

Judges 6 Notes

One War Over and Another Begun

by C H Spurgeon
Sermon on Judges 6:4–22

“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. And the Lord said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die. Then Gideon built an altar there unto the Lord, and called it Jehovah-shalom” (Judges 6:4-22).

These Midianites were wandering Bedouins from Arabia, and from the East country round about the Holy Land. They were masters of the art of plundering, and knew no bowels of compassion. They generally lived a hard life themselves, and when they had an opportunity to feast on the spoils of others, they rioted without stint, and left a famine behind them. Most fitly does the Scripture compare them to grasshoppers, for both in number and in destructive force they were like those terrible devourers. God had brought them upon Israel to scourge that nation because it had been so foolish and so ungrateful as to set up the gods of the heathen, and to forget the one mighty God who was so specially and graciously their patron and defender. They were impoverished and ground down to the very last degree by these plunderers, who left no food either for men or cattle. The poor Israelites, creeping forth from their dens and caves, attempted to carry on the work of husbandry, and sowed the land; but when the time came for reaping, the marauders came forth once more, took away their harvest, and despoiled their pastures again. Then, as usual, Israel cried unto Jehovah, and his ear was open to their groaning. Their afflictions made them weary of their idols, and caused them to say, “We will return unto our first husband, for it was better with us then than now.” God in his great mercy raised up for them a deliverer, Gideon, a mighty man of valor, who distinguished himself in various skirmishes with the foe! His name was already a terror to Midian, for he who dreamed of the barley cake which smote the tent, and it lay along, said to his fellow—“This is none other than Gideon, the son of Joash.”

His character has never been sufficiently admired: Scripture names much less bright than his have been preferred before him by the general ministry; yet he deserves far better treatment. He was a man gentle and yet strong, cautious and yet venturesome; a searching inquirer, and an intense believer. While he was a sort of foreshadowing of David, he had much of the afterglow of Joshua. He was a truly great man, though his latter days were overshadowed by a grievous religious error, and a sad moral fault. Despite his failings he was one of the greatest of the heroes of faith. He was not in a hurry to venture upon a pitched battle, but waited his time, and then by a sudden and unexpected attack he struck the whole host with panic, so that they fled at once, and Midian was smitten as one man. The leaders flee; two of the minor ones, Oreb and Zeeb, the raven and the wolf, are first captured, and by-and-by the greater generals, who had fled first of all, are taken by the victorious band. The leaders were ahead of all others in flight. In after days the destruction of their mighty ones became a proverbial curse, “Make their nobles like Oreb, and like Zeeb: yea, all their princes as Zebah, and as Zalmunna.”

Let us think for a while of Gideon, in order that we may see that we ourselves are or may be somewhat parallels with him. We may not have to smite the Bedouin as he had, but unto a spiritual warfare God has called many of us: and though he intends to use us, and to get unto himself victory by us, yet it may be that at this moment we are in fear. We are now passing through the same mental processes as those which educated Gideon, and we are being prepared thereby for future conflict and conquest.

I shall begin by asking you to dwell for a minute upon Gideon’s sigh for peace; for he loved not war, but pined for quiet. He called the name of the altar “Jehovah-shalom,” which the margin reads, “The Lord send peace.” You see therefore that deeper down in his spirit than any desire for warlike honor there was a yearning after peace. He wanted not the spoils of princes; he only desired to plow, and sow, and reap in peace.

And do you wonder at it, when the ills of war were all around? He had for a long time seen in the cases of his friends and neighbors the desolating effects of war: their property was taken from them, their bread was stolen out of their mouths, their children were slain, and themselves made to hide away upon the tops of mountains or in caverns among the hills. Life became intolerable amid such privations and dangers. Gideon must have felt his heart swell with grief and indignation as he looked upon the remnant of Israel hunted like partridges upon the mountains, though once they had dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree. The Bedouin styled the valley of Jezreel “the meadows of God”: how grievous to see those fat pastures trodden down by the feet of the invaders! Ah, little can you and I imagine of the horrors of war. We read of it, and our sympathies are touched, but we know not the multiplied murders, the painful wounds, the desolating rapine, and the fierce crimes which attend the track of armies. If we saw battle with our own eyes, we should with burning fervor cry, “Send us peace in our days, good Lord.”

Moreover, he had not only seen war, but he sighed for peace, because he was himself feeling the mischief of it. The dread of the conflict had come to his own mountain farm at Abiezer. There he was himself, threshing wheat by the wine press, in an unusual

place, in an inconvenient place, that he might hide a little grain, for winter's food, from the Midianites who were eager to devour it. Aye, and when carnage smokes at your own door, and rapine is at your own gate, when you yourself are straitened and are hiding for fear, then comes from the deep recesses of the spirit the cry, "Oh, that God would send us peace, for this is a weary oppression; these ravens and wolves devour us utterly."

The way of peace was sufficiently well known to Gideon: the prophet of the Lord had indicated to the people that the only way of peace was for Israel to return unto Jehovah, her God. The great sin of departure from the glorious living God was set before them, and they could readily draw the inference that they would never have peace from their enemies till first of all they had made their peace with God. They must surrender to their sovereign, and renew their loyalty, and then he would drive out the foe from their land. They must confess their transgressions and renew their covenant, and then they would obtain deliverance. Then would the ancient promise be fulfilled, "One should chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight." Gideon probably knew this before the prophet came; it was deeply imprinted on his thoughtful spirit, and as he was a man of faith in God, he did not doubt but that if Israel returned unto Jehovah then peace would follow.

While Gideon is meditating and working, an angel appears to him and gives him the assurance that with him at least God was at peace. The covenant angel said to him, "Jehovah is with thee, thou mighty man of valor." Methinks his spirit ought greatly to have rejoiced at that assurance, and perhaps it did; for what better thing can happen unto any man than to receive such a token for good? If God be for us, who can be against us? We know how sweet is the assurance that being justified by faith we have peace with God. It is well with us when we are assured that the Lord is with us, our helper, our shield, our portion forever and ever.

But there arose in his mind a grave anxiety. His was a very careful, thoughtful soul, for he was a man of prudence, large-hearted, far-seeing, and given to look at things coolly and steadily; and there arose in his heart a question serious and vital, "Is this the voice of God to me, or am I deluded? Is God at peace with me, or am I like the rest, plunged in a horrible warfare against the living God?" Therefore he puts a question, and he asks a sign that he might make sure of what he was about. Brethren, in spiritual matters you and I had need be sure. If we have peace within our spirit, let us make certain that it is the peace of God; for still are there voices that cry, "Peace, peace," where there is no peace. Still do siren songs charm men to ruin with their dulcet notes; still does the fatal river flow most smoothly as it approaches the dreadful cataract. Beware of that word of the Lord, "When they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape." None are more quiet than the ungodly when they are given up to a strong delusion. The Psalmist says of them, "There are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men." It was no so with Gideon: his anxiety made itself visible. He was not the man to leap at a shadow: he sought for substance. If he was to have peace, he must have it from God: if he was to be delivered, he longed to have victory plain and permanent. The favor which he asked was requested because anxiety troubled him, and he wished to make assurance doubly sure. He desired to know from God himself that his mission was authentic and his success certain.

I believe that many of us have been, and perhaps are, in Gideon's position. Of course we have not his errand, but we have one of our own, and we are troubled because we are not personally sure of our peace. We are grieved by our past sins and their consequences. This is the lot of many men. "Conscience doth make cowards of us all," and when the mighty Spirit of God convinces us of sin then sin becomes a second sorrow; nay, worse than that, for if sorrow do chasten us with whips, sin doth scourge us with scorpions. We are consumed by God's anger, and by his wrath we are troubled. The mind is tossed to and fro and is confounded, but even in its confusion it seeks the true rest, and longs to gain peace in God. Like the needle in the compass, it is agitated and disturbed, yet still it knows its pole, and trembles towards it. It will never be still till it reaches the point of its rest. Have you ever been in that condition? I know you have if the Lord has loved you and ordained you to his work. Has God at such a time sent you a message of mercy? Have you searched the Scriptures and found a precious promise? Have you heard a faithful servant of God preach under his Master's anointing, and have you been comforted? Even then I should not wonder if the darkening thought has arisen like a cloud, "Is this the right comfort for me? May I really enjoy it? Will it be presumption or assurance?" There is often a fine line, thin as a razor's edge, between the two, and woe unto him who makes a mistake about it. O God, save us from carnal security. Prevent our crying "Peace, peace, where there is no peace." Better that we write bitter things against ourselves, if they be true, than that we say smooth things and flatter ourselves to destruction. Therefore, I should not wonder if you are asking the Lord to give you a token for good. You are praying to him and saying, "I will not be comforted except thou comfort me: thy dove shall find no rest for the sole of her foot except it be in the ark with the true Noah, in whom is rest." As for me, I will take no cup of consolation except that which Jesus proffers when he gives it me with his own pierced hands. If washed, it shall be in Jesus' blood: if clothed, it shall be in his righteousness.

From Gideon's longing, panting desire to obtain peace with God and then peace for his country we turn to look a little further into Gideon's fear which he met with in the way of peace. "An angel" appeared to him—so saith the text in the Authorized Version; but in truth it was the Angel of Jehovah, and this should have comforted him, even as it has comforted us. One would have thought that Gideon would have leaped for joy when he beheld his God veiled in angelic form, but instead therefore the shadow of death fell upon him. Here was a man panting for peace, and firmly following the way of peace, and yet afraid with a deadly fear. Peace cannot

be had except by our drawing near to God and the Lord's drawing near to us; but as soon as this process commences poor humanity shrinks from the interview, and is melted with fear. "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." It usually happens that when God is bringing men into peace with himself, while the operation is going on thoroughly and soundly, there is a degree of trembling in the soul. I suspect that conversion which has no trembling in it: note the prodigal's cry, "I am not worthy to be called thy son." Note Peter's bitter weeping, and the three days' darkness of Saul of Tarsus. Even to believers the visitations of God are not without overwhelming awe: Jacob cries, "How dreadful is this place," Job abhors himself, Moses doth exceedingly fear and quake, and Isaiah cries, "Woe is me."

Why was Gideon afraid? Not because he was a coward—you will scarcely meet with a braver man in all Scripture than this son of Joash—but because even brave men are alarmed at the supernatural. He saw something which he had never seen before, an appearance celestial, mysterious, above what is usually seen of mortal men; therefore, as he feared God, Gideon was afraid. When the living God draws very near to a soul, even though it be in the person of Christ Jesus, that soul is struck with awe, and trembles before the Lord. It cannot well be otherwise. Recollect how it was with the beloved John. "When I saw him," says John—that was, his own dear Master, upon whose breast he had leaned his head—"when I," the disciple whom Jesus loved, "saw him, I fell at his feet as dead." You do not wonder, therefore, if a poor soul full of doubt and anxiety, vexed with a sense of sin, and greatly troubled by affliction, is full of fear when Jesus draws near. Though he comes with no feeling but of love, no thought but of mercy, no sentence but of free forgiveness, yet the heart is awe-struck at the wondrous sight.

Alas, some of you know not what it is to have the Lord drawing near to your spirits. If you did you would not think it strange that certain awakened ones have acted in a singular way, and for a while have forgotten to eat bread. Daniel saith, "I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength." When this glorious God comes near to the soul it is a solemn visitation, and the mind is bowed under it.

Moreover, Gideon had been ill-taught by tradition. There was a rumor abroad which was derived from truth, and yet was false, namely, that no man could see a heavenly being and live. It is true that the Lord expressly told his servant Moses that he could not see his face and live; but he did not say, "Thou canst not see an angel and live"; nor had he said, "Thou canst not see my veiled presence and live." The tradition was an accretion to the truth and a corruption of it. We may not see the face of God, but we may see Jesus; in fact, we live because we see him. Beware of the moss which grows upon a truth. Many a heart bleeds because it is wounded by its own imperfect ideas of God; and so when God does draw near, when the great Almighty overshadows it, there is a slavish dread for which there is no need. "I shall die," saith he, "I shall die." He sees his sin, and therefore he thinks that God has come in anger to punish him: he feels his weakness, and fainting under it he groans, "I shall die." No, soul, if God had meant to slay you he would have let you alone. Whom God destroys he first leaves to the madness of his own conceit. He does not take the trouble to show a man his sin, and reveal to him his transgression unless he means to pardon and save him. If the Lord has taken to strip you, he will clothe you, if he makes your righteousness to fade like the leaves of autumn, it is because he has a glorious robe with which to array you: therefore be not afraid.

Besides, Gideon was in a state of mind in which he could be easily cast down. He was a brave man, but long affliction had cast a tinge of sadness over him. His usual conduct in life is well pictured by the two signs which God gave him. When all the people around him were, with excitement, like the threshing floor, heated and dry, he, like the fleece, was cool and composed: and then, again, when all around him like the wet floor, were dampened with discouragement, he alone remained in his ordinary condition, with not a drop of cowardice within him. That was the kind of man: calm, quiet, determined, brave. But at the moment recorded in our text he was smarting under a cruel oppression, conscious of God's anger for Israel's sin, and overshadowed by God's own presence, and therefore his mind was ready to rush from one fear to another. Only, see the beauty of it, that he always tells his fear to God, always goes to him for comfort, and therefore always obtains succor. The brave man is not he who sees no fear, but he who, seeing the danger, rises superior to it. Such was this man, tossed to and fro from one fear to another, but never tossed off from his God, and so always sure to right himself.

One thing is noteworthy, namely, that Gideon's greatest fear arose out of a sign which he had himself asked for. He said, "Show me a sign," and when he had that sign, namely, God's coming to him, then it was that he was afraid. Be very chary how you ask for signs; for they may work your discouragement rather than your comfort. I have known some say, "I shall not believe I am a child of God unless I feel a deep sense of sin," and when they have entered into that feeling they have exclaimed, "I will never again ask for this." I have heard of others who thought they could come to Christ if they were gently drawn; and the Lord has been gently drawing them, and then they have wished that they had been more troubled and distressed. They imagine that they could have believed more readily had their despair been greater—a strange notion certainly. We are every busy in manufacturing fresh doubts, and for raw material we use the very tokens for which we so earnestly besought the Lord. We cry aloud, "Show me a token for good," and when the token is given we are amazed at being heard, and fall to fearing more sadly than before. Therefore pray for such boons with bated breath, and say twice over concerning such things, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."

All this while Gideon had one truth before him which ought to have prevented all his fears: for the Lord had spoken to him, and said, "Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?" See, he goes home fearing that he will die, and yet that could not be. How could he die if he was to deliver Israel? He must be a live man to do that, and yet, you see, he forgets to reason for his own comfort, but takes care to argue for his fears. Have I never seen my hearers doing this? I have often caught myself at it—refusing to use my logic for the strengthening of my faith, but perverting reason in order to assist my unbelief. Is not this foolish and wicked? Too often we are industrious in the fabrication of discomfort, and utterly idle in the search for joy. This is folly, and yet better men than we are have fallen into this fault. The Lord save us from it. In drawing near to God is our peace, and if in that process a sense of the presence of God casts us down and creates a more poignant sorrow than we left at the first, let us not therefore shrink from the process, but push on with all our might. As our safety lies in coming to God, to him we must approach at all hazards. If he seem to stand before us with a drawn sword in his hand let us run upon the point of it. If even our God be a consuming fire let us still draw near to him, for this is indeed the high privilege of saints. "Our God," that is our God in Christ Jesus, "is a consuming fire." Who, then, shall dwell with the devouring fire?

Now let us spend a few minutes in considering God's comfort of his servant. "The Lord said unto him, Shalom—peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die." The Lord would not have his Gideons disturbed in mind. If we are to trouble the enemy we must not be troubled ourselves. Notice, brethren, the great power of God in speaking home the truth. Suppose I salute you with, "Brethren, peace be to you." That would be a sweet word; but when the Lord says it, you feel the peace itself. Suppose Peter had stood up in that bark which was tossed upon the Galilean lake, and had said to the waves, "Be still": the waves would not have taken much notice of him, and the whistling blast would have defied him; but when Jesus said, "Peace, be still," the rampant lions of the sea crouched at his feet, and there was a great calm.

"Peace!" the word is shalom, the word which Gideon borrowed and applied to the altar which he raised in obedience to the Lord's bidding. It signifies not only quiet, but prosperity, success, "good fortune," as the multitude say. When God spoke that word home to his dear servant's heart a great joy was born within him to prepare him for his great warfare. The Lord also cheered him with, "Fear not." Oh, that charming word; as full as it is short—"Fear not." What is there to fear? If God is with you, of whom can you be afraid? Gideon feared himself, dreaded his own unfitness and unworthiness, feared in the awful presence of God; but the Lord said, "Fear not," and Gideon's heart grew calm.

Then the Lord added, "Thou shalt not die," thus meeting the special form of his dread. This is what the Lord says to every poor trembler who is holding to him by the desperate grip of faith—"Thou shalt not die. Thou shalt not die the second death: thou hast no sin to die for, for I have laid thy transgressions on my only-begotten Son. Thou shalt not die, for Jesus died. Thy spiritual life cannot expire, for thy 'life is hid with Christ in God,' and because Jesus lives thou shalt live also."

Let us now look at Gideon's memorial. His fears being banished, and being at perfect peace, Gideon now goes to work. Are any of you questioning whether you are saved or not? Do not go out preaching yet, for you may, perhaps, put others into bondage. Are any of you half afraid that you are not at peace with God? Be careful what you do! Strive after peace, lest you weaken your testimony. I recollect the lesson which I learned from my Sunday-school class: I was taught, if the other boys were not. Though yet a youth, I was teaching the Gospel to boys, and I said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." One of them asked somewhat earnestly, "Teacher, are you saved?" I answered, "I hope so." The boy replied, "Teacher, don't you know?" As if he had been sent to push the matter home to me, he further inquired, "Teacher, have you believed?" I said, "Yes," "Have you been baptized?" I said, "Yes." "Well, then," he argued, "you are saved." I was happy to answer, "Yes, I am"; but I had hardly dared to say that before. I found that if I had to teach other people the truth I must know and believe its sweet result upon myself. I believe that you will seldom comfort others except it be by the comfort with which you yourself are comforted of God. God would have his people be at peace with him, and know that they are so, for if they are fretted within, and worried in reference to their God, how can they fight the battles of life?

When Gideon is fully at peace, what does he begin to do for God? If God loves you he will use you either for suffering or service; and if he has given you peace you must now prepare for war. Will you think me odd if I say that our Lord came to give us peace that he might send us out to war? Gideon's first work was to go and cut down his father's sacred grove, which stood on the top of the hill, and enclosed an altar to Baal. He could not effect this business by day, because the foolish worshipers would have rallied to the defense of their dumb idol, and have overpowered the reformer; therefore with his ten men he performed the work by night. I think I see him and his people in the dim darkness, with their axes and saws, doing the work as quietly as they can, felling all those trees. A splendid clearance was made that night. "Now," cries he, "over with that detestable altar to Baal." Some people would have said, "Spare it as a fine piece of antiquity." Yes, and leave it to be used again! I say, down with it, for the older it is the more sin it has caused, and the more likely is it that it will be venerated again. I often wish the Reformers had been more thorough in their destruction of idolatrous images and Popish trumpery. In many a parish church of this land everything is ready for the restoration of the Roman idolatry.

But see, by the Lord's bidding, he piles a new altar of earth, or unhewn stone; and when that is done, he fetches his father's bullock

and slays it for a sacrifice. How steadily they went about this re-establishment of the pure faith! See, they use the wood of the grove for burning the sacrifice, and the heavens are red with the blaze. I think I hear the gallant leader say, "Let them wake now; they cannot prevent our worshipping the Most High, nor can they cause the grove to grow again. By yon beacon-fire, Israel shall gather together to fight against Midian, and victory shall be ours." Beloved, if God has given you peace, go home and begin your reform. I would preach up the overthrow of every sin. Down with every idol. Have you one left? Over with it, and present a sacrifice to God.

But to pull down is not enough. Plenty of people can do that. Gideon, as we have seen, builds an altar to Jehovah. When you are at perfect peace with God, think what you can do for him: think of a new plan of work, or consider how to do the old work better: advance any part of divine truth that has been forgotten, any ordinance that has been neglected, any virtue that has been despised. Especially make prominent Christ Jesus, the altar and sacrifice so dear to God.

When he had built his altar he called it "Jehovah-shalom," which was done by way of thanksgiving for peace received. The inscription declares that "Jehovah is our peace." Blessed be his name this day. We have entered on the battles of peace, for the Lord God is with us, and with his people we will go forth to win the peace which he has promised. It was a psalm in two words; it was a song of one verse, infinitely sweet. "Jehovah-shalom": the Lord our peace.

Moreover, it was a prayer, as the margin puts it—"Jehovah, send peace." If you have peace with God, let your next prayer be, "Lord, give peace to all thy people." "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem." Work it, O holy Spirit of peace! Then ask for peace by conquest of an ungodly world for Jesus till the first Christmas carol shall be sung again, "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, goodwill toward men."

See, brethren, and with that I finish, there may sit here this morning a young man who does not know what God is going to make of him. The capacities of service that God can infuse into a single individual are marvelous. At present you are disturbed in mind, afflicted in heart, ill at ease; you need perfect peace, but you have not found it yet. Rest not ill you have it. At God's own altar, where Jesus died, you will find it, and only there. When Jesus' blood makes peace with God there is your peace. Rest not till you are assuredly at peace with the Lord of all, so that your soul lies down in green pastures, and is led by the still waters.

GIDEON'S ALTAR by Alexander Maclaren Judges 6:24

'Then Gideon built an altar there unto the Lord. and called it Jehovah-shalom [God is peace] — Judges 6:24.

I NEED not tell over again, less vividly, the picturesque story in this chapter, of the simple husbandman up in the hills, engaged furtively in threshing out a little wheat in some hollow in the rock where he might hide it from the keen eyes of the oppressors; and of how the angel of the Lord, unrecognised at first, appeared to him; and gradually there dawned upon his mind the suspicion of who He was who spoke. Then follow the offering, the discovery by fire, the shrinking of the man from contact with the divine, the wonderfully tranquillising and condescending assurance, cast into the form of the ordinary salutation of domestic life: 'And the Lord said unto him Peace be unto thee!' — as any man might have said to any other — 'fear not! thou shalt not die.' Then Gideon piles up the unhewn stones on the hillside into a rude altar, apparently not for the purpose of offering sacrifice, but for a monument, to which is given this strange name, strange upon such warrior lips, and strange in contemplation of the fierce conflict into which he was immediately to plunge, 'the Lord is peace.'

Now I think that this name, imposed for such a reason and under such circumstances, may teach us a good many things.

I. The first thing that it seems to me to suggest is the great discovery which this man had made, and in the rapture of which he named his altar, — that the sight of God is not death, but life and peace.

Gideon was a plain, rude man, with no very deep religious experience. Apparently up to the moment of this vision he had been contentedly tolerating the idolatrous practices which had spread over all the country. He had heard of 'Jehovah.' It was a name, a tradition, which his fathers had told him. That was all that he knew of the God of Israel. Into this hearsay religion, as in a flash, while Gideon is busy about his threshing floor, thinking of his wheat or of the misery of his nation, there comes, all at once, this crushing conviction, — 'the hearsay God is beside you, speaking to you! You have personal relations to Him, He is nearer you than any human being is, He is no mere Name, here He stands!'

And whenever the lightning edge of a conviction like that cuts its way through the formalisms and traditionalisms and hearsay repetitions of conventional religion, then there comes what came to Gideon, the swift thought, 'And if this be true, if I really do touch, and am touched by, that living Person whose name is Jehovah, what is to become of me? Shall I not shrivel up when His fiery finger is laid upon me? I have seen Him face to face, and I must die.'

I believe that, in the case of the vast majority of men, the first living, real apprehension of a real, living God is accompanied with a shock, and has mingled with it something of awe, and even of terror. Were there no sin there would be no fear, and pure hearts would open in silent blessedness and yield their sweetest fragrance of love and adoration, when shone on by Him, as flowers do to the kiss of the sunbeams. But, taking into account the sad and universal fact of sin, it is inevitable that men should shrink from the Light which reveals their evil, and that the consciousness of God's presence should strike a chill. It is sad that it should be so. But it is sadder still when it is not so, but when, as is sometimes the case, the sight of God produces no sense of sin, and no consciousness of discord, or foreboding of judgment. For, only through that valley of the shadow of death lies the path to the happy confidence of peace with God, and unless there has been trembling at the beginning, there will be no firm and reasonable trust afterwards.

For Gideon's terror opened the way for the gracious-proclamation, which would have been needless but for it — 'Peace be unto thee; fear not, thou shalt not die.'

The sight of God passes from being a fear to a joy, from being a fountain of death to a spring of life. Terror is turned to tranquil trust. The narrow and rough path of conscious unworthiness leads to the large place of happy peace. The divine word fits Gideon's condition, and corresponds to his then deepest necessity; and so he drinks it in as the thirsty ground drinks in the water; and in the rapture of the discovery that the Name, that had come down from his fathers to him, was the Name of a real Person, with whom he stood in real relationships, and those of simple friendship and pure amity, he piles up the rough stones of the place, and makes the name of his altar the echo of the divine voice. It is as if he had said with rapture of surprise, 'Then Jehovah is peace; which I never dreamed of before.'

Dear friends, do you know anything of such an experience? Can you build your altar, and give it this same name? Can you write upon the memorial of your experiences, 'The Lord is my peace'? Have you passed from hearsay into personal contact? Can you say, 'I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee'? Do you know the further experience expressed in the subsequent words of the same quotation: 'Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes'? And have you passed out of that stormy ocean of terror and self-condemnation into the quiet haven of trust in Him in whom we have peace with God, where your little boat lies quiet, moored for ever to the Rock of Ages, to 'Jehovah, who is Peace'?

In connection with this rapturous discovery, and to Gideon strange new thought, we may gather the lesson that peace with God will give peace in all the soul. The 'peace with God' will pass into a wider thing, the 'peace of God.' There is tranquillity in trust. There is rest in submission. There is repose in satisfied desires. When we live near Him, and have ceased from our own works, and let Him take control of us and direct us in all our ways, then the storms abate. The things that disturb us are by no means so much external as inward; and there is a charm and a fascination in the thought, 'the Lord is peace,' which stills the inward tempest, and makes us quiet, waiting upon His will and drawing in His grace. The secret of rest is to cease from self, from self as guide, from self as aim, from self as safety. And when self-will is cast out, and self-dependence is overcome, and self-reliance is sublimed into hanging upon God's hand, and when He, not mine own inclination, is my Director, and the Arbiter of my fate, then all the fever of unrest is swept wholly out of my heart, and there is nothing left in it on which the gnawing tooth of anxiety or of care can prey. God being my peace, and I yielding myself to Him, 'in quietness and confidence' is my 'strength.' 'Thou shalt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon Thee, because he trusteth in Thee.'

II. We may look upon this inscription from another point of view, as suggesting the thought that God's peace is the best preparation for, and may be experienced in the midst of, the intensest conflict.

Remember what the purpose of this vision was, — to raise up a man to fight an almost desperate fight, no metaphorical war, but one with real sharp swords, against real strong enemies. The first blow in the campaign was to be struck that night. Gideon was being summoned by the vision, to

long years of hardship and bitter warfare, and his preparation for the conflict consisted largely in the revelation to his inmost spirit that 'Jehovah is peace.' We might rather have looked for a manifestation of the divine nature as ready to go forth to battle with the raw levies of timid peasants. We should have expected the thought which inspired their captain to have been 'The Lord is a man of war,' rather than 'The Lord is peace.' But it is not so — and therein lies the deep truth that the peace of God is the best preparation for strife. It gives courage, it leaves the heart at leisure to fling all its power into the conflict, it inspires with the consciousness of a divine ally. As Paul puts it, in his picture of the fully-armed Christian soldier, the feet are 'shod with the preparedness of alacrity which is produced by the gospel of peace.' That will make us 'ready, aye ready' for the roughest march, and enable us to stand firm against the most violent charges of the enemy. There is no such preparation for the conflict of life, whether it be waged against our own inward evil, or against opposing forces without, as to have deep within the soul the settled and substantial peace of God. If we are to come out of the battle with victory sitting on our helmets, we must go into it with the Dove of God brooding in our hearts. As the Lord said to Gideon, 'Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel,... have not I sent thee?'

But, besides this thought that the knowledge of Jehovah as peace fits us for strife, that hastily-reared altar with its seemingly inappropriate name, may remind us that it is possible, in the midst of the deadliest hand-to-hand grip with evil, and whilst fighting the 'good fight of faith' with the most entire self-surrender to the divine will, to bear within us, deeper than all the surface strife, that inward tranquillity which knows no disturbance, though the outward life is agitated by fierce storms. Deep in the centre of the ocean the waters lie quiet, though the wildest tempests are raging above, and the fiercest currents running. Over the tortured and plunging waters of the cataract there lies unmoving, though its particles are in perpetual flux, the bow of promise and of peace. So over all the rush and thunder of life there may stretch, radiant and many-coloured, and dyed with beauty by the very sun himself, the abiding bow of beauty, the emblem and the reality of the divine tranquillity. The Christian life is continual warfare, but in it all, 'the peace of God which passeth understanding' may 'garrison our hearts and minds.' In the inmost keep of the castle, though the storm of war may be breaking against the walls, there will be a quiet chamber where no noise of the archers can penetrate, and the shouts of the fight are never heard.

Let us seek to live in the 'secret place of the Most High'; and in still communion with Him, keep our inmost souls in quiet, while we bravely front difficulties and enemies. You are to be God's warriors; see to it that on every battlefield there stands the altar 'Jehovah Shalom.'

III. Lastly, we may draw yet another lesson, and say that that altar, with its significant inscription, expressed the aim of the conflict and the hope which sustains in the fight.

Gideon was fighting for peace, and what he desired was that victory should bring tranquillity. The hope which beckoned him on, when he flung himself into his else desperate enterprise, was that God would so prosper his work that the swords might be beaten into ploughshares, and the spears into pruning hooks. Which things may stand as an allegory, and suggest to us that the Christian warfare, whilst it rests upon, and is prompted by, the revelation of God who is peace, aims in all its blows, at the conquering of that sure and settled peace which shall be broken by no rebellious outbursts of self-will, nor by any risings of passions and desires. The aim of our warfare should ever be that the peace of God may be throned in our hearts, and sit there a gentle queen. The true tranquillity of the blessed life is the prize of conflict. David, 'the man of war from his youth,' prepares the throne for Solomon, in whose reign no alarms of war are heard. If you would enter into peace, you must fight your way to it, and every step of the road must be a battle. The land of peace is won by the good fight of faith.

But Gideon's altar not only expressed his purpose in his taking up arms, but his confidence of accomplishing it, based upon the assurance that the Lord would give peace. It was a trophy erected before the fight, and built, not by arrogant presumption or frivolous underestimate of the enemy's strength, but by humble reliance on the power of that Lord who had promised His presence, and had assured triumph. So the hope that named this altar was the hope that war meant victory, and that victory would bring peace. That hope should animate every Christian soldier. Across the dust of the conflict, the fair vision of unbroken and eternal peace should gleam before each of us, and we should renew fainting strength and revive drooping courage by many a wistful gaze.

We may realise that hope in large measure here. But its fulfilment is, reserved for the land of peace which we enter by the last conflict with the last enemy.

Every Christian man's gravestone is an altar on which is written 'Our God is peace'; in token that the warrior has passed into the land where 'violence shall no more be heard, wasting, nor destruction within its borders,' but all shall be deep repose, and the unarmed, because unattacked, peace of tranquil communion with, and likeness to, 'Jehovah our Peace.'

So, dear brethren, let us pass from tradition and hearsay into personal intercourse with God, and from shrinking and doubt into the sunshine of the conviction that He is our peace. And then, with His tranquillity in our hearts let us go out, the elect apostles of the peace of God, and fight for Him, after the pattern of the Captain of our salvation, who had to conquer peace through conflict; and was 'first of all King of Righteousness, and after that also King of Peace.'

GIDEON'S FLEECE
by Alexander Maclaren
Judges 6:37

'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.' — Judges 6:37.

THE decisive moment had come when Gideon, with his hastily gathered raw levies, was about to plunge down to the plain to face immensely superior forces trained to warfare. No wonder that the equally untrained leader's heart beat faster. Many a soldier, who will be steadfastly brave in the actual shock of battle, has tremors and throbbings on its eve. Gideon's hand shook a little as he drew his sword.

I. Gideon's request.

His petition for a sign was not the voice of unbelief or of doubt or of presumption, but in it spoke real, though struggling faith, seeking to be confirmed. Therefore it was not regarded by God as a sin. When a 'wicked and adulterous generation asked for a sign,' no sign was given it, but when faith asks for one to help it to grasp God's hand, and to go on His warfare in His strength and as His instrument, it does not ask in vain.

Gideon's prayer was wrapped, as it were, in an enfolding promise, for it is preceded and followed by the quotation of words of the Angel of the Lord who had 'looked on him,' and said, 'Go in this thy might and save Israel from the hand of Midian: have not I sent thee ?' Prayers that begin and end with 'as Thou hast spoken' are not likely to be repulsed.

II. God's answer.

God wonderfully allows Gideon to dictate the nature of the sign. He stoops to work it both ways, backwards and forwards, as it were. First the fleece is to be wet and the ground to be dry, then the fleece is to be dry and the ground wet. Miracle was a necessary accompaniment of revelation in those early days, as picture-books are of childhood. But, though we are far enough from being 'men' in Christ, yet we have not the same need for 'childish things' as Gideon and his contemporaries had. We have Christ and the Spirit, and so have a 'word made more sure' than to require signs. But still it is true that the same gracious willingness to help a tremulous faith, which carries its tremulousness to God in prayer, moves the Father's heart to-day, and that to such petitions the answer is given even before they are offered: 'Ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.' No sign that eyes can see is given, but inward whispers speak assurance and communicate the assurance which they speak.

III. The meaning of the sign.

Many explanations have been offered. The main point is that the fleece is to be made different from the soil around it. It is to be a proof of God's power to endow with characteristics not derived from, and resulting in qualities unlike, the surroundings.

Gideon had no thought of any significance beyond that. But we may allowably let the Scripture usage of the symbol of dew influence our reading into the symbol a deeper meaning than it bore to him.

God makes the fleece wet with dew, while all the threshing-floor is dry. Dew is the symbol of divine grace, of the silently formed moisture which, coming from no apparent source, freshens by night the wilted plants, and hangs in myriad drops, that twinkle into green and gold as the early sunshine strikes them, on the humblest twig. That grace is plainly not a natural product nor to be accounted for by environment. The dew of the Spirit, which God and God only, can give, can freshen our worn and drooping souls, can give joy in sorrow, can keep us from being touched by surrounding evils, and from being parched by surrounding drought, can silently 'distil' its supplies of strength according to our need into our else dry hearts.

The wet fleece on the dry ground was not only a revelation of God's power, but may be taken as a pattern of what God's soldiers must ever be. A prophet long after Gideon said: 'The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples as dew from the Lord,' bringing to others the grace which they have received that they may diffuse it, and turning the dry and thirsty land where no water is into fertility, and the 'parched ground' into a 'pool.'

We have said that the main point of Gideon's petition was that the fleece should be made unlike the threshing-floor, and that that unlikeness, which could obviously not be naturally brought about, was to be to him the sure token that God was at work to produce it. The strongest demonstration that the Church can give the world of its really being God's Church is its unlikeness to the world. If it is wet with divine dew when all the threshing-

floor is dry, and if, when all the floor is drenched with poisonous miasma, it is dry from the diffused and clinging malaria, the world will take knowledge of it, and some souls be set to ask how this unlikeness comes. When Haman has to say: 'There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples... and their laws are diverse from those of every people,' he may meditate murder, but 'many from among the people of the land' will join their ranks. Gideon may or may not have thought of the fleece as a symbol of his little host, but we may learn from it the old lesson, 'Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds.'

FLEECES AND THE WILL OF GOD

by Kay Arthur

Note that Gideon in 6:36 & again in 6:37 says "as Thou hast spoken". A FLEECE is something that you devise in order to know His will or in order to prove His will. A FLEECE is something that YOU DEVISE & then ask God to do in order that you might know God's will or that you might prove His will.

Knowing God's will:

1). Begins with a commitment to God: Ro12:1-2.

We present ourselves to Him totally, completely, absolutely. Jn7:17 says a similar truth: so the condition for knowing the will of God is submission to God -- if we are willing to do His will. If so, then we will know whether the teaching of God.

Sympathy with the will of God is a condition for understanding it.

2). Knowing the will of God comes thru a RENEWED MIND (Ro12:2). Where do you obtain a mind like this?

1Co2:15 But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. 16 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE SHOULD INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.

When you got saved you received the Holy Spirit Who moved inside of you and He has the mind of God, the mind of Christ. So you must realize that He has given you His mind.

It follows that the Will of God is perceived or received NOT thru your heart (not how you feel) but thru YOUR MIND.

Ep5:17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Jn7:17 says "he will KNOW" so again emphasizing that knowing the will of God is first of all a MATTER OF ONE'S MIND, a renewed mind. So many people are looking for some mystical experience to discern the will of God but that is not what God's word teaches. Knowing God's will then is not a FEELING. Be alert & don't shut the "door of your mind" when seeking God's will.

Col1:9-12 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; So we must know what God's will is in order to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. And here again we see that this filling with the knowledge emphasizes that knowing the will of God all has to do with the MIND.

YOU KNOW THE WILL OF GOD BY TRUSTING:

Who wants you to know the will of God more... God or you? Obviously God does. So God tells you that you can trust Him.

Pr3:5,6: Don't go by your own understanding. Go by the spiritual wisdom & understanding that God gives. God will direct your paths and that is TRUTH. So when we come to Him and say we are not going to walk in our own understanding but we are going to turn to Him and ask Him what His will is, we are trusting Him to lead us into all truth.

Ps37:5, 23,24: So tell Him that whatever His will is, you want it. But then you begin to panic and don't know where to go and want a "fleece". So we are to walk out confident that if we are off the path, He will get us back on. Or if we fall He will hold us.

Heb13:20,21: As you walk with a renewed mind, God will equip you to do His will! You start walking and you trust Him to lead you and guide you and direct you! He will. Php2:12,13: also shows He will work in you.

Ps32:8 God is going to instruct us in the way we should walk.

Php3:15, 16: It is God's responsibility to direct me in His will. My responsibility is to be committed to Him and have my mind in tune with His Word and God will lead me.

What about my heart? See Jeremiah 17:9

We have a new heart (Eze36:26) and if you are committing your way to God you can trust your heart. And in Eze36:27 He gives us His Spirit to cause us to walk in His statutes.

Pr20:24 Man's steps are ordained by the LORD, How then can man understand his way?

Pr16:9 The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.

WHAT "BAROMETER" IS AVAILABLE TO BELIEVER'S TO HELP DISCERN WHETHER YOU ARE IN THE WILL OF GOD?

Col3:15 Does the peace of God rule in your heart (the primary teaching in this passage is "peace in relationships" so this is an application of this passage). The fruit of the Spirit is peace so if I am walking under the control of the Spirit, I will have peace. But you need to beware because there can be a "false peace"

Fleeces: cannot be your barometer bc you are calling the shots! You don't find a fleece anywhere else in God's Word. The NT parallel (although not identical because they are not specifying the conditions God must meet as Gideon did) is "show us a sign" and that refers to a wicked and adulterous generation! (Mt12:39, 16:1,v4).

So how can you know the will of God? Say to Him and live it out: "God I am totally Yours. Whatever You want I want it." You saturate yourself with the Word of God and you trust Him. Walk as best you understand. Trust Him to turn you around if you are going the wrong way. But you see if you didn't start out with a COMMITMENT to Him, you are very likely to resist His "turning" you around. That is why a commitment to Him is so important in knowing His will. You can trust Him if you are truly seeking His will because He says that the steps of a righteous man are ordered by the Lord.