

7: THE SIGN

Seeking the Signal

Signs were given to some, and from others they were withheld. To the one, they were merely confirmation; assurances of what they already knew to be true; evidence of “God’s presence [and] empowerment for the task at hand”.ⁱ To the latter, the “request for a sign [was] already a refusal to see what [was] going on before one’s very eyes”.ⁱⁱ

The scribes and Pharisees sought external evidences to prove the truth of Jesus’ identity and His claims. The crowds demanded signs that they might test the legitimacy of His Words. Others sought wonders to experience the sensational and exact personal benefit. They challenged, *“Teacher, we want to see a sign or a miracle from You [proving that you are who You claim to be]”* (Matthew 12:38, AMP). *“Give us some hard evidence that God is in this”* (MSG).

Although man’s tendency is to seek evidence *before* he will believe, faith precedes signs. A “fleece” is not a substitute for faith, nor is the absence of the miraculous an excuse to refrain from doing what God has already instructed.

God does not condemn the sign-seeker who is bent on obedience. Our God, who *“knows our frame and remembers that we are dust”* (Psalm 103:14, NKJV), stands ready to affirm His Words to the one who is willing to trust Him.

Psalm 86:16-17 says, *“Give strength to Your servant...show me a sign for good”* (NKJV). *“Show me a sign of [Your evident] goodwill and favor... You, Lord, [will show Your approval of me when You] help and comfort me”* (AMP).

PROOF

Signs are external evidences that confirm that the messenger and the message are true. During His ministry, many “were not willing to believe Jesus’ words without external confirmation”.ⁱⁱⁱ They pressed, *“What sign will you perform... that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do?”* (John 6:30). Although we may not doubt His identity, we must ask ourselves whether we, too, seek signs to validate His directives.

For what reasons do individuals seek signs to validate what God has spoken? _____

Generally, what is your purpose in seeking a sign from God? _____

Why is it easier to trust signs than the written Word of God? _____

What danger is found in this practice? Consider Matthew 24:24. _____

Reread and underline the verses listed in the introduction of this lesson, paragraph 2. Then read Matthew 16:1-4.

The Message states Matthew 16:1 this way: *“Some Pharisees and Sadducees were on Him again, pressing Him to **prove Himself to them**”* (MSG, emphasis mine). Another translation says, *“One day the Pharisees and Sadducees came to test Jesus, demanding that He show them a miraculous sign from heaven to **prove His authority**”* (NLT, emphasis mine).

“Prove that you are who You claim to be! Prove Your right to speak into my life! Give me hard evidence that I ought to obey!”

Do you seek signs to prove that God is who He claims to be? If so, what keeps you from fully trusting God’s character—that He is who He claims to be, and that what His Word declares is authentic? _____

Do you struggle with the concept of authority and submission? (John 2:13-22) Explain. _____

Is your obedience to Him based on whether He fulfills your request? Explain. _____

In what ways can requesting signs be an indicator of distrust in His character or Word? _____

How can repeatedly seeking evidence inhibit faith? _____

Faith is trust without evidence, and yet, many would not trust Jesus unless He fulfilled their requests. But Christ said, *“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”* (John 20:29, NKJV).

While some sought to ascertain Jesus’ character and His words by insisting that He perform for them, others sought *“**to try and test and tempt Him**”* [by demanding] *a sign of Him from heaven”* (Luke 11:16, AMP, emphasis mine). Their aim was to expose His imperfections and faults.

Those who do not want to obey difficult passages or instructions in the Word will attempt to undermine them by seeking errors, discrepancies, or alternative meanings, or by creating scenarios to force God into action. If they find error, or He fails to act, their unbelief and rebellion are justified.

It is not uncommon for individuals to seek and present “signs” of their own devising in order to substantiate God’s approval of their actions. How does this occur? _____

Now read Matthew 12:22-24. What did the Pharisees observe with their eyes? How did they respond? (Also consider Exodus 8:19.) _____

Even those who profess faith in Jesus Christ can repeatedly hear God’s words and see confirming signs, yet refuse to heed His instructions. What might this indicate about their heart condition? _____

Read John 6:22-36. What did the crowds hope to obtain for themselves? How did they put Jesus to the test? _____

What did they require to place their trust in Him? _____

Turn to Luke 9 and read verses 7-9. Also read Luke 23:8 and John 6:2. For what reasons did these people seek signs? _____

How can experiential, thrill-based faith lead to disappointment in one’s relationship with God? _____

Read John 2:23-25. What does this passage convey about signs and human nature? _____

Read Matthew 12:38-42. Why do you believe Jesus repeatedly called sign-seekers “*evil and adulterous*”?^{iv} _____

What difference lies in those from whom signs are withheld and those for whom God performed signs and wonders? _____

EVIDENCE

Oftentimes it is not a question of God's character and claims that cause us to seek signs, but the weakness of our flesh that prompts us to seek external evidences. Just as God looked upon Gideon's uncertainty with patience, kindness, and compassion, our gracious God, who knows our weaknesses (Psalm 103:14), will take pains to comfort and encourage us. The account of Gideon's fleece is not a model for seeking signs, but an encouragement that God willingly supplies confirmation and reassurance to those who are willing to trust Him.

Although we would prefer that God perform the miraculous before we obey, signs seldom precede faith.^v Why isn't a fleece a substitute for faith? _____

Turn to Judges 6 and read verses 33-40.

What occurred after the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon? _____

What is Gideon's understanding of his task? (Also see verse 14.) _____

Did he set forth the fleece to discover God's will? Explain. _____

One commentator states, "[We] are expected to trust that as [we] make decisions on the basis of what [God] has already said so He *is* guiding [us]; [we] are not... to demand that He show [us] *how* He is guiding [us], by telling [us] what decisions to make."^{vi}

Describe the specificity of Gideon's request and the specificity of God's answer. _____

Do Gideon's words demonstrate faith in God's ability? For what reason, then, might Gideon be seeking a sign? _____

According to Judges 6:14-15, what does Gideon believe of himself? _____

What doubts has he entertained since his childhood? (v.13) _____

What promise was made to Gideon? (v.16) _____

Keep reading: Judges 6:17-24. What did he request to confirm the Angels' identity? Did God honor Gideon's request? _____

Return now to verses 36-40 of Judges 6.

Do you believe that the fleece was necessary after all that had occurred? Why or why not? _____

Gideon "already knew from divine revelation what God wanted him to do."^{vii} His presence was promised (6:12, 16). He had been empowered and equipped by God's Spirit (v.34). Men gathered to him to perform what God had spoken (v.34). And yet, Gideon needed reassurance that he was the man God had chosen.

"Gideon's prayer for a sign sprang not from want of faith in God's promise of victory, but from the weakness of the flesh, which paralyzes the faith and energy of the spirit, and often makes the servants of God so anxious and timorous that God must assist them by miracles. Gideon knew himself and his own strength, and that for victory over the enemy this would not suffice."^{viii}

David Guzik said, "Yet before being too critical of Gideon, we should consider the challenge that was ahead of him. Many of us would immediately refuse such a call, without even considering allowing God to confirm it. Gideon's weak faith was still greater than *no* faith. For this reason, Gideon is rightly included in the register of great men and women of faith (Hebrews 11:32)."^{ix}

Consider the following: If God did *not* answer miraculously, would Gideon have been released from His instructions? Explain. _____

Are you willing to obey what you already know to be true, regardless whether God answers your appeal? _____

How *can* seeking signs such as Gideon's fleece put God to the test? _____

What emotions are evoked when God does not perform your request? _____

If He *does* answer your request, are you ready and willing to obey regardless of His answer? _____

Describe the time frame of Gideon's petition (vv.38, 40) _____

How can the demand for signs pose as a delay tactic? _____

Return to Judges 6. Why do you believe Gideon requested a second miraculous sign? _____

It has been suggested that Gideon requested a second sign because he believed his first request was tainted. Fleece is naturally more absorbent than the surrounding earth, causing it to easily retain moisture. The possibility that God's answer could be explained naturally only obscured it.

Have you ever received an answer only to doubt it? _____

Why do you believe God was willing to answer Gideon's request? _____

How did His answer increase Gideon's faith? _____

What does this tell you about God's care and concern for those who are willing to trust Him? _____

In closing, the prayer that springs not from want of belief in God's character and claims; the request that is not made for personal thrills and selfish gain, God delights to answer. When our flesh is weak and doubting, anxious and timorous; when we need to hear again God's instructions, He willingly supplies evidence of His presence and enablement. God stands ready to affirm His words to the one who is willing, if not able, to trust Him.

ⁱ Lindsey, F. D. (1985). [Judges](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 393). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

ⁱⁱ Nolland, J. (1998). [Luke 9:21–18:34](#) (Vol. 35B, p. 652). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

ⁱⁱⁱ Martin, J. A. (1985). [Luke](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 236). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

^{iv} When Jonah spoke, the Ninevites heard his message and repented. When the queen of the South heard Solomon's wisdom, she marveled and believed. In contrast, many Jews, loyal only to themselves and their figments of the Christ, saw the signs but refused to acknowledge that they confirmed the Messenger and the Message.

^v John 2:23 states that many believed when they saw the signs and wonders performed by Christ. Faith was its catalyst.

^{vi} Wilcock, M. (1992). [The Message of Judges: Grace Abounding](#). (J. A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.) (p. 82). England: Inter-Varsity Press.

^{vii} Lindsey, F. D. (1985). [Judges](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 393). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

^{viii} Lange, J. P., Schaff, P., Cassel, P., & Steenstra, P. H. (2008). [A commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Judges](#) (p. 120). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

^{ix} Guzik, D. (2013). [Judges](#) (Jdg 6:36–40). Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik.