

Judges 6:36

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

Gideon's request for a sign using the fleece has often been misunderstood and misapplied. The context is crucial: God had already clearly called Gideon (6:11-24), commissioned him (6:14), assured him of victory (6:16), and confirmed the message through miraculous fire (6:21) and the Holy Spirit's empowerment (6:34). The fleece test wasn't seeking God's will but requesting confirmation of a promise already given. The Hebrew phrase "If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said" (im yesh mokeia et-Yisrael beyadi ka'asher dibarta) acknowledges God's prior word while requesting tangible reassurance. Gideon's timidity contrasts with the bold faith God desires, yet God graciously accommodates this weakness, providing not one but two miraculous signs (fleece wet/ground dry, then reversed). However, Gideon's excessive caution reveals ongoing doubt despite overwhelming evidence. The contemporary practice of "putting out a fleece" to discern God's will often misapplies this narrative. Gideon didn't lack God's clear command—he lacked courage to obey it. Biblical decision-making prioritizes Scripture's authority, Spirit-led wisdom, and godly counsel rather than demanding miraculous signs. God accommodated Gideon's weakness but doesn't endorse fleece-testing as normative for discerning His will. Hebrews 11:32-34 commends Gideon's ultimate faith despite his hesitation, showing that God uses flawed, fearful people who eventually trust His promises.

Historical Context

This incident occurred after God's Spirit empowered Gideon to summon the northern tribes (6:34-35) but before the battle against Midian's vast army (7:1ff). The 32,000 men who initially responded would soon be reduced to 300 through divine testing (7:2-8), demonstrating that victory depended on God's power rather than military strength. The fleece test took place on the threshing floor, an open area for winnowing grain. Gideon placed a wool fleece overnight, asking God to make it wet with dew while the surrounding ground remained dry—a reversal of natural patterns, since wool absorbs atmospheric moisture readily. When God provided this sign, Gideon requested the reverse: dry fleece on wet ground, an even more miraculous demonstration since wool naturally retains moisture. Ancient Near Eastern peoples commonly sought signs from deity through various divination practices—examining animal entrails, observing natural phenomena, casting lots. Gideon's fleece test differs from pagan divination by directly addressing Yahweh, recalling His explicit promise, and seeking confirmation of revealed will rather than discovering hidden knowledge. The narrative presents Gideon's request with ambivalence—God graciously answered, yet Gideon's repeated testing suggests weak faith needing strengthening. This episode illustrates God's patience with fearful, doubting believers, accommodating their weakness while ultimately accomplishing His purposes.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. In what areas of your life are you demanding additional signs and confirmations despite God's clear word in Scripture or through circumstances?

2. How can we distinguish between Gideon's legitimate request for confirmation and presumptuous fleece-testing that reveals lack of faith in God's revealed will?
3. What does God's patient accommodation of Gideon's repeated requests teach about His grace toward fearful, doubting believers?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּאמֶר	גִּדְעֹן וְ	אֶל	הָאֱלֹהִים יָם	אִם	יִשְׁכַּח	מוֹשֵׁה יַעֲ
said	And Gideon	H413	unto God	H518	If thou wilt	save
H559	H1439		H430		H3426	H3467
בְּיַדִּי	אֶת	יִשְׂרָאֵל ל	כָּאֲשֶׁר ר	דִּבַּרְתָּ:		
by mine hand	H853	Israel	H834	as thou hast said		
H3027		H3478		H1696		

Additional Cross-References

Judges 6:14 (Salvation): And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?

Matthew 16:1 (Parallel theme): The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven.