

## Judges Chapters 7-8- John Karmelich

1. Can one "blow it badly", when one is trusting in God? What are the dangers in putting our trust in God? Now there's an optimistic way to start a lesson. The lesson here is about starting by our trust in God and then "finishing" by trusting in ourselves and not God. That's the story told her in these two chapters. Chapter 7 is a story of a great victory when our hero of the moment (Gideon) is trusting in God and obeying exactly what He wants him to do. Chapter 8 is a story of decline. It starts off innocent enough as all "efforts of the flesh" are. (That is, trying to do things by our will and not God's). By the end of Chapter 8, the Israelites are back to turning from God. The lesson is about learning how to keep trusting and finishing well!
  - a) First let me set your mind at ease. God is not asking for perfection. He's also isn't telling us we must finish well in order to be saved. Our salvation is only based on our trust that Jesus is God, died for every sin we'll ever commit and He's in charge of our lives. What I am getting across here is about how to be a good witness for Jesus. Remember how I say that these lessons are for people who already believe Jesus is God, "so now what"? What He desires of us is to be a good witness for Him.
  - b) The danger that any of us can face and most of us do, is we can start well, even go around singing His praises for what He's done, and then revert back to trusting in our willpower or our instincts versus trusting in Him. But doesn't He want us to make the best decisions we can based on what is in front of us? Of course. The issue is we do that by praying for His will and not violating His word as we make those decisions. What we'll read Gideon doing in Chapter 8 is just that, making decisions that violate biblical principals!
  - c) To be a Christian does not mean we're exempt from troubles or trials. God isn't a genie in a bottle to grant our every wish! God wants to guide our lives to make a difference for the kingdom of God. Does He allow suffering? Yes, to drive us back to Him. To teach us the principals He wants us to learn about life. Romans 8:28 teaches that all things (emphasis on "all" things) that happen to Christians happen for God's glory. That includes death and the suffering of believers. That means trials as well as good times! Life for a Christian is all about seeking His will, praying for His will for our lives, regular study of His word for guidance and then making the best decisions we can. That is how He guides us. It's not a special feeling or constant messages from God. He talks to us whenever He desires and it is not something we can force Him to do because we want Him to!
  - d) That's the lesson the hero of this story, Gideon had to learn in these two chapters. Chapter Seven is a highlight of the bible. It's a great story of God giving a great victory when they are greatly outnumbered and shows that He will work great victories when we're trusting in Him to guide our lives and the danger of what happens when we don't. Chapters 7 and 8 are great contrasts in trusting God and watching the benefits versus ignoring Him as we watch the consequences unfold from living that way. The idea of these chapters is to teach the dangers of doing, "whatever it is we fell like doing" as opposed to doing His will!
2. OK John, we get the point. You can stop beating it over our heads. What do you call this lesson? I decided to call it, "The benefits of living as God desired and the dangers of ignoring that desire!" I would say that's these two chapters in a nutshell. With that said, time to lay out some of the facts of these chapters so you'll understand this story better. (Hey, it's what I do.)
  - a) The story starts off where it left off in the last chapter. God called Gideon to lead an army to defeat other nations that were stealing from Israel. The enemies had about 120,000 men (Chapter 8, Verse 10). The army of farmers that Gideon raised was about 30,000 to start. It is a battle of 4 to 1 odds against us. However, God said in effect, "that's too many, I (God) want to prove it's just Me that leads you to victory. Therefore, God somehow told Gideon that if any of the Israelites are scared or don't want to battle, they're free to go home. This is a good thing as God's saying "eliminate your fears as God will lead to victory".

- b) Then about 10,000 left, so now the odds are 12 to 1 against them. Then He made it clear to Gideon that He wants even less men. That's because God doesn't want to share His glory with anyone. If there was a victory with 30,000, Israelites it means they would get the credit as opposed to God alone. The underlying point is God wants to lead us to all our victories in life. It's a lesson in trusting Him versus willpower! Remember that the 10,000 who stayed wanted to fight, so they didn't do anything wrong. Sometimes, things are just His will to be accepted and that's the case here. Bottom line, God designed a simple test in order for there to be 300 fighting men to defeat over 120,000. The test of the 300 isn't something for us to duplicate. It's just how God dwindled the army size to a point where one can only be grateful to God for a great victory and not any effort on our part!
  - i) OK John, hold your horses for a moment. God doesn't speak to me to lead an army over thousands of people! Unless you're an army commander, it doesn't apply for most of us. However, He wants to lead us to victories in life and lead others to be a good witness for Him. We don't have to wait to hear an audible voice from God to start. We just have to look for ways to make a difference for Him and surrender our will to His. If you don't know where to begin, talk to a pastor at your church. Discuss your spiritual gifts and needs there and do something to use your life as to make a difference for Him. That will bring us far more joy than anything we'll ever do for ourselves. That's what makes life worth living! Promise.
  - ii) OK, then back to Gideon.
- c) Next Gideon did a little reconnaissance. That simply means God asked him to go spy on the enemies. I suspect the purpose of this was to get Gideon to trust God more. Let's face it he was about to attack 120,000 with 300 men. As he snuck into the camp, he heard a few men discussing a dream one of them had. Apparently the enemy knew they were fighting Gideon as the dream involved him. The short version is the dream was of a giant piece of barley (type of wheat) rolling in the enemy camp and doing damage! This dream showed Gideon that the enemy was suffering from real fear. We can assume the dream was God induced which is why it happened in the first place.
  - i) Remember this foreign army was attacking Israel and stealing from them. Because God called Gideon, God was bringing an end to a horrid injustice.
  - ii) The short version is Gideon's three hundred men were only armed with jars used to hold a lamp and trumpets (probably animal horns). In the middle of the night, those 300 came into the camp of the enemy, blew the trumpets and broke their jars. The noise scared the enemy thinking the Israelites were far greater in number.
  - iii) They started to run for their lives and even fought with each other. The Israelites won and the text says how the two main leaders were killed. Yes, Chapter 7 is a great story. However then comes the bad news of Chapter 8.
- d) It starts with some Israelites asking Gideon, "Hey why didn't you ask us to join the battle? What's wrong with us? Gideon does a smart thing by firing off some compliments so they were thinking "You guys are special even though they didn't fight with us!"
- e) Then Gideon and his 300 men traveled to another town in pursuit of the leaders of that battle. The townsfolk refused to help the 300 and Gideon threatened them for that. After that, Gideon threatened to destroy another town for refusing to help him and his men. In a matter of time Gideon defeated the rest of that army. Then he returned to the town that didn't help him. He punished (whipped) people there and killed the men in that town. It was also told that those Israelites killed Gideon's brothers and that caused the rage that made him kill them.
- f) After that the Israelites wanted to make Midian a king for killing their enemies. At first he said no, but they ended up giving Midian a lot of gold, which he turned into a shrine that the Israelites went to for worship. Gideon went on to have 70 sons by a lot of wives. That fall in lifestyle, caused the Israelites to turn back to Baal after Gideon had died.

3. OK, we have a story of a great victory, and a story of a downfall of that king as he failed to live as God desired him to live. The bible teaches that Israel's leaders aren't to multiply wives and there is no story in the bible of any good thing happening to any man with multiple wives. Gideon also let the power rush to his head by killing innocent Israelites and making a monument based on all the gold he collected.
  - a) That's an interesting story, why should I care? Glad you asked!
  - b) The point is not to learn history from 1200 BC. The point's to learn there are consequences when we choose not to live as God desires we live. Being obedient to God is much more than saying, "I pray for Your will" and then going about one's day. It's a matter of making the best decisions we can living under the guidelines of how the bible teaches we're to live as a witness for Him. The issue isn't our salvation. It's our witness to God. I'm willing to bet Gideon is saved and in heaven. However, I'm also convinced he may have lost eternal rewards for failing to live as God desires. That's the lesson to be learned here.
  - c) With that said, time for the details.
4. Chapter 7, Verse 1: Early in the morning, Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) and all his men camped at the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh. <sup>2</sup> The LORD said to Gideon, "You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her, <sup>3</sup> announce now to the people, 'Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.' " So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained.
  - a) As my regulars know there were no chapter breaks in the original text. Chapter 6 ended (those breaks were added roughly when the printing press was invented.) with the story hero Gideon, testing God by asking in effect, "You really want me to lead a big bunch of farmers against a professional army in battle?" That's why he designed a test about sheep wool being wet and the ground being dry and then vice versa. Whether or not that test is a lack of faith on Gideon's part after God already told him to go attack is a classic debate I am not going to solve here. The point is after the whole "wet wool, dry ground and then a dry wool, wet ground test", we read of Gideon organizing an army.
  - b) Obviously there is a time gap between the last part of Chapter 6 and the text here. Let's be honest a large army of farmers didn't show up on Gideon's doorstep the next day. That is why we read of Gideon and his men camping out before an attack.
  - c) Time for some technical details for those who like that sort of thing.
    - i) First because Gideon destroyed an altar to Baal in the previous chapter, he also got the nickname "Arguer with Baal", which is what Jerub-Baal means.
    - ii) The army was camping northwest of what most of us know as the Sea of Galilee. It is a national park today. This is the northern part of Israel.
    - iii) Verse 3 tells us that the total size of the army was about 30,000 men. We'll discover in Chapter 8, Verse 10 the size of the foreign army was 120,000 men. Therefore we have four to one odds against us at this point.
    - iv) However, God says, "I want to change the odds more, so tell all the men who were scared that they can go home". Therefore, of the 30,000, two thirds of them left for the rest of the men to fight. If nothing else, it shows how fears can overwhelm us if we let them. Remember that the Israelites have been living horribly in fear for the last seven years as they've been robbed and oppressed by this enemy. The "good guys" have been hiding in caves and essentially starving due to that oppression.
      - a) My point is many people would rather live in fear with "what is" then take a risk to change things for the better even if it is God's will. That's why I'm always emphasizing praying for boldness and trusting Him to guide us so we can live as He desires.
    - v) So why reduce the army? So God gets all the credit for the victory!

5. Verse 4: But the LORD said to Gideon, "There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there. If I say, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go; but if I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go."
  - a) Remember that the 10,000 who stayed were willing to take a stand for God. Yet He wants to reduce the army even more, not because He didn't respect the 10,000, but because He is going to make it obvious that God and God alone gets the credit for the victory by making the army absolutely minimal.
  - b) There are going to be times in life where we're going to want to make a difference for God but He will say no. Remember that the purpose of living the Christian life is to do what is His will, not ours. Therefore, we must accept the "no" answer at times!
  - c) Anyway, with that understood, here comes the test!
6. Verse 5: So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the LORD told him, "Separate those who lap the water with their tongues like a dog from those who kneel down to drink." <sup>6</sup> Three hundred men lapped with their hands to their mouths. All the rest got down on their knees to drink.
  - a) First let me state that the men who drank water like a dog are not better soldiers than all of the men who drank normally. We can't please God by drinking a certain way. God just wanted a way to separate a "handful" of men for this task and this was a way to do it.
  - b) Anyway, we're going to have a battle now with 300 men against 120,000. The underlying point is God is designing a situation simply to prove that He and He alone gets the credit for all the victories we have in life. I try to keep that in mind as I write, that God's the one guiding me and He is to get the credit and not me. Ok, back to the story.
7. Verse 7: The LORD said to Gideon, "With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the other men go, each to his own place." <sup>8</sup> So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites to their tents but kept the three hundred, who took over the provisions and trumpets of the others.
  - a) Imagine having to tell 10,000 men who were willing to fight to end this injustice, that God said they could go home. These were men who said goodbye to their wives and children and were willing to take a stand for God. I'm sure they grumbled a little as they left but it is a matter of turning their will over to God. It's like if He makes it obvious, "this isn't My will at the moment. Most of living the Christian life isn't about doing some great thing, it's about being willing to do what God wants us to do and accepting His will even if it's not a thing we want to do at that point.
  - b) In the meantime, I'm sure the 300 men left were nervous. For 300 men to go battle 120,000 must have felt like a suicide mission. They must have thought, "If this is God's will we'll have to accept it. Even if it's a suicide mission." I'm reminding of the story of "D-Day" as many thousands of men started a great battle in World War II. Many men died that day. To make a difference for God to stop evil often requires a great sacrifice. A bible verse I've always loved is "to love God means to hate evil" (See Psalm 97:10 as an example!)
  - c) I bring this up as the 120,000 men in effect represent evil. They were raiding Israel to steal what they have. My simple point is it had to feel like a suicide mission for 300 to stand up to 120,000 people who are intent upon killing you!
8. Verse 8b: Now the camp of Midian lay below him in the valley. <sup>9</sup> During that night the LORD said to Gideon, "Get up, go down against the camp, because I am going to give it into your hands. <sup>10</sup> If you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah <sup>11</sup> and listen to what they are saying. Afterward, you will be encouraged to attack the camp." So he and Purah his servant went down to the outposts of the camp. <sup>12</sup> The Midianites, the Amalekites and all the other eastern peoples had settled in the valley, thick as locusts. Their camels could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore.
  - a) Meanwhile, it's time to face reality! The Israelites were camped up on a hill. In the valley below, were camped 120,000 men along with all their supplies and animals!

- b) The good news is God intends for us to win our battles over our fears. It doesn't mean we will all live to say 100 years old. It means He wants us to trust in Him and not be afraid of whatever it is we must face in life. Victory in life is about overcoming our fears and using our lives to make a difference for Him.
  - c) Anyway, the next step was a "reconnaissance". That just means spying on an enemy! The first step was for Midian to sneak down into the camp in the middle of the night! He took a servant named Purah with him. I suspect the reason for the servant is the bible says that a thing is established as true by "two or more witnesses in agreement". (Matthew 18:19 for an example.) I picture then full of fear that if they're discovered, that's their end! What is about to happen is a great example of how God works in ways we can't imagine! Notice how all of this was from God's hand. Verse 11 says this spying act will encourage Gideon to attack. Remember that Gideon is well aware it's 300 versus 120,000 plus! Keep in mind it's the middle of the night as we read the next few verses:
9. Verse 13: Gideon arrived just as a man was telling a friend his dream. "I had a dream," he was saying. "A round loaf of barley bread came tumbling into the Midianite camp. It struck the tent with such force that the tent overturned and collapsed." <sup>14</sup> His friend responded, "This can be nothing other than the sword of Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite. God has given the Midianites and the whole camp into his hands."
- a) First thing I want you to notice is that the enemy soldiers were aware of Gideon and the fact he was leading an army of Israelite farmers to battle against them. The foreign army is not aware of the size of the Israelite army. They did have their own reconnaissance as this army knew they had to fight the Israelites and not just steal their stuff as they have been doing for the last seven years.
  - b) The point is God's working behind the scenes to lead us to victory. He gave this enemy of God a bad dream involving a "huge piece of bread" rolling into the Midianite camp that is wiping them out. Personally, if someone told me they had a dream like that, I'd tell them to cut back on the late night pizza as it's given you nightmares! Instead, remember it's still the middle of the night, a second person gave the interpretation that this dream meant it's going to be a losing battle as the Israelites will win.
  - c) The first way to win a battle is to intimate an enemy and put fear in their hearts. We read of God doing that here in these verses! Notice the interpretation is the "sword of Gideon". The soldiers didn't know what kind of weapons the Israelites had and stated that thought.
  - d) Anyway, Gideon overheard these two soldiers talking and took it to heart.
10. Verse 15: When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped God. He returned to the camp of Israel and called out, "Get up! The LORD has given the Midianite camp into your hands." <sup>16</sup> Dividing the three hundred men into three companies, he placed trumpets and empty jars in the hands of all of them, with torches inside.
- a) I don't know about you, but if I had 300 people on my side and over 100,000 were on the other side, I'd still be nervous. The fact that God told Gideon to do this and is encouraging every aspect of the plan is a good sign.
    - i) Let's pause for a moment. Obviously God's not calling us to literally take on a big army much larger than us. The lesson here is about the steps God takes in our life to trust Him more and more. When we trust Him with one small step it will make it possible to take the next step. As a personal example, my ability to publicly talk about my faith in God took a long time to develop. God started worked on my life in a small way. As I trusted Him and moved forward, He gives us the next step. It is teaching us about how we grow in our faith by trusting Him with "what He has done so far". My point is God's never finished with us until He calls us home. Yes our salvation is up to Him. Our willingness to be a living witness for Him is all about us having a willing heart to take the footsteps to make a difference for Him. I have watched many a life change when we're willing to take those steps.

- b) OK then, back to Gideon. The next instruction for Gideon was to divide his 300 men into three groups of 100 and provide them with torches and horns.
    - i) Again, God doesn't usually give "step by step" instructions in our life. He expects us to do the next logical thing. Yes God can interrupt our lives whenever He wants to give us some specific instruction. I've sensed that at times. However, we must remember "God is God" and He talks to us when He wants to. We can't force Him to say something just because we want instructions from Him. So unless it occurs do what is logical without violating any significant biblical principals.
    - ii) Notice the weapons Gideon is to carry. No "bazookas" since they didn't exist. Not any spears. Instead he asks them to carry jars with lights in them and trumpets in their other hands. OK, where did Gideon get that many jars and trumpets? What I suspect is the men had lights as they traveled to join his army. Jars are common as a way to carry things or God somehow provided them. When it comes to trumpets there's no music shop loaning them trumpets. What it refers to is animal horns as they are used to call an assembly. I suspect when the 30,000 men left, what's left is enough supplies to do this. A famous quote is, "Where God leads He provides.
11. Verse 17: "Watch me," he told them. "Follow my lead. When I get to the edge of the camp, do exactly as I do."<sup>18</sup> When I and all who are with me blow our trumpets, then from all around the camp blow yours and shout, 'For the LORD and for Gideon.' "<sup>19</sup> Gideon and the hundred men with him reached the edge of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just after they had changed the guard. They blew their trumpets and broke the jars that were in their hands.<sup>20</sup> The three companies blew the trumpets and smashed the jars. Grasping the torches in their left hands and holding in their right hands the trumpets they were to blow, they shouted, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!"<sup>21</sup> While each man held his position around the camp, all the Midianites ran, crying out as they fled.
- a) OK, now that the supplies are set, it's time for the action. Remember that it's the middle of the night and the enemy probably knew of the 30,000 men assembled by the Israelites.
  - b) Anyway, here is the big moment. Gideon's instructions were for all his men to break their jars so it would make a great noise and startle and wake up the enemies. If that noise did not get everyone to move, all three hundred blast their trumpets. The whole point was to startle the enemy to not know what's going on. A trumpet for an army is a call to battle.
  - c) The point is the noise of the jars breaking and the trumpet blasting and the Israelites then shouting "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!" was enough to scare the enemy to start to run away as they were scared of the Israelites attacking them in the middle of the night!
  - d) Notice in Verse 21 the 300 men "stood there". While they did that the Midianites ran away as what happened scared them into confusion so that they ran away.
  - e) OK John, nice story, and it'd make a great movie. Why should I care? For starters it shows that God likes to work with "the odds highly stacked against Him" just to prove He's God and we're not. It reminds us that God will work how God will work, and our job's to then go along with His will. So how do we know His will? Easy. We live as the bible tells us to live and make the best decisions we can with the information in front of us. We ask God how He wants to use our lives for His glory. He can't resist a complete surrender of our lives to Him and works with us faults and all to make a difference for Him. I've watched it happen all the time on grand scales and on small scales. It starts with our willingness as well as a trust in Him to do what we can't do, period!
  - f) What if I'm too scared to take a step for God? Look how He started in Gideon's life. By an angel sitting under a tree watching Gideon. My point's God's aware who are His and who will commit their lives to Him. If we're willing to be used by Him, He will lead us. If we don't know what to do, "welcome to club". Some of the greatest works God does is when we have an idea to make a difference for God and "run with it". We'll know soon enough if God's behind it by the results. My point is "trial and error" is part of the Christian life!

12. Verse 22: When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the LORD caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords. The army fled to Beth Shittah toward Zererah as far as the border of Abel Meholah near Tabbath. <sup>23</sup> Israelites from Naphtali, Asher and all Manasseh were called out, and they pursued the Midianites. <sup>24</sup> Gideon sent messengers throughout the hill country of Ephraim, saying, "Come down against the Midianites and seize the waters of the Jordan ahead of them as far as Beth Barah."
- a) Time to get back to the story itself. While the three hundred "stood there", God caused all the men in the enemy's camp to turn on each other. Those that survived ran away to other parts of Israel. At that point Gideon called for reinforcements. Other Israelites pursued to a point where I suspect many more of the enemy died.
  - b) Notice the other strategy point. Armies need food and water to survive. Gideon called to the Israelites living in the area where the army was fleeing and said in effect, go cut off the water supply. I suspect that means damming up streams so they flow a different way or it could simply mean stand by the river so when they approach, they can be wiped out!
  - c) Remember all of this started because the Israelites cried out to God for help as they were tired of being oppressed. The great lesson is when things are going wrong, we must turn to God first, not last. Often, God doesn't respond. Sometimes we must take inventory to see if there's some unconfessed sin. Sometimes God's simply waiting to work our life out on His timing not ours. I don't know why God waited seven years. Maybe He wanted the Israelites to stop worshipping Baal and realize only He can help. Whatever the reason the only way to have true joy in one's life is to use it for His glory! That's the lesson here.
  - d) Meanwhile, we've got a few more verses left in this chapter.
13. Verse 24 (cont.): So all the men of Ephraim were called out and they took the waters of the Jordan as far as Beth Barah. <sup>25</sup> They also captured two of the Midianite leaders, Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb at the winepress of Zeeb. They pursued the Midianites and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon, who was by the Jordan.
- a) Here we read of work done by men other than the 300 God separated. God does want all believers to be part of His plan. Once the 300 "did their job" and it became obvious this is a "God thing" it was then ok for others to join in. Ever want more people to "get it"? The answer is when people see God working in our lives and when we are full of joy, that is a contagious thing that others want to join in! The other Israelites saw or heard of what was done and others joined in.
  - b) A quick note about "kings". In those days, a single city leader was thought of a king. It's also possible that each king represented a different group. Remember the Israelites were attacked by the Midianites and the Amalakites. So one king could be over each group.
    - i) The point is that other men killed the leaders and the "clean up operation" is now going well. God is working well in their lives to get people to do His will and be trusting in Him for their lives! That's what He desires.
  - c) OK enough of the good news of Chapter 7. It's time for the downhill slide of Chapter 8!
14. Chapter 8, Verse 1: Now the Ephraimites asked Gideon, "Why have you treated us like this? Why didn't you call us when you went to fight Midian?" And they criticized him sharply. <sup>2</sup> But he answered them, "What have I accomplished compared to you? Aren't the gleanings of Ephraim's grapes better than the full grape harvest of Abiezer? <sup>3</sup> God gave Oreb and Zeeb, the Midianite leaders, into your hands. What was I able to do compared to you?" At this, their resentment against him subsided.
- a) The basic story here is some Israelites living in that area were mad that Gideon didn't ask them to join the battle. The first thing I want you to notice is that Gideon didn't tell them the truth. He didn't say, "Hey God told me to whittle the army down to 300 men so that only God would get the credit". Instead, Gideon acted out of fear. He probably saw a big bunch of people threatening him. To get out of the "pickle" Gideon started to compliment them so they feel like they're something special.

- b) First of all, it's not a bad thing to compliment people when anger is growing. Appealing to one's ego is usually a good strategy to avoid a fight. It doesn't always work, but it's still a good method to try to calm things down. My problem is simply he didn't tell them what's the truth, that God dwindled it down so only God got the credit! Gideon even paid them a compliment by saying that you're people were responsible for killing the leader! Gideon's calming the situation by saying, "I got the enemy to run away but you guys actually killed the leaders!" Again it's a compromise in that Gideon didn't give God the credit for all that victory but instead he said, "Yes, but here's what you guys did".

- i) What should we do when God works greatly in our lives and people get jealous? I would start by saying, "Hey it wasn't me. God decided to work through me. If you don't like it, take it up with Him!" Unfortunately success often breeds jealousy. It is a fact of life. If you're talking to people who believe in God, then give Him credit as if to say, "Hey I didn't do this. I just saw an opportunity to be used by God and I stepped forward. If you want to be used by God, pray through it and ask Him to use you in a mighty way!" The point is it's up to God how He wants to use each of us and we must accept it and not get jealous of other's success.

- ii) Anyway, that's the story here. Let's see what happens next!

15. Verse 4: Gideon and his three hundred men, exhausted yet keeping up the pursuit, came to the Jordan and crossed it. <sup>5</sup> He said to the men of Succoth, "Give my troops some bread; they are worn out, and I am still pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian." <sup>6</sup> But the officials of Succoth said, "Do you already have the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna in your possession? Why should we give bread to your troops?"

- a) Remember how I said that "kings" are leaders, like a city mayor that's also the leader of an army? In the previous set of verses, we read about two kings being killed. Here we read of other kings being sought to kill. Notice the Israelites did their reconnaissance. They're aware who the leaders were. Why is it so important to kill the leaders? For starters, if the leaders are killed it discourages the others from following. It was the leaders that decided to attack Israel in the first place and steal all they had. It's accountability for the leaders of those who attacked Israel.

- b) Anyway the original 300 were not satisfied with the original way God used them. They all went after the leaders of those who attacked them. Is that what God wanted them to do? I do not know. I would say its logical to wipe them out so they wouldn't rise to fight again!

- c) The next point in this story is the 300 were "exhausted" and asked the Israelites in a city by the name of Succoth to give them bread. Instead of giving some food to these hero's, they responded by saying, "Hey you haven't killed the leaders yet, why should we reward you!"

- i) In the first set of verses, we dealt with the issue of jealousy. Here we deal with the issue of not helping others in need! To state another classical Christian expression, we are not "1,000,000 solo acts for Jesus, we're to help each other!" As a pastor that I used to study under put it, if you're not on the front line firing the bullets, then it is necessary to be on the back line providing the ammunition (prayer). Obviously it was wrong to help those in need!

- ii) OK, does that mean we're to give to everyone who asks? If that were the case we'd be broke in no time! Obviously we have to show discrimination. Some Christians have a gift to help those in need. The Salvation Army for example, is an excellent Christian organization that helps millions transform their lives from nothing to be a useful member of society. My view is when asked, I pray about what God wants me to do and then do what is obvious. I don't give to all that ask but often I do.

- iii) For what it's worth, I know some Christian "giving organizations" that like to wait to see if God is working behind some movement before they give. Yes that would make it tough for some to get off the ground, but that's how they work. The way I look at it is, if God wants something to work, He'll make it possible through us.



- d) In the meantime, we need to get back to our story. Gideon's all "ticked off" that he's been working for God, chasing after the leaders of the enemies and other Israelites refused his request for food. Next we read of how Gideon reacted!
16. Verse 7: Then Gideon replied, "Just for that, when the LORD has given Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, I will tear your flesh with desert thorns and briers."<sup>8</sup> From there he went up to Peniel and made the same request of them, but they answered as the men of Succoth had.<sup>9</sup> So he said to the men of Peniel, "When I return in triumph, I will tear down this tower."
- a) First question, do you think this is the type of reaction God would want? Let's say no one will help us. Should we torture them as Verse 7 implies or tear down their town as stated in Verse 8? Obviously this is an overreaction.
- b) I'm reminded of the classic phrase "HALT". That means we usually act our worse when we are (H)ungry, (A)ngry, (Lonely) or (T)ired. Gideon was both hungry and tired. He is of the opinion God can only work through him at this moment and a failure to help him is a failure to help God! Just because God worked through Gideon earlier, doesn't give him the right to threaten violence over those who refused to help him.
- c) Realize by the end of the chapter, the Israelites turn back to Baal. The seeds are planted as Gideon isn't acting "God like" here. Remember the "judges" had faults and made mistakes and they were not perfect people that God used. So was it right for Gideon to do this just because he was hungry and tired? No. I also blame the townsfolk for refusing to help the Israelites in need especially after they rescued their country from years of oppression.
- d) Back on my first lesson on Judges, I stated a recurring problem in Judges is these Israelites did "whatever they felt like doing" (as opposed to trusting God). We see some of that play out here with both sides being stubborn and refusing to work together. As Christians we will always see failure when we fail to help others in need and refuse to be grateful for the way others have helped us! When that happens "there is plenty of blame to go around!"
- e) Now that I've beaten that point to death, we can move on!
17. Verse 10: Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor with a force of about fifteen thousand men, all that were left of the armies of the eastern peoples; a hundred and twenty thousand swordsmen had fallen.<sup>11</sup> Gideon went up by the route of the nomads east of Nobah and Jogbehah and fell upon the unsuspecting army.<sup>12</sup> Zebah and Zalmunna, the two kings of Midian, fled, but he pursued them and captured them, routing their entire army.
- a) Earlier I stated there were 120,000 men that were attacking Israel. I under exaggerated in order to make the "6 to 1" comparison easier to remember. There were actually 135,000 of the enemy. So far 120,000 were killed. Did that mean the 300 killed that many? I suspect a lot of it was them killing each other. Some were killed by other Israelites as they fled the scene. Bottom line is the records knew how many died and how many were left. So how did they know? The bodies had to be buried, and that's when the count occurred.
- b) Bottom line, Gideon who was still hungry and tired along with the 300 routed the rest of the army and killed them. So why did God bless this act after Gideon threatened those of those two towns? The issue is still doing God's will. His will was to punish those who've been stealing from the Israelites. It's not a matter of blessing Gideon, it's a matter that His will be done and punish the guilty. Was it right for Gideon to pursue them even though he was hungry and tired? Yes, remember that God never asks us to do anything that He won't provide the means for us to do it. Yes God wants to work through us. Often we do have to by trial and error figure out the best solution. The point is we do the best we can and trust in God in the area's we can't do by our own power!
- c) Thus Gideon and 300 men wiped out 15,000 more. That alone is a great miracle!
- d) Now comes more bad news. Gideon didn't forget his threats to the Israelites who refused to help him. If you think about it, it's pure "ego" at this point. God just gave you a great victory and now you want to blame those who refused to help you!

18. Verse 13: Gideon son of Joash then returned from the battle by the Pass of Heres.<sup>14</sup> He caught a young man of Succoth and questioned him, and the young man wrote down for him the names of the seventy-seven officials of Succoth, the elders of the town.<sup>15</sup> Then Gideon came and said to the men of Succoth, "Here are Zebah and Zalmunna, about whom you taunted me by saying, 'Do you already have the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna in your possession? Why should we give bread to your exhausted men?' " <sup>16</sup> He took the elders of the town and taught the men of Succoth a lesson by punishing them with desert thorns and briers.<sup>17</sup> He also pulled down the tower of Peniel and killed the men of the town.
- a) The short version here is that Gideon made good on his threats. He showed the residents of Succoth (an Israelite town) the kings he was after. He punished the Israelite men there with "desert thorns and briers". Yes that is painful. Then he went to the other place that refused to help and pulled down their tower and killed Israelites in that town!
  - b) Is this an overreaction? Of course! Life is about doing God's will. God wants us to lead others to Him, not punish them because "They refused to get in line behind me!" You can see Gideon assuming "the throne" of Israel by punishing and killing those who refused to help him. A sign we're not doing God's will is when we're killing our own people who do refuse to "get behind me".
  - c) I'm reminded of the classic expression, "Christian flood control channels". That refers to a church or organization trying to do some great work for God, and expecting God to work through their "flood controls" as oppose to God working how He wants to work. If we're in a situation where we're expected to "do it their way" or suffer the consequences, that is when I know we're in trouble. Twice in the book of Revelation Jesus condemns a group called the "Nicolatians". The short version is this is a group that "Lord's over others!" So how do I know what's the right thing to do? Pray and see if God wants us to join in that movement. See if we can be of help if it's a good thing. It is about volunteering versus a force of service. What about being drafted in an army? That's about the government and not Christian service. It's an "apple versus oranges" thing.
    - i) What I'm trying to get out here is God calls all believers to get involved for Him. I love to say that everyone has to do their share of things we may not like to do. I've always used "taking out the trash" as an example. My point is sometimes we'll do a service for God because we have a gift to do that service. Sometimes we need to make ourselves available as opposed to considering our abilities!
  - d) Bottom line is we're reading of Gideon messing up. This chapter is a series of events that is going to lead to the downfall of Gideon and worse, cause the Israelites to turn from God again even though He lead them to a great victory!
19. Verse 18: Then he asked Zebah and Zalmunna, "What kind of men did you kill at Tabor?" "Men like you," they answered, "each one with the bearing of a prince." <sup>19</sup> Gideon replied, "Those were my brothers, the sons of my own mother. As surely as the LORD lives, if you had spared their lives, I would not kill you." <sup>20</sup> Turning to Jether, his oldest son, he said, "Kill them!" But Jether did not draw his sword, because he was only a boy and was afraid.
- a) Here we read of Gideon interviewing the enemy! Gideon found out that among the men these guys killed were Gideon's own brothers! Therefore, Gideon pronounced judgment on them as if to say, "Eye for an eye". Since they killed his brothers, they deserved to die.
  - b) The crime before this was stealing the food of the Israelites. Since they moved up to the crime of murder, Gideon decided it was fair for them to die.
  - c) Let me talk about biblical murder versus killing. If one is at war, and one kills in battle, it is not a sin. If one kills in "cold blood", then that deserves punishment. Notice again, how Gideon is setting himself up to be a king by pronouncing judgment on these foreign kings who invaded Israel. Was it right for Gideon to order this death? God did want Israelites to wipe out all the foreigners in that land, so in that sense, he was carrying out judgment. The last issue here is about teaching our children the right thing to do. I'll explain.

- d) Gideon who had his own fear issues in the previous chapter, was now embolden because God used him. Now that he was a "war hero" he wanted to encourage his son to learn to kill God's enemies as well. The child had the same fears Gideon had a chapter ago. We'll read in the next verse how Gideon killed these two men themselves.
  - e) OK, I'm way overdue for one of my "why should I care about this ancient history stuff"? I love these types of moments. Part of our job as Christians is to pass His values to the next generation. Is teaching a child how to kill proper? Let's face it throughout history soldiers have trained younger men how to kill. This is a "kill or be killed" situation and one has to learn to judge it in that context. The bigger picture I see is God worked on Gideon to trust Him and we see Gideon trying to pass on making a difference for God works. Was it right for Gideon to kill these men? One has to judge them in context of that situation!
20. Verse 21: Zebah and Zalmunna said, "Come, do it yourself. 'As is the man, so is his strength.' " So Gideon stepped forward and killed them, and took the ornaments off their camels' necks.
- a) I admit I wondered why these foreign kings dared Gideon to do this. Maybe they figured if the son won't do it, dad won't do it either. Boy did they bet on the wrong horse! Gideon killed both of them on the spot.
  - b) So why does the text say Gideon took the ornaments off the camel's neck? Did he want to have the gold? I suspect it was a symbolic act of saying "God is God" and the deities that those ornaments represent are a false god. This is Gideon embolden by all God did to use his life. Did God call him to lead this way? I suspect Gideon wanted to show that enemies of God can be defeated by trusting in Him even if they are greatly outnumbered.
  - c) Speaking of the test of leadership, let's look at the next few verses:
21. Verse 22: The Israelites said to Gideon, "Rule over us--you, your son and your grandson--because you have saved us out of the hand of Midian." <sup>23</sup> But Gideon told them, "I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The LORD will rule over you." <sup>24</sup> And he said, "I do have one request, that each of you give me an earring from your share of the plunder." (It was the custom of the Ishmaelites to wear gold earrings.)
- a) One of the hardest things for people to resist is power. Gideon initially said the right thing by saying, "No, God will worship over you". But then he requested a bunch of the gold of the spoil of the war.
  - b) Let me get through the next set of verses and then I can discuss the significance of this!
22. Verse 25: They answered, "We'll be glad to give them." So they spread out a garment, and each man threw a ring from his plunder onto it. <sup>26</sup> The weight of the gold rings he asked for came to seventeen hundred shekels, not counting the ornaments, the pendants and the purple garments worn by the kings of Midian or the chains that were on their camels' necks. <sup>27</sup> Gideon made the gold into an ephod, which he placed in Ophrah, his town. All Israel prostituted themselves by worshiping it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and his family.
- a) As I stated earlier, this is not a measly amount of gold. It's about \$6M in U.S. dollars.
  - b) Midian took that gold and essentially made it into an idol to be worshipped. I'm sure he justified it by saying, "Here is a statue to remember how God worked in our lives!" What the statue did is instead of getting people to worship God they worshipped the statue!
  - c) The reason God gave the commandment to not build idols, is it makes us want to focus on a ritual in order to please Him versus looking to God to guide our lives.
  - d) The underlying point's the danger of starting out by doing what God wants us to do, then doing things that violate His word like making an idol. That's a violation of the Second of the Commandments.
  - e) OK John, I haven't built any statues to God, how does any of this apply to my life? Have you ever stopped to consider why the bible isn't one page thick? It doesn't just say, Jesus is God, He died for all Your sins. Let Him be in charge of your life and that's that. Instead it's a thick book with the purpose of teaching us how to live once we believe that!

- f) An important principal is we're free to make any decision we want, along that it is within the guidelines of Scripture. What we should be considered about is how can we live a life that's pleasing to God? That's why we were created in the first place. Yes I know we still have to pay the bills and take the trash out. My point is no matter how long we get to live the greatest purpose we can have for our lives will be to use it for God's glory. If we'll be living in His presence forever, we might as well learn how to live for Him now, as again it is why He created us in the first place.
  - g) Gideon's great mistake here is compromising on what God called us to do by making this statue to remember this event. If you think it was no big deal, let's read on.
23. Verse 28: Thus Midian was subdued before the Israelites and did not raise its head again. During Gideon's lifetime, the land enjoyed peace forty years.
- a) I want you to grasp it wasn't all bad. Gideon did do what God called him to do and Israel as a country had peace for forty years! I'm positive his great victory scared other nations from wanting to attack Israel. It "did the trick". OK, then what? Did Gideon live happily ever after? Let's read on and see.
24. Verse 29: Jerub-Baal son of Joash went back home to live.<sup>30</sup> He had seventy sons of his own, for he had many wives.<sup>31</sup> His concubine, who lived in Shechem, also bore him a son, whom he named Abimelech.<sup>32</sup> Gideon son of Joash died at a good old age and was buried in the tomb of his father Joash in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.
- a) Remember that a nickname for Gideon was in effect, "The slayer of Baal" which is why the verse starts by calling him "Jerub-Baal". Gideon went on to have many wives and he had a total of 70 sons by a bunch of women. That probably means he had close to 70 daughters as well. My joke is "What did Gideon do the rest of his life?" He had lots of sex with lots of different women. A standard male fantasy, but again, causing lots of consequences!
    - i) Women in general have a need to nest and form a relationship. Men in general do have a "lower nature" that is attracted to beautiful women. Just because men have that nature, doesn't mean they have to act on it! Just as women must resist a urge to fix their spouses, so men have to resist the urge to act on that nature.
    - ii) With that speech out of system, time for a related topic!
  - b) A few words on polygamy. God calls us on to "Leave our mother and father and cling to our wives" (Genesis 2:24). It implies one wife. It doesn't mean we can't remarry if say our spouses die or divorce occurs. While the bible never formally forbids polygamy, nowhere in the bible do you read anything good coming from it. It causes fights between the wives it causes leaders to turn from God to make the spouses happy. Yes it was common for the kings of that time era to have harems. As we'll discover the next chapter, having all those sons, will cause a major problem for the nation of Israel. However, that'll be a topic for the next lesson and the next chapter. Verse 32 mentions he died at an old age and was buried in the "family tomb".
25. Verse 33: No sooner had Gideon died than the Israelites again prostituted themselves to the Baals. They set up Baal-Berith as their god and<sup>34</sup> did not remember the LORD their God, who had rescued them from the hands of all their enemies on every side.<sup>35</sup> They also failed to show kindness to the family of Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) for all the good things he had done for them.
- a) OK, so why did the Israelites turn their back on Gideon after he died? It's the natural urge to rebel against authority. It's the feeling of "we know what's best and not God". We want to do it our way and not His way. Most of the book of Judges is in effect a lesson of what will happen when we refuse to turn our will over to God's will. We'll discover how that is going to play out in the next chapter. Meanwhile, it's time for a closing prayer.
26. Heavenly Father, Since You've called us to use our lives to make a difference for You, give us the boldness to make that difference. Make it obvious what you'd like us to do as Your disciples. Let us now waste the rest of our lives, but use it for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.

