

Homiletics Analysis: Judges 6

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

Judges 6 opens the Gideon cycle, the longest and most theologically complex narrative unit in the book. Israel has again done evil in the LORD's sight, and the Midianite oppression is severe — a seven-year agricultural devastation that reduces Israel to hiding in caves, its produce stripped bare by overwhelming enemy forces. Into this condition of complete national humiliation, the Angel of the LORD appears to Gideon — a man threshing wheat in a winepress to hide it from Midian — and addresses him as “mighty warrior.” The chapter moves through three distinct encounters: the commissioning of Gideon by the Angel of the LORD (vv. 11–24), Gideon's first act of obedience — the nighttime destruction of the Baal altar and Asherah pole (vv. 25–32) — and the double fleece confirmation that tests divine faithfulness (vv. 33–40). Threading through all three is a single diagnostic reality: Israel's idolatry produced the oppression, Gideon embodies Israel's fearfulness and unbelief, and God calls, equips, and confirms — over Gideon's repeated objections — the deliverer He has chosen.

This Text — Intent

God is not simply narrating a historical event. Through this chapter He is confronting His people with the pattern of their own unbelief — the idolatry that lies beneath affliction, the fear that mistakes obscurity for disqualification, and the grace that calls and confirms the weak precisely because the glory must belong to God alone. The chapter's intent is diagnostic and commissioning simultaneously: to expose the idolatrous root of Israel's condition and to show that God's answer to human weakness is not to find a stronger candidate but to bring His own presence and His own word to bear on the candidate He has already chosen. The reader is meant to see in Gideon both themselves — fearful, doubting, negotiating with God — and the relentless grace of a God who does not abandon His commission once given.

Subject Sentence: God calls a fearful, doubting man — and refuses to let him refuse.

Primary Claim: God's call does not depend on the called person's qualifications, courage, or certainty — it depends on God's own presence, and He will confirm that presence until the doubter obeys. This passage confronts the reader's excuses and calls them to act on the word God has already given, not on the conditions they are still negotiating.

Interpretive Evaluation

The identity of the Angel of the LORD (vv. 11–24)

The text presents the Angel of the LORD in ways that blur the line between divine messenger and the LORD Himself — the Angel speaks, then the LORD speaks (v. 14), and Gideon declares “I have seen the Angel of the LORD face to face” with the terror of a theophany (v. 22). Lutheran and Dispensational interpreters have differed on whether this figure is a pre-incarnate appearance of the Son (a Christophany) or a created angelic messenger uniquely authorized to speak in the divine name. The Reformed reading — shared with much of the patristic tradition — is that the Angel of the LORD in the Old Testament, particularly where the figure speaks as God, accepts worship, and produces theophanic awe, is most naturally understood as a pre-incarnate appearance of the Second Person of the Trinity. This reading is not imposed on the text; the text’s own oscillation between “the Angel” and “the LORD” invites it. The application consequence matters: Gideon is not being commissioned by a messenger from God — he is being commissioned by God Himself, which is why “I will be with you” (v. 16) carries the full weight of the divine presence, not a delegated assurance.

Gideon as hero vs. Gideon as flawed instrument

A common moralistic reading treats Gideon as a model of courage — he destroys the Baal altar, he responds to the call, he leads Israel to victory. This reading should be qualified substantially. The text does not present Gideon as courageous; it presents him as a man who destroys the altar *at night because he is afraid of his family and the townspeople* (v. 27). The fleece episodes are not examples of commendable faith-seeking but of repeated negotiation with a God who has already spoken clearly. The Reformed reading acknowledges Gideon’s real obedience while refusing to sanitize his fear and hesitancy — because the chapter’s point is precisely that God works *through* this man despite these qualities, not because of them. To preach Gideon as a courage model is to miss the chapter’s actual claim: that God’s power and call do not require human heroism as their precondition.

The fleece as a model for decision-making

A widespread popular reading treats Gideon’s fleece (vv. 36–40) as a sanctioned method of seeking God’s will — “putting out a fleece” before major decisions. This reading should be refuted as a misuse of the narrative. The fleece is not a commended practice; it is Gideon’s twice-repeated request for confirmation of a word God has already spoken with unmistakable clarity, including through a miracle (fire consuming the sacrifice, vv. 20–21) and a confirmed name (Jehovah-Shalom, v. 24). To extract the fleece as a general method of guidance is to (1) ignore the narrative’s function as description, not prescription, (2) reverse the text’s own movement — God accommodates Gideon’s weakness; He does not commend it — and (3) bypass the sufficiency of Scripture by requiring ongoing miraculous

confirmation of God's will. The Baptist tradition in particular sometimes treats the fleece as a model for "seeking a sign from God," but this directly conflicts with the New Testament's teaching that the completed canon is the sufficient word God has given (2 Tim. 3:16–17; Heb. 1:1–2).

Israel's idolatry as merely cultural vs. as the root diagnostic

Some expository treatments of the passage focus narrowly on Midianite oppression as the presenting problem and treat Gideon's commission as the response to that oppression, giving only passing attention to the idolatry of vv. 25–32. This truncation misses a structural feature of Judges' theology: the oppression is not the root problem — it is the consequence. The root is the Baal worship at the center of Gideon's own household (v. 25), and the LORD's first act after commissioning Gideon is not to send him against Midian but against the altar in his father's yard. Reformation precedes deliverance in the text's own logic. The Reformed reading follows this structure: Gideon must tear down what is false before he is equipped to defeat the enemy.

Key Canonical Support

- **Exodus 3:1–12** — God's call of Moses at the burning bush presents the same pattern: a man hiding (Moses in Midian, Gideon in the winepress), a divine appearance, an objection based on inadequacy, and the same answer: "I will be with you." The parallel is not incidental — both narratives are structured to show that the answer to human insufficiency is divine presence, not divine reassignment.
- **1 Corinthians 1:26–31** — "God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong." Paul's principle is the theological statement of what Judges 6 narrates in story form. God's selection of the fearful, self-doubting son of a Baal-worshipping household is precisely the kind of choice that ensures "no human being might boast in the presence of God."
- **Isaiah 6:1–8** — The commissioning of Isaiah parallels Gideon's in its movement from unworthiness to calling to obedience, but Isaiah's progression is accelerated by his encounter with holiness. The contrast illuminates Gideon: where Isaiah's lips are cleansed and he immediately volunteers, Gideon negotiates through multiple confirmations — underscoring Judges 6's emphasis on God's patient persistence rather than the human response's quality.
- **Romans 8:31** — "If God is for us, who can be against us?" This New Testament declaration is the logical conclusion of what the Angel of the LORD promises Gideon in v. 16: "I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man." The ground of Gideon's commission and the ground of the believer's confidence are identical — not their qualifications, but God's presence.

- **2 Corinthians 12:9–10** — “My power is made perfect in weakness.” Paul’s testimony to the principle governing Gideon’s commissioning makes explicit what the narrative embeds: God’s method is not to wait for strong vessels but to demonstrate His power through weak ones. The same God who worked through Gideon’s fearfulness is working through Paul’s thorn — and through the reader’s inadequacy.

Aim: To expose the excuses with which readers deflect God’s call and to show that the answer to every legitimate objection is the same answer God gave Gideon — “I will be with you” — which is sufficient, and must be obeyed.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
1–2	Israel does evil; the LORD gives them into Midian’s hand for seven years; Midian overpowers them	Standard Judges cycle opener; seven years of sustained oppression, not a brief raid
3–5	Midian, Amalek, and eastern peoples invade at harvest; destroy crops and livestock; innumerable as locusts	Agricultural devastation is total — survival-level threat; “locusts” simile signals supernatural scale
6	Israel is brought very low; cries out to the LORD	Misery precedes repentance — the cry is not yet identified as true repentance, only distress
7–10	A prophet is sent before a deliverer; the LORD’s indictment — I brought you out, I drove out your enemies, I said do not fear their gods — but you did not obey	The theological root is stated before the deliverer arrives: disobedience and idolatry caused this; this is diagnosis, not just history
11–12	The Angel of the LORD appears to Gideon under a terebinth; addresses him as “mighty warrior” while he hides in a winepress	The address is ironic — Gideon is anything but mighty in posture; the LORD names what He will make him, not what he currently is
13	Gideon’s first objection: where are the miracles our	Theological confusion — Gideon attributes the

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	fathers told us about? The LORD has abandoned us	abandonment to God, not to Israel's sin; the prophet (vv. 7–10) has already answered this
14	The LORD turns to him: "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from Midian's hand. Do I not send you?"	Divine commission — the authority is in the sending, not in the man; "this might of yours" is either ironic or refers to the encounter itself as empowerment
15	Gideon's second objection: my clan is the weakest in Manasseh; I am the least in my father's house	Social-structural inadequacy — not false humility but a statement of fact; God does not dispute it
16	The LORD's answer: "I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man"	The answer to inadequacy is presence, not résumé; "as one man" signals the coming victory's totality
17–18	Gideon asks for a sign; requests that the LORD wait while he brings an offering	Negotiation continues; Gideon has not yet obeyed, but God accommodates the request — patience with the doubter
19–20	Gideon prepares a goat and unleavened bread; the Angel instructs him to place it on the rock and pour the broth	The offering becomes a sacrifice — the presentation resembles covenant-establishing ritual
21	The Angel touches the offering with his staff; fire springs from the rock and consumes it; the Angel vanishes	Theophanic confirmation — the miracle establishes that this is divine commission, not human imagination
22–23	Gideon fears he has seen the Angel of the LORD face to face and will die; the LORD reassures: "Peace to you. Do not fear; you shall not die"	The theophanic terror is genuine; divine reassurance is immediate and personal
24	Gideon builds an altar: Jehovah-Shalom (The LORD)	Memorial altar marks the moment; the name encodes the reassurance — peace

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	Is Peace)	given where terror was felt
25–26	That same night the LORD commands: tear down your father’s Baal altar, cut down the Asherah pole, build an altar to the LORD on the stronghold, and offer the bull using the Asherah wood	The first act of obedience is domestic reformation, not military action; the LORD addresses the root before the fruit
27	Gideon obeys — but does it at night because he fears his father’s household and the townspeople	Obedience with fear — the text does not sanitize this; Gideon acts, but not boldly
28–30	The townspeople discover the destroyed altar; identify Gideon; demand he be handed over for death	Immediate social consequence — the cost of obedience is real; the community’s loyalty is to Baal
31–32	Joash defends Gideon: if Baal is a god, let him contend for himself; Gideon is named Jerubbaal — “Let Baal contend against him”	Irony: Baal cannot contend; the name becomes a monument to Baal’s impotence; Joash’s argument is implicitly monotheist
33–35	Midian, Amalek, and eastern peoples assemble in the valley; the Spirit of the LORD clothes Gideon; he blows the trumpet; Abiezer, Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali rally	Spirit’s empowerment precedes battle; “clothed” suggests being enveloped, not merely touched; the coalition assembles around Gideon’s call
36–37	Gideon asks for the fleece sign: if dew on fleece and dry ground around it, then I will know you will save Israel by my hand	First fleece — Gideon is still negotiating despite the theophany and the Spirit’s coming; the request is for confirmation, not initial guidance
38	It is so the next morning	God accommodates the request without rebuking Gideon — divine patience on display

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
39–40	Gideon asks again: do not be angry; now reverse it — fleece dry, ground wet; it is so	Second fleece — Gideon’s negotiation continues; God again accommodates; patience exhausted nowhere in the text, though the reader feels the accumulation

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	1–10	The Condition Diagnosed: Idolatry, Oppression, and a Prophet’s Indictment
2	11–24	The Commission Given: God Calls the Hiding Man
3	25–32	The First Obedience: Reformation Before Deliverance
4	33–40	The Confirming Spirit and the Negotiating Doubter

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: God calls a fearful, doubting man — and refuses to let him refuse.

Primary Claim: God’s call does not depend on the called person’s qualifications, courage, or certainty — it depends on God’s own presence, and He will confirm that presence until the doubter obeys. This passage confronts the reader’s excuses and calls them to act on the word God has already given, not on the conditions they are still negotiating.

Applications (Five)

1. Examine what altar is standing in your household before you go looking for the enemy outside it. (*Affections/Worship*) Gideon’s first commission is not against Midian — it is against the Baal altar in his father’s yard. The LORD addresses the root before He addresses the fruit, and He does so in the same night He calls Gideon. The reader who is waiting to address spiritual failure, compromised worship, or household idolatry “after things settle down” has the order inverted. The LORD’s pattern is unmistakable:

reformation precedes deliverance; you cannot fight the enemy outside while you are still feeding the altar inside. The question is not whether there is a Midian in your valley — it is whether there is a Baal in your backyard that has not yet been torn down.

2. Stop mistaking obscurity for disqualification. (*Mind/Belief*) Gideon's objection — “my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house” — is factually accurate and completely irrelevant to the LORD's commission. The LORD does not dispute the facts; He redirects attention to the only fact that matters: “I will be with you.” The reader who has concluded that their background, their lack of platform, their family of origin, or their history of failure disqualifies them from God's call is reasoning from the wrong variable. Gideon was chosen hiding in a winepress. The selecting criterion was not his strength — it was the LORD's sovereign purpose. Obscurity has never once been a barrier to God's call; it is frequently its precondition.

3. Recognize when you are negotiating with a word God has already spoken clearly. (*Mind/Belief*) Gideon asks for a sign after a theophany, then asks for a first fleece after the sign, then asks for a reversed fleece after the first fleece — all before moving. The text does not commend this sequence; it reveals it. The reader who has been circling the same decision, asking for one more confirmation, one more circumstance to align, one more internal feeling to solidify, should hear in Gideon's second fleece request the sound of their own voice. God is patient with doubters, as He was with Gideon. But patience is not endorsement. The question is not “has God spoken?” — it is “will you act on what He has already said?”

4. Feel the weight of being called “mighty warrior” before you are one. (*Affections/Worship*) The Angel of the LORD addresses Gideon as “mighty warrior” while he is hiding in fear — and the name is not mockery, it is commission. God names what He will make, not what currently appears. This should produce not self-confidence but worship: the God who calls Gideon a mighty warrior while he hides is the same God who calls the reader righteous, beloved, and His own child — not because of what currently appears, but because of what He has accomplished and will accomplish. The right response to being called by a name you haven't yet grown into is not to argue the address but to receive it as the word of the One who cannot lie and who completes what He begins.

5. Act on the commission even when you are afraid — do it at night if necessary, but do it. (*Will/Behavior*) Gideon destroys the Baal altar while afraid — at night, quietly, with ten servants rather than in public declaration. The text does not celebrate the manner; it records the obedience. God does not require you to feel brave before you act on His word. He requires that you act. The reader who is waiting until their fear is gone before obeying has misunderstood what obedience under a sovereign God looks like. It looks like Gideon at midnight — shaking, working, and completing the task God gave anyway. Courage is not the absence of fear before obedience; it is fear that did not prevent it.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Judges 6 teaches that God's electing call is entirely unconditioned by human qualification and entirely sufficient in itself — because the ground of the call is not the called person but the promise "I will be with you." The chapter also establishes that idolatry is not merely a moral failure among others but the root condition from which oppression grows — God's discipline in the Judges cycle is not arbitrary punishment but the inevitable consequence of broken covenant worship. The theophanic encounter (vv. 20–24) further establishes that God does not commission from a distance; He appears, speaks, confirms, and reassures — the call is personal and the confirming presence is real. Finally, the chapter demonstrates that God's patience with human weakness is not reluctant accommodation but the consistent method by which He accomplishes His purposes through instruments that make His glory undeniable.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: This chapter is a narrative embodiment of the Reformed doctrine of divine sovereignty in election — God chooses the least, the weakest, the most fearful, and the most objection-prone, not despite these qualities but in a way that ensures the glory of the outcome belongs to Him alone. The pattern of the call (commission → objection → reassurance → confirmation → obedience) is the pastoral framework within which God works, and it refuses the Arminian instinct to locate the grounds of God's choice in some foreseen quality of the chosen. The destruction of the Baal altar before the defeat of Midian also displays the Reformed insistence on the indispensable connection between right worship and covenant blessing — not as a works-based exchange but as the covenant's own internal logic: the God who will not share His glory with Baal will not share the victory He is about to give with a people still worshipping at Baal's altar. The Angel of the LORD's presence throughout, understood as pre-incarnate Christophany, roots the entire commissioning encounter in Christ's mediatorial work — the second Person of the Trinity is already the deliverer-in-person, and Gideon is being sent as His instrument.

Main Takeaway

God looked at a man threshing wheat in a winepress to hide from the enemy, called him a mighty warrior, gave him a commission he tried to refuse, answered every objection with the same answer — "I will be with you" — and refused to take no for an answer. He was not waiting for a better candidate. He was demonstrating that He is the only qualification that matters. The excuses you are carrying to God's call are real. They are also irrelevant. The only variable that determines whether you can do what God is calling you to do is whether

God is with you — and He has said that He is. Tear down the altar. Act on the word. Do it afraid if you must. But do it.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Preaching Gideon as a hero of courage.** The text is explicit that Gideon acts at night because he is afraid (v. 27). He negotiates twice through fleece requests after a clear theophanic commission. To present Gideon as a model of boldness is to preach against the text's own characterization. The chapter's hero is not Gideon — it is the God who commissions a frightened man and brings him to obedience through patience and repeated confirmation. Let Gideon be afraid in the pulpit, or you will lose the passage's actual claim.
- **Endorsing the fleece as a model for seeking God's guidance.** This is the most common and most damaging misappropriation of the text. The fleece is not a commended practice; it is a doubter's twice-repeated request for confirmation of a word God has already made unmistakably clear. Extracting it as a general method of divine guidance is description mistaken for prescription, and it undermines the sufficiency of Scripture. Preach the fleece as evidence of God's patience with weakness — not as a decision-making tool for modern believers.
- **Skipping or minimizing vv. 7–10 (the unnamed prophet's indictment).** Many expositors move quickly to the Gideon commissioning and treat the chapter's opening as throat-clearing. But vv. 7–10 are the theological key to everything that follows — they establish that the oppression is the consequence of idolatry, not the primary problem requiring a military solution. A sermon that skips this section will produce a Gideon story without a diagnostic framework, resulting in applications that address the Midianite symptoms while leaving the Baal root untouched.
- **Treating Gideon's first act of obedience (the altar destruction) as secondary to the military commission.** The LORD's command to destroy the Baal altar before sending Gideon to war is not a detail — it is the structural statement that reformation precedes deliverance. Sermons that treat vv. 25–32 as background material before the “real” action of chapters 7–8 miss the chapter's own ordering principle and lose the application that is most urgent for many hearers: the enemy inside the household must be addressed before the enemy outside it.
- **Importing the broader Gideon narrative (chapters 7–8) into the exposition of chapter 6.** Judges 6 ends before the victory — and intentionally so. The chapter's Primary Claim is about calling, commissioning, and first obedience under doubt. Importing the victory of chapter 7 prematurely relieves the chapter 6 tension too early and short-circuits the application that belongs to the reader who is still in the doubting, negotiating stage. Let chapter 6 be chapter 6. The triumphant story is

coming — but the person in the winepress doesn't know that yet, and neither does your hearer.

- **Failing to identify the idolatry root in application.** Because the passage is structured around a call-and-commission narrative, it is easy to generate applications that are entirely about responding to God's call and neglect the diagnostic function of the Baal altar episode. Keller's idol-diagnosis lens is essential here: the Midianite oppression had an idolatrous root, and so do most of the life-situations your hearers will bring to this text. Applications should press beneath the presenting problem (the "Midian in my valley") to the worship disorder that produced it (the "Baal in my backyard"). Failure at this point makes the sermon a motivational talk about courage rather than a gospel diagnosis.