

Gideon: Part III - Falling off the Mountaintop

The stage had been set. Gideon finally realized that as long as he began the huge task set before him by God, God would be sufficient to finish it in any creative method He chose. And so, Gideon began.

God was faithful and kept His promise, but the unpredictable part was how Gideon behaved after seeing God's great work on Israel's behalf. Oh, if only he had finished well.

Stop and Pray - Lord, please show me all the dangers of sweet victory. Reveal to me the lessons of Gideon's later life so that I will handle my God-given successes well.

1. What do non-Christians point to in Christians' lives that give them excuses to reject God?

Read Judges 7:15 - 8:3 – The Battle West of the Jordan. Mark this text found on pages 6-7.

2. In your own words, describe how the battle in 7:19-22 played out. Note the timing, who fought the battle, with what they fought, who won the battle, why, etc....

3. Following this battle, in verse 23, some men joined in the chase after the escaping Midianites.
 - a. Who were these men and what had they done earlier in the story (Judges 6:35; 7:3)?
 - b. How does the fact that they joined the battle here indicate that Gideon is off to a good start in saving the people from the hand of Midian? (Keep in mind the purpose of a judge and the reason for Israel's oppression.)

The Ephraimites were called to help at the Jordan River. Following their success, the offended men of Ephraim criticized Gideon sharply. Gideon's diplomacy successfully averted the threat of civil war by soothing intertribal jealousies.

Note: Manasseh, Gideon's tribe, and Ephraim are the two tribes that came from the sons of Joseph (Genesis 48:12-20).

4. a. Evaluate Gideon's interaction with Ephraim. Do you think he was right or was he wrong in addressing their criticism the way he did?

b. How does your reasoning in question 4a compare with the following verses:
Proverbs 15:1

Ephesians 4:29

I Peter 3:8-12

Hebrews 12:14-15

c. Summarize how God wants you to respond to sharp criticism?

Read Judges 8:4-21 - The Battle East of the Jordan. Mark this text found on pages 7-8.

As Gideon and his 300 men crossed the Jordan River, they encountered people less willing to enter into the battle. En route to the capture of Zebah and Zalmunna, Gideon threatened the two Israelite cities of Succoth and Peniel for not helping. He later came back and carried out the threats.

5. Evaluate Gideon's interaction with the Israelite towns of Succoth and Peniel based on the following verses. Was he justified in punishing them?
Judges 5:23 -

Romans 13:3-4 -

Put it together –

6. Despite the hunger and exhaustion of his 300 men, Gideon was pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna with frenzied determination. From Judges 8:18-21, what are some reasons why he might have been so motivated to pursue them? Numbers 35:16-21, 33-34 and Judges 6:14, 16 may provide some additional insight.

Read Judges 8:22-35 - The End of Gideon's Life. Mark this text found on page 8.

Had the story ended at verse 8:3, Gideon would be considered one of the heroic judges. Gideon had learned great lessons from God about fear and lack of faith. His new faith and resulting actions had returned positive memories of God to the minds of Israel. Unfortunately, this was not the end of the story.

7. Why do the Israelites offer Gideon dynastic rule?

8. a. What was praiseworthy and what was wrong with Gideon's response to the offer? Notice both what he said and what he did.

- b. How does God want us to respond when we are given direct credit for God's victories? Deuteronomy 8:10-18

Jeremiah 9:23-24

Galatians 6:14

The ephod was used by the priests at the tabernacle in Shiloh to help divine God's will for the tribes of Israel (Exodus 28:1-2, 15, 21, 29-30; Deuteronomy 12:4-5; Joshua 19:51).

9. a. Based on what an ephod was used for and what had already occurred in Gideon's life, what could have motivated Gideon to make the ephod and put it where he did?

b. This ephod became a snare to Gideon, his family, and the nation of Israel. Contrast Israel's relationship with God before Gideon came on the scene and after Gideon made the ephod.

Before Gideon

After Ephod

c. After seeing the results of disobedience to God's rules for worship here, how do you now feel about the narrowness (precise nature) of God's instructions?

10. a. Your daily choices can either further or hinder God's kingdom by giving others reasons to bless or slander God's name. From the portion of Gideon's life discussed in this lesson, what did you learn that you can do that will:

Further God's Kingdom

Hinder God's Kingdom

b. Are you doing anything that could hinder God's kingdom? What do you need to change in your own life?

Final Thoughts: Gideon had an opportunity to return his nation's attention and trust back to God. However, following his God-given success, he did a number of things of which God would not have approved. This resulted in a fast ticket back to apostasy and oppression for all of Israel. Today, many of God's followers do the same thing. Many great men and women of God have gained recognition for God just to later fall into sin. They are then remembered for their downfall and supply yet another reason for the world to write off God. How careful we must be not to steal or erase God's glory with our own selfishness. May you be remembered for God's impact in your life, rather than for the results of your not following Him.

"No sooner had Gideon died than the Israelites again prostituted themselves to the Baals...and did not remember the LORD their God, who had rescued them from the hands of all their enemies on every side (Judges 8:33-34)." May your end be so much better than this.

Pray - Lord, keep me alert to my selfish nature that sets itself up against Your kingdom. Give me the strength to be peaceful and the faith to trust You to defend me. Help me to live a life that meshes with Your truth.

Kyna Ritchie (original 2002; revised 2013)

Lesson 14 — Gideon Part III — Judges 7:15-8:35

Examine the text. You will be instructed to mark certain sections of this text periodically in this lesson. Each section is titled and corresponds to a section of questions in the lesson.

Mark your text. Put a box around time words (e.g. now, same night, when). Put a circle around conditional words (e.g. but, thus, because). Underline all references, including pronouns for:

- Gideon in green
- God in red
- An enemy in black (both groups and individuals)
- Israel in blue (designating the difference between Gideon's 300 men, the men who joined Gideon after the first battle, the Israelite towns of Succoth & Peniel, etc... by putting 300, the first letter of a tribe such as E, N, A, M, Suc, Pen, etc... over their pronouns)

Judges 7:15-8:3 — The Battle East of the Jordan

15 When Gideon heard the account of the dream and its interpretation, he bowed in worship. He returned to the camp of Israel and said, "Arise, for the LORD has given the camp of Midian into your hands." 16 He divided the 300 men into three companies, and he put trumpets and empty pitchers into the hands of all of them, with torches inside the pitchers. 17 He said to them, "Look at me and do likewise. And behold, when I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do.

18 "When I and all who are with me blow the trumpet, then you also blow the trumpets all around the camp and say, 'For the LORD and for Gideon.'" 19 So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, when they had just posted the watch; and they blew the trumpets and smashed the pitchers that were in their hands. 20 When the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers, they held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands for blowing, and cried, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!" 21 Each stood in his place around the camp; and all the army ran, crying out as they fled. 22 When they blew 300 trumpets, the LORD set the sword of one against another even throughout the whole army; and the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the edge of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath. 23 The men of Israel were summoned from Naphtali and Asher and all Manasseh, and they pursued Midian. 24 Gideon sent messengers throughout all the hill country of Ephraim, saying, "Come down against Midian and take the waters before them, as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan." So all the men of Ephraim were summoned and they took the waters as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan. 25 They captured the two leaders of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb, and they killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and they killed Zeeb at the wine press of Zeeb, while they pursued Midian; and they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon from across the Jordan.

Chapter 8

1 Then the men of Ephraim said to him, "What is this thing you have done to us, not calling us when you went to fight against Midian?" And they contended with him vigorously. 2 But he said to them, "What have I done now in comparison with you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? 3 "God has given the leaders of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb into your hands; and what was I able to do in comparison with you?" Then their anger toward him subsided when he said that.

(Judges 7:15-8:3, NASB95)

Judges 8:4-21 — The Battle West of the Jordan

4 Then Gideon and the 300 men who were with him came to the Jordan and crossed over, weary yet pursuing. 5 He said to the men of Succoth, "Please give loaves of bread to the people who are following me, for they are weary, and I am pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian." 6 The leaders of Succoth said, "Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hands, that we should give bread to your army?" 7 Gideon said, "All right, when the LORD has given Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, then I will thrash your bodies with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers." 8 He went up from there to Penuel and spoke similarly to them; and the men of Penuel answered him just as the men of Succoth had answered. 9 So he spoke also to the men of Penuel, saying, "When I return safely, I will tear down this tower." 10 Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor, and their armies with them, about 15,000 men, all who were left of the entire army of the sons of the east; for the fallen were 120,000 swordsmen. 11 Gideon went up by the way of those who lived in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and attacked the camp when the camp was unsuspecting. 12 When Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued them and captured the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and routed the whole army. 13 Then Gideon the son of Joash returned from the battle by the ascent of Heres. 14 And he captured a youth from Succoth and questioned him. Then the youth wrote down for him the princes of Succoth and its elders, seventy-seven men. 15 He came to the men of Succoth and said, "Behold Zebah and Zalmunna, concerning whom you taunted me, saying, 'Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hand, that we should give bread to your men who are weary?'" 16 He took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and he disciplined the men of Succoth with them. 17 He tore down the tower of Penuel and killed the men of the city. 18 Then he said to Zebah and Zalmunna, "What kind of men were they whom

you killed at Tabor?" And they said, "They were like you, each one resembling the son of a king." 19 He said, "They were my brothers, the sons of my mother. As the LORD lives, if only you had let them live, I would not kill you." 20 So he said to Jether his firstborn, "Rise, kill them." But the youth did not draw his sword, for he was afraid, because he was still a youth. 21 Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, "Rise up yourself, and fall on us; for as the man, so is his strength." So Gideon arose and killed Zebah and Zalmunna, and took the crescent ornaments which were on their camels' necks.

(Judges 8:4-21, NASB95)

Judges 8:22-35 — The End of Gideon's Life

22 Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, "Rule over us, both you and your son, also your son's son, for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian." 23 But Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you." 24 Yet Gideon said to them, "I would request of you, that each of you give me an earring from his spoil." (For they had gold earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.) 25 They said, "We will surely give them." So they spread out a garment, and every one of them threw an earring there from his spoil. 26 The weight of the gold earrings that he requested was 1,700 shekels of gold, besides the crescent ornaments and the pendants and the purple robes which were on the kings of Midian, and besides the neck bands that were on their camels' necks. 27 Gideon made it into an ephod, and placed it in his city, Ophrah, and all Israel played the harlot with it there, so that it became a snare to Gideon and his household. 28 So Midian was subdued before the sons of Israel, and they did not lift up their heads anymore. And the land was undisturbed for forty years in the days of Gideon. 29 Then Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and lived in his own house. 30 Now Gideon had seventy sons who were his direct descendants, for he had many wives. 31 His concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, and he named him Abimelech. 32 And Gideon the son of Joash died at a ripe old age and was buried in the tomb of his father Joash, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites. 33 Then it came about, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the sons of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals, and made Baal-berith their god. 34 Thus the sons of Israel did not remember the LORD their God, who had delivered them from the hands of all their enemies on every side; 35 nor did they show kindness to the household of Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) in accord with all the good that he had done to Israel.

(Judges 8:22-35, NASB95)