

COFFEE means Christ Offers Forgiveness For Everyone Everywhere.

The coffee is free...

and so are the refills on conversations.

Children are also welcome in our Keiki Kids Center.

Today we are examining an expression Christians have used for generations.

*"I am going to put out a fleece."*

Usually the person means something like this.

*"Lord, if You want me to accept this job, let the company call before Friday."*

Or...

*"Lord, if You want us to move, let someone make an offer on the house this week."*

Or...

*"Lord, if this relationship is Your will, cause this person to say a particular thing."*

Then the event happens.

The call comes.

The offer arrives.

The words are spoken.

And the Christian says...

*"God answered my fleece."*

*"Now I know His will."*

But do we know that?

Did God attach that meaning to the event?

Did God promise to communicate through the condition we selected?

Was the event supernatural?

Was it providential?

Was it ordinary?

Was it merely likely to happen?

Or did we decide what the event would mean before it occurred?

The question today is not whether God answered Gideon.

The Bible says that He did.

The question is what Gideon's experience means for us.

Was Gideon testing God's will?

Was he testing God's Word?

Was he testing whether God would use him?

Or was Gideon testing God Himself?

And if God answered the fleece...

does that mean we should imitate it?

We cannot answer those questions by beginning with the fleece.

We must begin with what God had already said.

Israel had been oppressed by Midian for seven years.

The Midianites came when Israel planted its crops.

They destroyed the increase of the earth.

They took the sheep, the oxen and the donkeys.

Israel hid in dens, caves and strongholds.

Judges chapter six says that Israel was greatly impoverished.

Then Israel cried unto the LORD.

God first sent a prophet.

The prophet reminded them that God had delivered Israel from Egypt.

God had brought them out of bondage.

God had driven their enemies away.

God had told them not to fear the gods of the Amorites.

Then came the painful explanation.

*"But ye have not obeyed my voice."*

Israel's problem was not that God had failed to speak.

Israel had failed to obey.

That background matters.

Gideon was not deciding which employment offer to accept.

He was not choosing a house.

He was not trying to discover whom he should marry.

He stood inside God's covenant dealings with Israel.

God was raising a deliverer to rescue His people from national oppression.

The angel of the LORD found Gideon threshing wheat by the winepress.

Wheat was normally threshed in an open place where the wind could carry away the chaff.

Gideon was working in concealment because he feared Midian.

The angel addressed this hiding man with surprising words.

*"The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour."*

Gideon did not feel mighty.

He did not look mighty.

His present behavior did not appear mighty.

But God knew what Gideon would become through the power of God.

Gideon answered with a question.

*"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?"*

That is an honest question from a suffering man.

If God is with us, why are we hiding?

If God is faithful, why are our crops gone?

If the stories of Egypt are true, where are those mighty acts now?

Gideon concluded...

*"But now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites."*

But Gideon had missed something.

God had not forsaken His covenant.

Israel had forsaken obedience.

Even then, God came in mercy.

The LORD answered Gideon's question by giving him a commission.

*"Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?"*

Notice the clarity.

*"Thou shalt save Israel."*

*"Have not I sent thee?"*

Gideon protested.

His family was poor in Manasseh.

He was the least in his father's house.

He looked at his resources.

God pointed to His presence.

*"Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man."*

God answered the questions that mattered.

Who was sending Gideon?

God was.

What was Gideon supposed to do?

Deliver Israel.

Would Gideon face Midian alone?

No.

*"Surely I will be with thee."*

Would the mission succeed?

God said that Midian would be defeated.

This was not a vague inward feeling.

It was not an impression Gideon was trying to interpret.

It was not a coincidence.

It was not an open door.

The LORD had spoken directly.

Gideon did ask for a sign at that first meeting.

But listen to what he asked.

*"Shew me a sign that thou talkest with me."*

That first sign concerned the identity of the One speaking.

Gideon prepared a kid, unleavened cakes and broth.

The angel instructed him to place the meat and cakes upon a rock.

The angel touched them with the end of his staff.

Fire rose out of the rock and consumed the offering.

The angel disappeared.

Gideon understood that he had encountered the angel of the LORD.

He feared that he would die.

The LORD said...

*"Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die."*

Gideon built an altar and called it Jehovah-shalom.

The LORD is peace.

So before Gideon ever touched a fleece...

he had received a clear commission.

He had received a clear promise.

He had witnessed supernatural fire.

He had heard God's word of peace.

He had built an altar to remember it.

Then God commanded Gideon to destroy his father's altar to Baal.

Gideon obeyed.

But Judges chapter six tells us that he did it at night because he was afraid.

That detail is important.

Gideon was afraid...

but Gideon obeyed.

His courage was incomplete.

His obedience was real.

When the men of the city discovered what happened, they wanted Gideon killed.

But God preserved him.

Gideon's father told them that if Baal was truly a god, Baal could plead for himself.

Nothing happened to Gideon.

That was another piece of evidence.

Then the enemies gathered in the valley of Jezreel.

Judges 6:34 says...

*"But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon."*

The Hebrew expression pictures the Spirit of the LORD clothing Gideon.

Gideon blew the trumpet.

His own people gathered.

Messengers went throughout Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali.

Thousands came to meet him.

Now count what Gideon had received.

A divine commission.

A divine promise.

A supernatural sign.

Protection after destroying Baal's altar.

The Spirit of the LORD upon him.

An army gathering at his call.

And then...

Gideon asked for the fleece.

Was he trying to discover God's will?

Look again at his words.

*"If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said."*

*"As thou hast said."*

He said it twice.

Gideon did not lack information about God's will.

He lacked confidence in God's promise.

Sometimes we say that we need guidance...

when what we really need is courage.

We know that Scripture commands forgiveness...

but we are afraid of being hurt again.

We know that Scripture commands honesty...

but we are afraid of the consequences of telling the truth.

We know that Scripture commands faithfulness...

but we are afraid of the cost.

We know that we must repent...

but we are afraid of admitting what we did.

Then we say...

*"Lord, give me a sign."*

But the unresolved question is not always what God wants.

Sometimes the unresolved question is whether we will trust Him enough to obey.

Gideon placed a fleece of wool on the threshing floor.

He requested dew upon the fleece while the surrounding ground remained dry.

God did it.

The fleece held enough water to fill a bowl.

Then Gideon asked for the opposite.

He wanted the fleece dry and the ground wet.

Why reverse it?

The Bible does not directly tell us.

It is reasonable to think that Gideon wanted a result that could not be attributed to the natural qualities of wool.

But we should not state as certainty what Scripture leaves unexplained.

What Scripture does tell us is that Gideon knew he was asking for much.

*"Let not thine anger be hot against me."*

He knew that God had already answered.

He knew that he was asking again.

Then Gideon used an important word.

*"Let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece."*

The Hebrew word carries the idea of testing or putting something to proof.

That word deserves careful attention because Deuteronomy 6:16 says...

*"Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted him in Massah."*

When Satan urged Jesus to cast Himself from the pinnacle of the temple and force a demonstration of the Father's protection, Jesus quoted that command.

*"Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."*

Was Gideon committing exactly the same sin as Israel at Massah?

We should be careful.

Judges does not record a rebuke from God.

The circumstances were not identical.

Gideon was not denying God's existence.

He was not openly defying God.

But Gideon's own words show that he understood the danger.

God had spoken.

God had already provided evidence.

Gideon was asking God to place the promise under another test.

So was Gideon faithful or faithless?

The answer is not as simple as either word alone.

Gideon had faith.

Hebrews chapter eleven includes his name among those remembered for faith.

He had obeyed God by destroying Baal's altar.

He had sounded the trumpet.

He was preparing to lead Israel.

But Gideon was also afraid.

The Bible does not hide that fear.

He threshed in hiding.

He questioned God's presence.

He emphasized his weakness.

He acted at night.

He asked for one sign.

Then another.

Faith and fear were living in the same man.

That may be true of someone listening today.

You believe God.

You love God.

You want to obey God.

And you are still afraid.

Weak faith is still faith.

But weak faith must learn to rest more fully in the faithfulness of God.

Why did God answer Gideon?

The text does not give us a sentence beginning with the word because.

We should not pretend to know everything God did not explain.

But the larger story reveals God's patience.

Psalm 103 says...

*"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him."*

*"For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust."*

God knew Gideon's frame.

God knew his fear.

God had chosen him.

God intended to deliver Israel.

God answered both requests.

That reveals grace.

But grace does not automatically turn Gideon's action into a command for us.

God's accommodation is not automatically God's recommendation.

God may meet us patiently in an immature place...

without commanding us to remain there.

The most important question is whether the fleece accomplished what Gideon needed.

Did the wet fleece remove his fear?

Did the dry fleece establish permanent confidence?

Continue reading into Judges chapter seven.

Gideon had approximately thirty-two thousand soldiers.

The LORD said that the people were too many.

Why?

*"Lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me."*

God told Gideon to let the fearful return home.

Twenty-two thousand left.

Ten thousand remained.

God said that ten thousand were still too many.

After the test at the water, only three hundred remained.

Think about what God had done.

Gideon had asked for evidence that would make him feel secure.

God then removed everything that looked secure.

Thirty-two thousand became three hundred.

Human strength disappeared.

Favorable odds disappeared.

The possibility of boasting disappeared.

Gideon would have to trust the promise.

Then God said...

*"Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand."*

But listen to the next verse.

*"But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host."*

If thou fear.

After the commission...

after the fire...

after the protection...

after the Spirit came upon him...

after the wet fleece...

after the dry fleece...

Gideon was still afraid.

The fleece was wet.

Then the fleece was dry.

But Gideon was still afraid.

A sign can answer a question for a moment without teaching the heart to live by faith.

This time God selected the reassurance.

God told Gideon to take Phurah and go near the Midianite camp.

The enemy covered the valley like grasshoppers.

Their camels were without number.

Gideon heard one soldier telling another about a dream.

A cake of barley bread tumbled into the camp and overturned a tent.

The other soldier said...

*"This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel."*

Then the enemy said the promise Gideon had struggled to believe.

*"For into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host."*

Gideon had heard that promise from God.

Now he heard it from the lips of a frightened Midianite.

What did Gideon do?

Judges 7:15 says...

*"When Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he worshipped."*

He worshipped.

Then he returned to Israel's camp and declared...

*"Arise; for the LORD hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian."*

Something had changed.

He was no longer asking whether God would do what He said.

He was now repeating God's promise to others.

The story did not reach its turning point when Gideon obtained the sign he designed.

It reached its turning point when Gideon rested in the promise God had repeatedly given.

The fleece was Gideon's chosen test.

The dream was God's chosen reassurance.

With the fleece, Gideon established the conditions.

With the dream, God directed Gideon where to go.

With the fleece, Gideon asked again.

With the dream, Gideon worshipped and obeyed.

Does this mean that God never reassures fearful believers today?

No.

God remains sovereign.

He may arrange circumstances with remarkable precision.

He may send a wise Christian with exactly the counsel we need.

He may bring a Scripture passage to our attention at the right moment.

He may close an opportunity that was never within our control.

He may provide encouragement we did not request.

But receiving providential encouragement is different from requiring God to communicate according to conditions we invent.

And an event is not the same as an interpretation of the event.

Something may happen.

That occurrence is a fact.

What the event means may still be our interpretation.

Modern fleeces are usually very different from Gideon's fleece.

Gideon asked for two precise, opposite and extraordinary physical results.

We often choose events that were already likely to happen.

*"If my friend calls, I will know."*

Does that friend call regularly?

*"If the company responds, I will know."*

Had the company already promised to respond?

*"If the light stays green, I will know."*

Traffic lights turn green every day.

Then we attach divine certainty to an ordinary event.

Sometimes we choose vague conditions.

If the event is close enough, we count it.

If it happens one day late, we extend the deadline.

If the first result is unwanted, we ask for another.

If the second is still unwanted, we redesign the test.

Eventually the fleece tells us what we wanted to hear.

That is not surrender.

It may be confirmation bias wearing religious clothing.

A fleece can also shift responsibility.

If the decision succeeds, we say...

*"God led me."*

If it fails, we say...

*"God told me to do it."*

But God may never have said what we claimed.

We established the condition.

We interpreted the event.

We made the choice.

Then we assigned the responsibility to God.

That becomes especially dangerous when another person is involved.

A private fleece cannot determine whom another person must marry.

It cannot determine where another person must serve.

It cannot require someone to give money.

It cannot bind another person's conscience.

No one should be pressured by the words...

*"God gave me a sign about what you must do."*

And no fleece can make sin righteous.

An opportunity to sin is not an open door from God.

A feeling of peace does not make disobedience holy.

A convenient circumstance cannot overrule Scripture.

God is not going to contradict His written Word through a traffic light, telephone call or unexpected check.

The Bible records Gideon's action.

That does not mean the Bible commands Gideon's action.

Description is not automatically prescription.

Scripture also records Abraham lying about Sarah.

It records Jacob deceiving his father.

It records David's adultery.

It records Peter denying Christ.

The Bible tells the truth about what people did.

We must still ask what God commands us to do.

Did God command Christians to use a fleece?

No.

Did Jesus teach His disciples to design signs for personal decisions?

No.

Did the apostles establish fleeces as a normal church practice?

No.

The story reveals God's patience with Gideon.

It does not create a decision-making formula for us.

Now we must make one more distinction.

Testing an impression is not the same as testing God.

First Thessalonians 5:21 says...

*"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."*

First John 4:1 says...

*"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God."*

We should test our interpretations.

We should test teaching.

We should test spiritual claims.

We should test whether our proposed action agrees with Scripture.

We should ask whether desire is controlling the conclusion.

We should ask whether fear is delaying obedience.

We should ask whether wise counsel exposes a problem.

We should ask whether we are honoring our responsibilities.

We should remain willing to say...

*"I believed the Lord may have been leading me, but I could have interpreted the circumstances incorrectly."*

That is humility.

But testing God says...

*"Lord, I have established the test."*

*"You must perform my chosen sign."*

*"Then I will trust You."*

One tests our fallible understanding.

The other puts God's faithfulness on trial.

So what should a Christian do instead of putting out a fleece?

When Scripture commands, obey.

You do not need another sign before you forgive.

You do not need another sign before you tell the truth.

You do not need another sign before you repent.

You do not need another sign before you remain faithful to your vows.

You do not need another sign before you care for the responsibilities God has already placed in your hands.

When Scripture forbids, refuse.

No sign can authorize adultery.

No coincidence can make dishonesty righteous.

No open door can turn greed into obedience.

No private impression can cancel a clear command of God.

But what if Scripture permits more than one choice?

Pray for wisdom.

Examine your motives.

Gather reliable information.

Seek qualified counsel.

Consider your responsibilities.

Respect the rights and consent of others.

Evaluate the likely consequences.

Then make a responsible choice with humility.

You may not receive a supernatural sign.

You may not feel complete certainty.

You may have to make the best decision you can with the wisdom God has supplied.

That does not mean you have stepped outside God's providence.

Where Scripture commands, obey.

Where Scripture forbids, refuse.

Where Scripture permits, seek wisdom and choose humbly.

In every case, trust God.

What did the fleece teach Gideon?

God was able to control the dew.

God was willing to keep His promise.

God was patient with Gideon's fear.

But God did not allow Gideon to build his future upon the fleece.

God led him forward until the frightened man worshipped and obeyed.

Perhaps you have used fleeces before.

This study is not an invitation to live in shame.

God was patient with Gideon.

He is able to correct us patiently.

Return to Scripture.

Reconsider what you concluded.

Separate what happened from what you decided it meant.

Where correction is needed, receive it.

Then take the next faithful step.

Gideon was an imperfect deliverer.

He was frightened.

He hesitated.

He needed repeated reassurance.

Yet God used him to rescue Israel.

But Gideon points us toward a greater Deliverer.

When Satan tempted Jesus, he proposed a test.

*"If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down."*

Satan even quoted Scripture about God's protection.

Jesus refused to manufacture a crisis that would force the Father to prove His faithfulness.

*"Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."*

Jesus did not demand another sign before obeying the Father.

He moved toward the cross.

He knew the suffering that awaited Him.

He knew the shame.

He knew the nails.

He knew the weight of our sin.

And He obeyed perfectly.

Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures.

He was buried.

He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.

We do not need to place a fleece on the ground to know whether God is willing to save.

God answered that question at the cross and the empty tomb.

Romans 5:8 says...

*"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."*

Romans 10:9 says...

*"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."*

If you have never trusted Jesus Christ, do not wait for a private sign.

The Gospel has been declared.

You are a sinner.

Christ died for sinners.

Christ rose from the dead.

Turn to Him.

Trust Him.

Receive the salvation He offers by grace.

Was Gideon testing God's will, God's Word or God Himself?

He was not testing an unknown will.

God's will was already clear.

He was asking God to prove an already-spoken promise because fear made that promise difficult for him to trust.

In doing so, Gideon approached the dangerous territory of testing God.

Yet God responded patiently.

God did not abandon him.

God kept teaching him.

God removed his visible security.

God brought him near the enemy.

God repeated the promise.

Gideon worshipped.

Gideon obeyed.

The fleece was wet.

Then the fleece was dry.

But Gideon was still afraid.

The miracle changed the fleece before it changed the man.

Then God reduced the army.

God brought Gideon near the enemy.

God allowed him to hear the promise from the mouth of a Midianite.

And finally, Gideon worshipped.

The fleece was not the end of Gideon's fear.

The faithfulness of God was.

When God has spoken clearly, obey Him.

When Scripture permits several choices, seek wisdom and choose humbly.

When you are afraid, ask God for help.

But do not make God submit to a test before you will trust the Word He has already given.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father...

Forgive us for the times we have delayed obedience while asking for more evidence.

Forgive us for assigning Your authority to our interpretations.

Teach us to test our own understanding without putting Your faithfulness on trial.

Give wisdom to those facing difficult choices.

Give courage to those who already know what obedience requires.

Give comfort to those whose faith is weak.

Thank You for knowing our frame and remembering that we are dust.

Thank You for Jesus Christ, who obeyed perfectly and died in our place.

Draw the lost to salvation.

Strengthen Your people to walk by faith.

We ask this in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

If you trusted Christ today, or if you want someone to open the Bible and explain salvation more fully, please speak with me after the service.

If you are facing a difficult decision and would like prayer or Biblical counsel, you are invited to the Pastor's Study.

Please also join us at Reason Together Cafe.

God's patience with Gideon means that a fearful believer should not run away from God.

Bring your fear to Him.

Open His Word.

Ask for wisdom.

Receive counsel.

Then take the next faithful step.

The goal is not to become a person who can interpret every circumstance.

The goal is to become a person who knows God's Word, trusts God's character and obeys God even when no additional sign appears.

Aloha Nui Loa.

## REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

# PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

## The Fleece as a Test

*Judges 6:33-40*

*Was Gideon Testing the Will of God the Word of God or God Himself*

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Pastor and Teacher

## Commentary in Brief

Judges 6:36-40 does not present the fleece as a method for discovering an unknown will. Gideon's repeated phrase "as thou hast said" shows that he already knew God's commission and promise. The signs belong to a larger account of a fearful servant whom God patiently moves toward trust. The fleece is answered, but fear remains. The decisive movement occurs in Judges 7:15, when God supplies reassurance of His own choosing and Gideon worships.

### 1. Judges 6 1 through 10

The Gideon cycle begins with covenant disobedience. Israel's oppression is not introduced as an unexplained misfortune. The narrator states that Israel did evil and that the LORD delivered the nation into Midian's hand for seven years. Midian's recurring raids devastated agriculture and forced Israelites into concealment. When the people cried out, God sent a prophet before He sent a military deliverer. The prophet recalled the exodus, the gift of the land and God's command not to fear the Amorite gods. His final accusation, "ye have not obeyed my voice," supplies the theological interpretation of the crisis.

This beginning guards against an individualistic reading of the fleece. Gideon is not an isolated believer trying to choose among ordinary life options. God is acting within covenant history to discipline and rescue Israel. The public question about modern fleeces is legitimate, but the answer must respect this original setting.

### 2. Judges 6 11 and 12

Gideon threshes wheat by a winepress to hide from Midian. The setting makes his fear visible before the narrator names it. Threshing ordinarily benefits from an exposed location and moving air. A winepress offers concealment but is poorly suited to separating grain from chaff.

The angel's greeting, "The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour," creates deliberate tension. Gideon does not presently appear mighty. The address can be read proleptically: God names the role Gideon will fulfill through divine presence. The words do not flatter Gideon's natural ability. They prepare for the promise "Surely I will be with thee."

### 3. Judges 6 13 through 16

Gideon's question joins national pain with theological confusion. If the LORD is with Israel, why has disaster occurred, and where are the wonders of the exodus? Gideon correctly remembers that Israel's God is a God of mighty acts, but he overlooks the prophetic explanation already given: Israel has not obeyed God's voice.

The LORD answers by commissioning Gideon. "Have not I sent thee?" establishes divine authority. Gideon's objection concerns family status and personal insignificance. God's answer does not enlarge Gideon's resume. It promises presence: "Surely I will be with thee." This pattern resembles the call of Moses. The servant's inadequacy becomes the setting in which divine sufficiency is displayed.

## 4. Judges 6 17 through 24

Gideon's first request for a sign must be distinguished from the fleece. He asks for a sign "that thou talkest with me." The question concerns the identity and authority of the speaker. The Hebrew term *oth* may denote a sign or confirming token. Fire from the rock consumes the offering, transforming the presented food into a sacrifice and disclosing the divine character of the encounter.

Gideon responds with fear that he will die after seeing the angel of the LORD. God answers, "Peace be unto thee; fear not." Gideon builds an altar called Jehovah-shalom. Before the fleece, therefore, Gideon has already received an explicit commission, a promise of presence and supernatural confirmation.

## 5. Judges 6 25 through 32

God's command to destroy Baal's altar tests Gideon's response to the revelation already received. Gideon obeys, but verse 27 says he acts at night because he fears his household and the city. The detail resists simplistic classification. Gideon is neither wholly paralyzed nor fully courageous. He obeys while afraid.

The survival of Gideon after Baal's altar is destroyed also carries theological force. Joash argues that Baal should defend himself if he is a god. Baal does nothing. The one true God preserves the servant who obeyed Him.

## 6. Judges 6 33 through 35

The enemy coalition gathers in the valley of Jezreel. In response, "the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon." The Hebrew wording uses the verb *labash*, to clothe. Gideon is pictured as clothed by the Spirit for the task. He blows the trumpet, and Abiezer follows. Other tribes answer his messengers.

The placement is striking. Divine empowerment and a substantial response precede the fleece. The request cannot be explained by an absence of evidence that God is at work. It reveals that empowerment for service may coexist with personal fear.

## 7. Judges 6 36

Gideon's opening words establish the purpose of the fleece: "If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said." The final clause controls interpretation. Gideon knows what God has said. He is not asking whether he should fight or whether another person should lead.

The conditional form does not necessarily mean Gideon doubts every aspect of God's character. It does show that he seeks further assurance that the promise will be fulfilled through him. The problem is not lack of revealed direction. It is difficulty resting in revealed direction.

## 8. Judges 6 37 and 38

The first proposed sign places a fleece of shorn wool on the floor, meaning the threshing floor. Gideon asks for dew on the fleece alone and dryness on all the surrounding ground. The next

morning he wrings a bowlful of water from the fleece. The abundance strengthens the presentation of an extraordinary result.

The noun *tal*, dew, appears repeatedly in the paragraph. Dew was agriculturally significant and elsewhere may accompany blessing. The noun *erets* can mean ground or land. Some interpreters see a symbolic picture of Israel's land and Midian's consumption of blessing. That reading is possible, but Gideon himself states a simpler purpose: he wants to know that God will save Israel through him as promised.

## **9. Judges 6 39 and 40**

Gideon asks that God's anger not burn against him and requests one further proof. His concern shows that he recognizes the boldness of asking again after God has answered. The reversal requires the fleece to remain dry while dew covers the ground. God performs the second sign.

The verb translated "prove" comes from *nasah*, to test or try. The same root appears in Deuteronomy 6:16, which forbids Israel to test the LORD as at Massah. Vocabulary alone cannot erase contextual differences, and Judges does not record a divine rebuke. Nevertheless, Gideon's own appeal concerning God's anger confirms that this is no casual model of prayer. He is placing an already spoken promise under additional proof.

## **10. Deuteronomy 6 16 and Matthew 4 7**

At Massah Israel demanded evidence of God's presence despite the deliverance already received. Deuteronomy commands later generations not to repeat that testing. In Matthew 4 Satan urges Jesus to cast Himself down and force a public demonstration of promised angelic protection. Jesus refuses and quotes Deuteronomy.

These passages define the danger in a humanly designed test. Faith does not manufacture conditions that God must satisfy before obedience. This does not forbid every request for help or reassurance. It forbids placing God's faithfulness under human authority.

## **11. Exodus 4 and the Moses Parallel**

Gideon's call resembles Moses' call. Both men object on the basis of inadequacy. Both receive the promise of divine presence. Both are connected with signs that confirm a deliverer before Israel. This parallel prevents an excessively harsh reading in which every sign request is treated as atheistic rebellion.

The parallel does not establish modern fleeces. God gives Moses signs connected to his public commission and Israel's deliverance. Moses is not choosing arbitrary events and assigning them meaning for an ordinary personal decision.

## 12. Hebrews 11 32

Hebrews names Gideon among people whose lives testify to faith. The reference does not declare that every action Gideon took was ideal. Biblical commendation often recognizes the governing direction of a life without approving every moment.

The proper synthesis is that Gideon possessed real faith and real fear. He obeyed amid weakness. This reading allows the sermon to warn against testing God without denying the grace already operating in Gideon.

## 13. Judges 7 1 through 8

God reduces Gideon's army so Israel cannot say, "Mine own hand hath saved me." The numerical reduction is central to the theology of the cycle. Deliverance will reveal God's power rather than Israel's military sufficiency.

The sequence also addresses Gideon's struggle. He has sought reassurance, yet God removes the visible support of thirty-two thousand soldiers. The mission becomes less secure by ordinary calculation. Gideon must rest in the presence and promise of God.

## 14. Judges 7 9 through 11

God again declares, "I have delivered it into thine hand." The perfect certainty of the promise contrasts with Gideon's continuing fear. God then says, "If thou fear to go down," and permits Gideon to take Phurah. The conditional offer acknowledges the fear that remains after both fleece signs.

This observation is essential. The fleece has not completed Gideon's formation. Miraculous evidence can be remembered and still fail to produce settled courage. God continues to minister to His servant.

## 15. Judges 7 12 through 15

Gideon hears a Midianite dream and its interpretation. The enemy soldier declares that God has delivered Midian into Gideon's hand. The words repeat what God has said throughout the narrative. Their source heightens the irony: the fearful Israelite hears a Midianite confess the certainty of Israel's victory.

Gideon's response changes. He worships. He returns to the camp and tells the three hundred to arise. The narrative has moved from questioning the promise to proclaiming it. God's chosen reassurance, combined with the promise already given, brings Gideon to action.

## 16. Description and Prescription

Biblical narratives teach through what they report, but not every reported action is a command. The interpreter asks whether God commanded the act, whether the narrator commends it, whether later Scripture establishes it as a pattern and whether clearer teaching supports imitation.

No passage commands believers to devise fleeces. Jesus and the apostles do not present them as a normal method for private choices. The account teaches God's faithfulness and patience while exposing the fragility of faith that continually requires another proof.

## 17. Providence and Interpretation

Christian theology rightly affirms that God governs circumstances. The denial of fleeces must not become a denial of providence. A timely event may be one means through which God encourages, restrains or provides.

The interpretive limit remains important. The event is one matter; the meaning assigned to it is another. Unless God has revealed the meaning, the believer's explanation remains fallible. Humble language such as "I believe the Lord may have encouraged me" differs from the binding claim "God told me and my conclusion cannot be questioned."

## 18. First Thessalonians 5 21 and First John 4 1

The commands to prove all things and try the spirits establish a Christian duty of examination. Believers must not receive every religious claim without testing its content. Scripture, the Gospel and the character of God supply governing standards.

These commands support testing an impression, not testing God. A believer may examine whether a proposed course agrees with Scripture, honors responsibilities and withstands wise counsel. That is humility about human interpretation. Requiring God to perform a chosen sign before obedience reverses the relationship.

## 19. Pastoral Application

When Scripture clearly commands, another sign is unnecessary. The believer should forgive, speak truth, remain faithful, repent and fulfill responsibilities because God has spoken. Waiting for a fleece may become delayed obedience.

When Scripture forbids, no circumstance can authorize the act. Opportunity is not approval. Emotional peace is not moral permission. A private sign cannot make sin holy.

When Scripture permits several choices, wisdom governs. Prayer, counsel, accurate information, motives, responsibilities, consent and consequences all matter. The believer may choose without pretending that one lawful option arrived through private revelation.

## 20. The Meaning of Dew Fleece and Ground

The physical elements have generated several interpretations. Wool naturally receives and retains moisture, and this observation is sometimes used to explain why Gideon reversed the sign. The text itself does not state Gideon's scientific reasoning. It presents the first outcome as abundant and the second as a deliberate reversal. The force lies in God's control of the contrasting conditions, not in a natural experiment that Gideon could reproduce.

Dew often accompanies agricultural blessing in the Old Testament. Isaac blesses Jacob with the dew of heaven in Genesis 27:28. Deuteronomy 33:13 associates Joseph's blessing with dew. Psalm 133:3 uses the dew of Hermon in a picture of divine blessing. Because Midian had consumed Israel's crops, dew on the land can appropriately suggest restored fruitfulness.

The Hebrew *ereṣ* can refer to ground or land. This permits an interpretation in which the dry land and wet fleece represent Israel's deprivation while Midian possesses the produce, followed by a reversal in which Israel's land receives blessing and Midian is emptied. The proposal fits the broader story, but the narrator does not interpret the sign for the reader. It should be classified as possible rather than certain.

Later allegorical traditions assigned other meanings. The wet fleece was sometimes treated as Israel receiving revelation while the Gentile world remained dry, then the dry fleece and wet ground were treated as the Gospel moving to the Gentiles. Other interpreters associated the fleece with Mary or Christ. Such readings demonstrate the history of Christian imagination, but they do not arise from Gideon's stated request and should not govern the study.

## 21. The Baal Context

Gideon's fleece follows the destruction of Baal's altar and the cutting down of the grove. Baal worship in Canaan was associated with fertility, storm and agricultural provision. A sign involving dew may therefore have carried polemical force in a setting where Israel feared that Baal controlled the conditions necessary for crops. The LORD who preserved Gideon after Baal's altar fell also controlled the dew.

The narrative itself makes the anti-Baal point clearly through Joash: if Baal is a god, let him plead for himself. Baal does not act. The additional connection between Baal and Gideon's choice of dew is plausible, but the text does not state that Gideon selected dew to challenge Baal. Responsible exposition may describe the cultural resonance without converting it into the exclusive meaning.

## 22. Signs Confirmation and Repeated Demands

A sign may strengthen faith when God gives it, but Scripture also shows that signs do not mechanically create obedience. Pharaoh witnessed plagues and hardened his heart. Israel crossed the sea and later doubted in the wilderness. Religious leaders saw the works of Jesus and demanded another sign. Evidence can be sufficient while the human heart remains resistant or afraid.

Gideon's experience belongs to this broader pattern. Each sign answers the immediate request, yet the later words "if thou fear" reveal that another miracle did not settle every struggle. The narrative therefore warns against imagining that one more extraordinary event will remove the need for trust.

Repeated demands may also change the moral character of the request. A first question may arise from confusion. A second demand after clear revelation may expose reluctance to obey. Gideon's plea concerning God's anger indicates awareness of that progression. The preacher should not claim access to Gideon's entire motive, but should allow his words to carry their evident caution.

## 23. Prayer Wisdom and Ordinary Decisions

The New Testament normally directs believers toward transformed judgment, prayer, wisdom, counsel, love and responsibility. Romans 12 joins discernment with a renewed mind. James 1 promises wisdom to those who ask in faith. Philippians 1:9-10 connects discernment with love, knowledge and judgment. These texts form people capable of faithful decisions rather than promising a private sign for each choice.

An ordinary circumstance may narrow the available choices. A position that is never offered cannot presently be accepted. A cost a family cannot bear is relevant. Another person's refusal removes an option that requires consent. These are facts to be respected. Calling them an open or closed door may be harmless shorthand, but it becomes dangerous when the metaphor is treated as infallible revelation.

Christian freedom also matters. If two choices are lawful and responsible, a believer may select either without fearing that one hidden option is the only path inside God's providence. God remains sovereign over imperfect human decisions. Humility permits correction without the spiritual crisis created by a false claim that God privately dictated every detail.

## 24. Gospel and Christ

Gideon is a genuine but imperfect deliverer. Jesus is the obedient Son. When Satan proposed a test of the Father's protection, Jesus refused to turn Scripture into an excuse for presumption. He later moved toward the cross in complete obedience.

The death and resurrection of Christ provide the decisive public ground for the Gospel invitation. Sinners do not need a private fleece to learn whether God is willing to save. God commended His love when Christ died for sinners. The risen Christ promises salvation to those who believe.

## 25. Final Commentary Conclusion

The fleece is memorable because God controls dew and answers Gideon's precise requests. The narrative is more profound because those signs do not end Gideon's fear. God continues to strip away visible strength, repeats His promise and supplies reassurance according to His own wisdom. Gideon finally worships and obeys.

The passage therefore gives fearful believers both warning and comfort. The warning is not to place God's faithfulness under self-designed tests. The comfort is that God knows the weakness of His servants and patiently leads them toward trust.