

A HERO WILL RISE

The Book of Judges

Text
Judges 6:33-40

Topic
Gideon puts God to a test by asking Him to manipulate the amount of dew that is on a fleece of wool each morning

Title
"Do the Dew"

Introduction

The term, "wardrobe malfunction," came into common use when Janet Jackson was exposed during the Super Bowl XXXVIII half-time show.

Justin Timberlake, who performed with Jackson, first used the term when he issued an apology at the 2004 Grammy Awards. It caught on, and has entered pop culture to describe all manner of public clothing snafus.

You don't have to be a celebrity to fall victim to a common wardrobe malfunction. Whether it's your zipper... Or a tear... Or a popped button... Or a stain... You can be totally embarrassed.

I got to thinking of wardrobe because of something we read about Gideon. In verse thirty-four we're told, "the Spirit of the LORD **came upon** Gideon."

The word translated "came upon" literally means *clothed*. The Spirit of the Lord *clothed* Gideon.

I can't help but think of the way IronMan's armor comes to Tony Stark, and attaches itself to him, enveloping him in it.

Or maybe Johnny Storm when he simply says, "*Flame on!*" and instantly becomes the Human Torch.

Gideon, of course, did not wear a costume, or transform. He looked the same as he always had. "Clothed" is simply a way to express the dynamic difference that the Holy Spirit made in his life, and especially in his warfare against Israel's enemies.

The Holy Spirit was the only armor he would need to defeat a coalition of enemies numbering 135,000.

Before Gideon defeated them, however, he doubted God. Clothed with the Holy Spirit, and having been promised victory, he doubted, and designed a test for God.

It was a kind of self-inflicted spiritual wardrobe malfunction of disbelieving his new garment was sufficient for the task at hand.

Christians are described as being clothed with the Holy Spirit. In Luke 24:49 the Lord says, "And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are **clothed** with power from on high" (ESV).

Jesus was promising the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples gathered in the Upper Room on the Day of Pentecost. His coming upon them, that baptism with Him, Jesus described as their being clothed.

Do you believe you are clothed with the Holy Spirit? Or, like Gideon, do you disbelieve you are? I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Believe You Are Clothed With The Holy Spirit And You Will Defeat Your Enemies, or #2 Disbelieve You Are Clothed With The Holy Spirit And You Will Delay Your Victory.

#1 Believe You Are Clothed With The Holy Spirit And You Will Defeat Your Enemies

(v33-35)

In most fantasy or SyFy tales, there is a weapon that when wielded by the hero strikes terror into the enemy.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, it was the sword, Anduril, reforged by the Elves from the shards of Narsil. The Dark Lord, Sauron, feared it in the hands of Aragorn, the rightful king.

More recently in the movies it's Mjölfnir, Thor's hammer, which can only be lifted by a worthy hero.

In Gideon's case - **he was the weapon**, to be wielded by God the Holy Spirit.

The same is true of us. We are told to "put on the whole armor of God." Here is the passage, in Ephesians six.

Eph 6:11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

Eph 6:12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.

Eph 6:13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Eph 6:14 Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness,

Eph 6:15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

Eph 6:16 above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

Eph 6:17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

We're told to "put on" this armor, but if you think about it for a moment, it's really something that Jesus clothes us with. It's the clothing of every believer, so we can withstand the spiritual warfare that surrounds us.

I don't have a helmet and breastplate backstage. I'm wearing them right now. Or I should be, if I believe that God the Holy Spirit clothes me in His power. I put it on by believing I've been clothed.

I'm His weapon; you are His weapon; by virtue of having been born-again and baptized with the Spirit.

Gideon was good to go against Israel's enemies:

Jdg 6:33 Then all the Midianites and Amalekites, the people of the East, gathered together; and they crossed over and encamped in the Valley of Jezreel.

When we first met Gideon, he was threshing grain in a hiding place.

That tells us it was harvest time. Israel was being oppressed by nomadic enemies who came every year at harvest time. They stole their crops while their livestock devoured all the grazing land.

A portion of the ground was a valley, but for the most part it was a plain. This plain is from fifteen to twenty miles long, and about twelve miles wide from north to south. It was some of the most fertile land. Israel's enemies made camp there, thinking to steal and plunder as they'd done for the previous seven seasons.

I've often mentioned to you that our spiritual enemies are super-intelligent, and are always plotting complicated satanic strategies against us. It is also true that they attack us the same way over-and-over again.

If something works for them, why abandon it?

Is there something in your life you can't seem to defeat? You **can** defeat it, because you are clothed with the Holy Spirit. It might be something you can walk away from once-and-for-all if you really want to.

Or it might be something you will battle all your life. Either way, the victory is already yours. I mean, what does the devil have that can overcome the armor of God you are clothed with?

Smaug, the dragon in the Hobbit, had a weak spot in his armored skin that eventually led to his death as Bard shot him with an arrow. True, our enemy is said to have fiery darts (Ephesians 6:16), but since our armor is from God, *it has no weak spots*.

If a dart gets through, it must be because we are in disbelief of God's promise to clothe us.

Jdg 6:34 But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon...

We will learn in chapter eight that the enemy numbered 135,000. They would be met in battle by one Spirit-clothed believer and the unique strategy God would designate to bring Him the most glory.

If you are a Christian, the odds against you are always overwhelming. You stand no chance of survival, let alone of victory.

Yet simultaneously you can declare, "If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us? For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:31 & 38-39).

Elijah once faced 450-1 odds against the prophets of Baal. Clothed with the Spirit, he prevailed, killing them all after shaming their so-called god.

Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, were at odds with King Nebuchadnezzar when they refused to bow to his image. The entire might of the world-ruling Babylonian Empire sought to crush them. They defeated the king and his government, and spent a leisurely afternoon strolling with Jesus in the burning fiery furnace that ought to have incinerated them. Clothed as they were with the Holy Spirit, their actual clothing didn't even smell like smoke when they emerged.

Your victory as a Spirit-clothed believer might go a different way; but that's OK. You could be like Stephen, the church's first martyr, whose face was like that of an angel as he was being accused.

You might "[have trials] of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonments, [be] stoned... sawn in two... tempted... slain with the sword... being destitute, afflicted, tormented..." (Hebrews 11).

If that's the case, you enter into glory, victorious over not just earthly and supernatural enemies, but over death and Hell.

Jdg 6:34 But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon; then he blew the trumpet, and the Abiezrites gathered behind him.
Jdg 6:35 And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, who also gathered behind him. He also sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali; and they came up to meet them.

Ten minutes ago the Abiezrites in Ophrah wanted to murder Gideon after he tore down the altar to Baal and burned its idol. Now they rallied behind him to face overwhelming odds.

So did Israelites from several other tribes.

What an incredible difference the Holy Spirit made. Remember, no one could 'see' Gideon was clothed with the Spirit. It isn't like they discovered his secret identity, and realized a super hero had been living in their midst all along.

All this was the spiritual influence, it was the effect, of being clothed with the Spirit.

Let's talk about the trumpet blast. One historian says this:

For the the Israelite, the sound of the trumpet was associated not more with war than with religion. When the fathers were journeying through the wilderness, the sound of the silver trumpets blown by the priests, was the signal for their marches and for their convocations. The advent of the new year was celebrated by the feast of trumpets, also days of gladness, solemn days, and the beginnings of months. The majesty of the law was attested by the voice of the trumpet, the walls of Jericho fell flat, when on the seventh day the trumpets of rams' horn were blown by the priests, and the Midianites themselves when, two centuries before, they had troubled Israel, had been dispersed at the sound of the trumpet (Numbers 31:6).

For years the trumpet had been silent in Israel. God's ordinances and His Sabbaths had been disregarded, the memories of Sinai and of Jericho had slumbered, the orgies of Baal had usurped the place of the holy convocations, and now that its sound was once more heard, it spoke to the people of Him whose covenant they had long forgotten, but whom at last they had invoked in their anguish.

I think we would agree that Gideon's clothing wasn't something he earned. True, he had been obedient in destroying the idols in his household. But there is no sense that his obedience earned him the clothing. And, in a moment, we'll see he doubted his clothing.

There's a famous saying, "the Holy Spirit can only fill [or in this case, *clothe*] a holy vessel." That wasn't true of Gideon; it's not true of us.

If it were, no one could ever be clothed by Him, because, practically speaking, we will never be holy until we are free from our mortal bodies and take residence in our immortal bodies.

We are once-and-for-all set apart, and are positionally holy, by virtue of being saved. We are baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ, and He comes to take residence within us. We therefore can believe we are Spirit-clothed.

I admit it, I like the Marvel Universe of super hero films. In *Dr. Strange*, the hero is fighting the bad guys, and he picks up an ancient weapon, Trouble is, he doesn't know what to do with it, so it's useless.

I'm clothed with the armor of God. But it doesn't mean I am using the armor properly, or that I am utilizing it at all.

Lots of Christian marriages are in trouble. The stats aren't nearly as bad as the secular world would like you to believe, but divorce among professing Christians is too prevalent.

(I should qualify, divorce without biblical grounds).

How could that be, if both husband and wife were "girded with truth," wielding "the sword of the Spirit?" The truth of God's Word would cancel-out any carnal thoughts that divorce should even be considered, let alone pursued.

The "breastplate of righteousness" would keep them from getting romantically involved with anyone other than their spouse, because God says it is right to honor your vows and remain married.

It must be we don't believe we are Spirit-clothed... And simultaneously that we are willing to grieve and quench the Holy Spirit in order to follow our own will rather than God's will.

You need to believe you are clothed with the Holy Spirit and you will defeat the lies, the fears, the deceptions, that arise from your own flesh, and from the world, and from the devil.

Luk 24:49 (ESV) I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.

That "clothing" came in the Upper Room. It continues throughout the church age. It is the promise of the Father, and a gift, that you are Spirit-clothed.

If you think there is something you need to do in order to receive this gift, here is what Jesus said:

Luk 11:13 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who **ask** Him!"

Ask, and you shall receive. Believe you are Spirit-clothed and stand against the enemy, overcoming the odds.

#2 Disbelieve You Are Clothed With The Holy Spirit And You Will Delay Your Victory

(v36-40)

Tom Cruise as Maverick. Val Kilmer as Iceman. Iceman was in trouble, in a dogfight outnumbered by Russian Migs. Maverick hesitates to engage... And he hesitates... And he hesitates, for what seems like forever, until he finally gets his head back in the game, and gets in the fight. Then it was hero-time in *Top Gun*.

It was hero time for Gideon to get in the fight, but he was hesitant.

Jdg 6:36 So Gideon said to God, "If You will save Israel by my hand as You have said -

"If" You will do "as You have said." Wow. That's bold, but in a bad way. Gideon had no reason to doubt God's promises.

Why do we doubt the promises of God? One reason is that He has a roundabout way of keeping them. We see His faithfulness, for example, in our sufferings. We see His strength in our weakness. We hear His still, small voice in the storm.

Bad things happen to good people, and to God's people. We are called upon to endure, believing all things are working together for the good for those who love the Lord. In those moments, doubt creeps in.

Back in verse seventeen Gideon had asked, "show me a sign that it is You who talk with me." The Angel of the Lord had already proven Himself to Gideon by consuming a sacrifice Gideon brought.

Often in the psalms the writers will rehearse God's mighty works on Israel's behalf. We've seen that in the Book of Judges, too. Without living in the past, we ought to rehearse God's mighty works for us, on our behalf.

You say there are none? How about Him saving you from sin and death and Hell? How about the indwelling of His Holy Spirit? Start there, and I'm sure other events in your walk with Him will be remembered.

God's past faithfulness ought to be more than sufficient for us to trust Him. Still, we doubt, and want signs of His love and goodness.

Jdg 6:37 look, I shall put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that You will save Israel by my hand, as You have said."

A "fleece of wool" is sheared in a continuous piece and is usually folded and tied individually. It sounds like it was the first thing Gideon saw lying around, and he concocted a test using it. The amazing thing is that the Lord allowed Gideon to test Him. How patient is His love for us, to endure doubt when all around us we see His love and power on our behalf.

Jdg 6:38 And it was so. When he rose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece together, he wrung the dew out of the fleece, a bowlful of water.

God not only submitted to being tested; He went way beyond the test, and loaded that fleece with the dew of the morning. It was soaked. There could be no doubt He had answered.

O, yes there could:

Jdg 6:39 Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me, but let me speak just once more: Let me test, I pray, just once more with the fleece; let it now be dry only on the fleece, but on all the ground let there be dew."

Remember that all this was happening after an army of Israelites had rallied to Gideon's trumpet blast.

The time to hesitate was through... Yet here was Gideon, burning two whole nights fleecing God.

In Gideon's case, God allowed for the delay, but sometimes timing won't allow for one. If God has given you a task, do it immediately. Don't hesitate or, in some cases, the opportunity might pass and be lost.

Jdg 6:40 And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, but there was dew on all the ground.

I can only wonder if Gideon was thrilled or disappointed. Was he looking for a way out? I am sometimes looking for a way out of things God has for me - especially trials.

At any rate, God had passed the tests, and Gideon must go forward.

This episode has given rise among Christians to the phrase "put out a fleece for God." The thinking behind it is, if I don't know God's will, I should look for Him to do or say something unusual to show me His will.

Gideon knew God's will. He wasn't asking for God's will; he was demanding God show His power.

In fact, **he was asking God to perform a miracle.**

We should drop "putting out a fleece" from our vocabulary. We don't really mean that we want God to perform a miracle.

In terms of God revealing to us His will, I have no problem with Him communicating to us through what seem to be coincidences.

Over the years a lot of believers have told me that, as they are praying to understand God's will, a certain Scripture will keep coming up. They'll read it in their morning or evening devotions, then hear it multiple times on Christian radio, then it will be taught in church or at Bible study.

You may not want to base your entire decision on something like that, but I think it's God speaking to you.

But, again, that's not a fleece. You aren't putting God to a test and demanding that He perform a miracle.

There is some interesting symbolism in Gideon's test. I doubt that he understood it, but it's there for us to at least ponder.

In ancient times, clothing was made of wool, linen, or silk. Wool was the most common, since it was the cheapest; then wool/linen blends; then linen; and, finally, expensive silk.

BTW: The Jews were prohibited by the Law from wearing wool/linen blends. Why? It was one of those rules that set them apart from other nations. It wasn't scientific, or practical; it was moral and ceremonial.

Back to Gideon: A fleece of wool represented the basic element of his physical clothing.

Bible commentators, both ancient and modern, see dew as an emblem of the Holy Spirit. It is a physical representation of Him, just like wind or fire.

Gideon's test, when viewed symbolically, involved the Holy Spirit saturating his clothing. It was a visible manifestation of the invisible Spirit.

In both tests, God sent the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is His to send, to give, and He desires to do so in abundance. But in one case it was only on the ground, not on the fleece representing our clothing.

I think it communicates that the Spirit is available to us, in an amount that can soak us, and be wrung out of us. In the New Testament, He is compared to a torrent of living water; similar idea here.

He can saturate us, OR we can remain dry by disbelieving God.

Disbelief only causes delays:

- God has begun a good work in you, and He will be faithful to complete it. But if you disbelieve Him along the way, His work in you is delayed.
- The Bible indicates that, after you are saved, God has good works for you to discover as you walk with Him. Disbelief hinders you from discovering those good works.

Clothing is a powerful illustration in the Bible. Your salvation is compared to clothing. Human beings in their natural state are depicted as being dressed in filthy rags that are unacceptable attire in Heaven. Jesus, by His death on the Cross, can confer a robe of righteousness on the believing sinner, while He takes upon Himself their filthy robe.

Robed in His righteousness, you are accepted into Heaven.

Beyond that, we've seen twice from the Gospel of Luke that you are clothed by the Holy Spirit. His coming upon you, either when you are saved or subsequent to it, is a gift of a spiritual garment.

One form that garment takes is the armor of God. I'm saying that you don't put it on in times of need (because you *always* need it) but that you are to believe it is always on, giving you victory over the flesh, the world, and the devil.

Do you think you deserved, or could ever deserve, the robe of righteousness that symbolizes salvation? Of course not.

Likewise, you cannot deserve being Spirit-clothed. It's something God does, that you are to receive; and to go on receiving by asking your Heavenly Father for His good gift.

Here is an easier way of understanding this. Look at Gideon. Did he deserve the Holy Spirit? Did he make himself a holy vessel, fit to be filled by God?

No. God clothed a very doubtful Gideon by grace.

Rom 8:32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?