

God Is It You? Pt. 1 : The Fleece Test

Description

36Then Gideon said to God, "If you are truly going to use me to rescue Israel
39Then Gideon said to God, "Please don't be angry with me, but let me make one

Judges 6:36-40 NLT

To understand this small excerpt, you must understand the full picture of what was going on in Israel at this time. The Israelites had already been living their "Promised Land" (the land of Canaan), and they had already been allotted their parcels of land according to their respective tribe. Joshua, who had led them across the Jordan River, in his last address to the nation he told them what would happen if/when they turned away from following God's commands to them;

11So be very careful to love the Lord your God.
12"But if you turn away from him and cling to the customs of the survivors of

Joshua 23:11-13 NLT

I set this up because in fact after Joshua and the other elders who led the Israelites across the Jordan River and into the promised land had died, the young people who didn't experience the miracles of God that they had heard about from the older generations, or appreciate the blessings/provisions that God had provided to them in fact turned their back on God, and the way that he had directed them to live and worship him. The book of Judges is post-Joshua Israel where the people have turned from God and begin to fall victim to exploitation by surrounding nations who oppressed them. They decide to live and follow the idols of surrounding nations while disregarding the commands of God. Because of this, God no longer protects them, and allows their enemies to oppress them, causing them to cry out to him so that he would save them from the mess/misery/problems that they had caused through their disobedience, and desire to live as others did. Now we arrive at Gideon, who was from the tribe of Manasseh, who was at the time threshing wheat at the winepress which in itself is out of place

the Midianites would steal the food, harvests, and crops from the Israelites so
Gideon threshing wheat at the winepress was a way for him to hide the
harvested wheat from any Midianite raiders who may seek to steal their food

Because Gideon like many other Israelites had not personally experienced or seen the miracles of God in their life or lifetime, and had only heard stories of past miracles, they lacked the faith that God could and/or would change their situation for the better. Because the reality that Gideon was living in, when he was visited by an angel (Judges 6:11-23), he immediately received the message with skepticism, and didn't realize or believe that it was an angel of God who was speaking with him. Because God hadn't "shown up" for the Israelites, and because Gideon was living in the realness of oppression from the Midianites, and miracles were non-existent, he needed to see "evidence" of God before he was

willing to believe and act on the directions that he was being given.

16The Lord said to him, "I will be with you. And you will destroy the Midianites."
17Gideon replied, "If you are truly going to help me, show me a sign to prove

Judges 6:16-17 NLT

I admit that it is hard to believe in what you haven't experienced or seen before. Gideon had heard the stories/sermons of God delivering the children of Israel from Egypt (Exodus chap 1-14), providing manna and quail (Exodus 16), providing water from a rock (Exodus 17), shade and warmth (cloud that led them by day, and pillar of fire at night), etc for them while in the wilderness, and also conquering the former inhabitants of the promised after they crossed the Jordan (the book of Joshua). He had also heard of the extraordinary miracles performed by God through the previous Judges (Judges chaps 3&4), but for at least the last 7 years (Judges 6:1-9) Gideon and the rest of Israel only knew oppression at the hands of the Midianites. Does that sound familiar? For many people living today, especially those that are familiar with underprivileged circumstances, broken families, financial difficulties, emotional/physical trauma and pain, or any other of a multitude problems, they can understand that it is hard to see or feel a God that appears to be absent in difficult times. For many of us black people/African Americans, we read books, watch documentaries, listen to older family members talk of the difficulties and victories experienced during segregation, civil rights, and other difficulties involved with racial/social injustices in America and the rest of the African Diaspora, but its hard for some of us to appreciate that when we still face higher incarceration rates, police brutality, subjected to under-performing schools, single parent homes, lower acceptance rates to college, lower pay in the workforce, etc. It is sometimes hard to follow or believe in a God that has seemed to fail everyone around you, especially the parents or grandparents that have remained faithful in serving God but still come up short in their finances, or love for you and others. Gideon having this personal encounter with an angel is indifferent because he nor anyone else at the time had had a personal encounter with God, or seen his hand deliver them from their situations. After Gideon realizes that he has been face to face with an angel, he is then inspired/willing to do what God is advising him to do (Judges 6:24-32). You would think that after the angel had shown Gideon his power by consuming the sacrifice that it would have been enough for him, but actually Gideon levels up and puts God to the test. The fleece test is NOT a sin! I repeat; THE FLEECE TEST IS NOT A SIN!! It is not a sin to question God, or even ask God to prove himself, however it IS a sin to reject, or not acknowledge the hand and provisions of God when he has shown/proven himself to be real in YOUR life. Gideon asks God to prove himself, or for validation (the blue check) because he had not personally seen or experienced God in his life, and in addition to that his own family and community didn't follow or acknowledge God, but they followed Baal who their own enemies and neighboring countries worshiped.

What do you do when you try to adopt the ways of your enemies, or people that appear successful to you, and you still end up unhappy, losing, broken, and lost? That's a whole nother topic, back to the issue at hand.

When God visited and spoke to Gideon, because he could not understand the prophetic stance that God spoke from earlier when he called him a mighty warrior, Gideon had to test God and see him move in a natural way that he understood.

36 Then Gideon said to God, "If you are truly going to use me to rescue Israel

Judges 6:36-38

This 1st test is interesting in that dew is a natural occurrence in the morning, but Gideon is asking for the ground to be dry. The threshing floor is commonly representative of the seat of judgement for Israelites, so Gideon placing the fleece at the threshing floor can be symbolic of him asking God to judge/decide if he will support and keep Israel in battle. I believe that Gideon asked for this test to symbolize that God would show favor on Israel (the fleece), and shower his blessings only on his people and not the nations/people (Midianites) that surround and oppressed them. Fleece can be made from wool which is very absorbent and can hold more water before feeling wet, or feeling heavy. Using this material can mean that Gideon desired for Israel and himself to consume/receive all of the blessings and good things that God had to give. Wringing the fleece to receive a bowlful of water meant that Israel would receive an overflow/abundance of God's blessing in addition to their victory over Midian. Oftentimes when we are questioning God and asking him to prove himself and show up in our situation, don't we want him to make a clear distinction between his favor on us, and those who we feel oppose us and/or aren't worthy of his blessings. Don't we feel that God's blessings and love for us is an either/or situation where he is either for us and against everyone else, and that he can't or shouldn't bless anyone else but us? In the case of Gideon and Israel, they were his chosen people and the only ones that God had selected to bless and represent him in the world at that time. What could appear as selfish, was actually Gideon just asking that God would make and show a distinction between his people and everyone else, given that the people of Israel at that time only knew oppression. Like the over-saturated fleece, when we feel that God hasn't taken care of us as we wish him to, we can desire that he gives us an abundance that makes up for what we feel that we have missed out on. In that regard, God IS a restorer (we'll discuss that in another post)

39 Then Gideon said to God, "Please don't be angry with me, but let me make one

Judges 6:39-40

For the 2nd test, Gideon is asking God to something extraordinary in the midst of a natural process/occurrence. The grass is wet with dew every morning, but to ask for the fleece to remain dry while being exposed to the elements is interesting. Allow me to give my spin on the symbolism that I see from this exchange. God was directing Gideon to lead the people of Israel in war against the Midianites who were oppressing them. Could it have been Gideon in his fear of going into battle because he had never fought before, or not understanding God's protection and favor for his people had actually presented this scenario as a way of asking God to show that he would sustain or protect Gideon in the midst of the battle, regardless of the outcome? Wool is the most absorbent of all fabrics, and can absorb up to 30% of its weight without feeling damp or wet, and it is able to maintain its appearance for extended amounts of time after multiple washes and exposure to the elements. Could Gideon have actually been asking God to show him that he would sustain or spare him in the event that Israel fell in the midst of its battle with Midian? Could this wool test been representative of Israel losing the battle to Midian, but the wool remaining dry to represent that Gideon would survive the battle

with some scars, wounds, disappoint, but ultimately not emerge wet or looking/appearing like what he had went through? If Gideon really loves his people, then could this test have been symbolic of Gideon asking God to pour out his fury/anger on Israel's enemies (Midian) but ultimately sparing Israel? The fleece lying in the midst of the ground could represent Israel being surrounded by enemies, but also that God could/would make the distinction between his people and everyone else, kinda like he did for his people in Egypt when he spared them in the midst of every plague that he sent on the Egyptians. Don't sometimes we feel that it isn't important what happens to everyone else as long as we're fine? Aren't we really only concerned with our well-being? Maybe Gideon could have thought that the grass remaining wet but the fleece being dry could represent that even if everyone else dies, or is damaged/wounded in this battle but as long as I emerge unscathed everything is fine. On the other hand, it could be that he was asking God to pour out his fury on all the other nations, but protect Israel in the midst of the chaos. Doesn't prolonged disappointment make us hard-hearted or indifferent to the cause of everyone else, we may take a survivalist stance or "every man for himself."

Reflection Time

It is hard to know the meaning of the two tests to Gideon, but it is easy to understand that in either case his concern was for himself, and his people. For this passage I want you to evaluate yourself and your faith. What are the reasons/source of your questions/doubt/unbelief, or hesitance in following God's plans and direction for your life? What would it take for you to wholeheartedly follow God without reservation or resistance? What are your fleece tests? In what way have you questioned God, or asked him to prove himself? Did he show up or prove himself? Additional thought, if you believe that he didn't show up, is it possible that he just didn't give you the answer that you desired, or show up how you wanted him to? I want you to look back over your life and experiences, and ask yourself what has contributed to either your lack of faith, or your strong faith/convictions. Stop beating yourself up because you have "little faith", or some level of doubt and fear, because I'm here to tell you that all the great ones had it, and so do I. Go get your fleece, put God to the test, and watch him "Show up, and show OUT!!"

Category

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