

Judges 6-8

Good evening, tonight we will continue our study of the Old Testament.

We will be in Judges Chapter 6 to start, and we will look at the story of Gideon tonight.

Let us pray before we get into our study...

Now we ended the last chapter on a high note, after Deborah's song of victory we read...

Judges 5:31 So the land had rest for forty years.

And how wonderful it would be if Israel could just learn to stay in this place, to understand that when they pursued their God, and obeyed Him, they were so prosperous.

But as we will see here in Chapter 6, Israel will go into their fourth apostasy, and they will once again fall away from serving their God.

God will raise up His sixth judge, Gideon.

Now, we are told regarding these Old Testament accounts, in **1 Cor. 9:11 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.**

You see as we read of the Nation of Israel's constant ups and downs and their moral failure, and their falling away, we today can learn much from them.

Today, the same tragedies come upon the people of God.

It is not so much Baal or Molech vying for our hearts and minds, but the gods of materialism, the gods of pleasure, the gods of money, the gods of power, the god's of entertainment, or the gods of comfort that are at working tirelessly to steal us away from our God, and to hider our loyalty and love for Him.

When we allow these things to be the gods of our lives we find ourselves too courting disaster, as we enter into seasons of chastening and discipline from the Lord.

Our God is a jealous God, and an all-consuming fire, He will not share your heart with any other god.

And we learn these Old Testament accounts, these things that are written, that we can learn from them, and so we can understand the dangers of walking away from God.

We are taught that when our lives are lived for God, when we serve Him and His purposes, we then walk in the blessings promised to us as believers.

So last time we ended with 40 years of rest in the land, and now here in Chapter 6 we read...

Midianites Oppress Israel

6:1 Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. So the Lord delivered them into the hand of

Midian for seven years, 2 and the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of the Midianites, the children of Israel made for themselves the dens, the caves, and the strongholds which are in the mountains. 3 So it was, whenever Israel had sown, Midianites would come up; also Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them. 4 Then they would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep nor ox nor donkey. 5 For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, coming in as numerous as locusts; both they and their camels were without number; and they would enter the land to destroy it. 6 So Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord.

So Deborah and Barak's victories over Sisera and the Canaanites should have led to a sustaining revival in Israel.

But sadly it only took forty years for the stories to lose their impact on the younger generation.

The next generation went back to their easy going and carefree lives.

They once again synchronized their worship with the worship of their neighbors.

Pluralism and idolatry once again crept into the Hebrew way of life.

The writer here records another account of the chastening hand of the Lord.

Notice in verse 1 it clearly says the LORD delivered Israel into the hand of Midian for seven years.

The Midianites were also descendants of Abraham, from his wife Keturah. Gen. 25:2

They were a nomadic group in the north.

They would swoop down into Israel during their harvest times, and take all their sustenance.

We are told the Midianites along with the Amalekites and other people from the East would raid Israel and leave them with no food.

It says in verse 4 they would raid all the way down to Gaza.

In verse 5, we are told they came in swelling numbers, as numerous as the locust, and they also devoured like the locust.

And we see in verse 5a a new war weapon was being used, that the foot soldiers of Israel would be overwhelmed by.

The camel for the first time in the scripture record is mentioned here as a weapon of fear and mobility.

These large and fairly quick beasts struck fear into the heart of the Israelis, for they were hiding at this point in dens, caves, and other strongholds in the mountains.

They were no match for the invaders.

These invasions seemed to be a yearly event.

And you can imagine the torment of working all year long to provide for your family, and waiting for the crops to ripen to eat, and at the time of sowing, others taking the fruit off to their own dwelling place.

It was drier times, so we see in verse 6, the children of Israel after seven years of suffering, cried out to the LORD.

It is sad that often times, turning to God is a last resort, after all our own planning and ingenuity is exhausted, that is when we cry out to God for help.

He wants His people to come to Him first, and only to come to Him.

And because the children of Israel turned to God only as a last resort, we see they really did not have faith.

So we read now in verse 7...

7 And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried out to the Lord because of the Midianites, 8 that the Lord sent a prophet to the children of Israel, who said to them, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'I brought you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of bondage; 9 and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you and gave you their land. 10 Also I said to you, "I am the Lord your

God; do not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell." But you have not obeyed My voice."

God sends this unnamed prophet to give His message.

God often times starts His message with a reminder of what He has already accomplished in delivering them out of Egypt.

God reminds them of His instructions when He delivered the land into their hands, that they were not to fear the gods of the Amorites.

And sadly they disobeyed Him. So God sent a prophet, because His people needed genuine repentance.

They were asking for relief, as though this was God's fault, and really, it was their own disobedience that caused them to be in this situation.

Tonight, maybe you are going through trials and hardships, and you find yourself often praying for God to deliver you from them.

"God, why are you allowing this to happen in my life?"

And perhaps instead of deliverance, what God is really hoping for is repentance.

Often times in our disobedience to God's plan for our lives, He as any loving Father does, He chastens us, to bring us back into the right relationship with Him.

A reoccurring theme we learn from Israel in the Book of Judges, is that God loves His people too much to allow them to get away with rebellion.

He loves you too much tonight, to allow you to stay in your sin.

So next, we read, because God is merciful, He will once again raise up a judge, and deliver Israel.

Gideon

11 Now the Angel of the Lord came and sat under the terebinth tree which was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress, in order to hide it from the Midianites. 12 And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him, and said to him, "The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor!"

Now, God's selection is very interesting here.

We see a man, Gideon threshing wheat in a wine press out of fear of the Midianites.

Usually you would thresh wheat on a threshing floor up on hill, and you would toss up the wheat, and the breeze would take the chaff, as the kernel fell to the ground.

But we see this miserable man, having to thresh in a winepress.

This would usually be a hollowed out rock, and here Gideon is improvising to hide his fruit from the enemy.

And The Angel of the Lord, which we have established as Jesus on the pages of the Old Testament, sees the

timid and weak man Gideon, and calls him a mighty man of valor.

And the more we get to know Gideon we will see he definitely does not start out this way.

Isn't it amazing to ponder here, that God does not see Gideon as he is, but as he will be.

Gideon will be a mighty man of valor in the future, but he will go through the school of hard knocks to get there.

Understand this tonight, we come to God weak, we come to Him foolish, we come to Him unskilled, and when we place ourselves in His hands, He makes us into mighty men and women of valor.

God sees you for who you will be in Him, not in the fallen state we are currently in.

In Jesus, God sees each and every one of us complete, justified, and whole.

Paul says in **Rom 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.**

God sees it all as though it was accomplished already.

Now, Gideon is conscious of his own weakness and his difficult situation.

His troubles are so great, that even a face to face with the Angel of the Lord is not enough to convince him that God is really going to deliver Israel.

13 Gideon said to Him, "O my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites."

This is most likely the complaint of most of Gideon's countrymen.

And maybe as Gideon was threshing miserably on a winepress, these were the thoughts racing through his head.

And here he states his concerns openly.

How tragic it is that when we are so focused on our miseries we miss the obvious working of God right in front of us?

When we are focused on ourselves, we miss the miraculous happening right in front our noses.

Gideon does not own up to his own sin here, and blames God.

"Where were you? You have forsaken us."

Next we read...

14 Then the Lord turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?"

15 So he said to Him, "O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house."

16 And the Lord said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man."

The Lord assured Gideon that he will be a mighty deliverer, and a victorious warrior.

And Gideon ponders the words, and replies with a list of his own weaknesses.

He is from the lesser tribe of Manasseh, surely the ruling tribe and brother of Manasseh would be a better pick, the proud and powerful Ephraimites.

Gideon, even says, in his own family he is the least.

Gideon is wanting God to pick someone else.

For which we see in verse 16, God affirms that the weakling from Manasseh is His man.

Now, as the story progresses we will see Gideon is an exaggerated and is not honest here.

His family is wealthy enough to have at least 10 servants, and Gideon's stature will be strong and capable.

Now, maybe you might be thinking tonight, "if Jesus, came to me, and spoke face to face to me, I would not argue, the supernatural encounter would be enough for me to believe and trust Him."

Maybe you have even prayed before, “God if I could just see You, I would believe no problem.”

But understand Gideon here is face to face with the Angel of the Lord, and it is still not enough for him.

Understand the human heart has a depth of darkness to it that even the supernatural can be explained away.

I think of Jessica’s doctor, who told us it is impossible for her to have children.

He told her after sticking camera’s into her reproductive system, that one of her Fallopian Tubes was 100% closed up, and the other one was so full of scar tissue that it was impossible for an egg to be fertilized.

He showed us pictures that proved to us, we would never have children.

Now, after the first pregnancy, the first impossible, he was shocked, he even said, “I have never seen a woman’s body heal on its own, like yours, it is like nothing is wrong.”

We told him about the many people praying, and how Jesus healed her.

Now, because of his skepticism, we thought it could not happen again.

But after our third baby in the course of 4 years, he sat us down, and said, “Well, we need to talk now, about

how many children you want, because I don't think this is going to stop."

He was bewildered as far as science goes, and we tried to explain to him it was our God, and even with so much evidence, and even his own mouth saying he has no explanation but a miracle.

He could never bring himself to confess that it was God that had done the impossible.

But this is the condition of the human heart...

We see next, Gideon wants more proof...

17 Then he said to Him, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who talk with me. 18 Do not depart from here, I pray, until I come to You and bring out my offering and set it before You."

And He said, "I will wait until you come back."

19 So Gideon went in and prepared a young goat, and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour. The meat he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot; and he brought them out to Him under the terebinth tree and presented them. 20 The Angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay them on this rock, and pour out the broth." And he did so.

21 Then the Angel of the Lord put out the end of the staff that was in His hand, and touched the meat and

the unleavened bread; and fire rose out of the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. And the Angel of the Lord departed out of his sight.

22 Now Gideon perceived that He was the Angel of the Lord. So Gideon said, "Alas, O Lord God! For I have seen the Angel of the Lord face to face."

23 Then the Lord said to him, "Peace be with you; do not fear, you shall not die." 24 So Gideon built an altar there to the Lord, and called it The-Lord-Is-Peace. To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

So the Angel of the Lord waits patiently for Gideon to bring Him a prepared meal of a young goat.

Gideon is instructed to put the offering on the rock, for which the offering is taken up in a fire and consumed.

At the sight of this, Gideon now fully understands it was the Angel of the Lord he encountered.

He is comforted by the Lord, because it was widely believed that a face to face encounter with God would mean a person's death.

And Gideon builds his first altar to the Lord.

This should be enough for Gideon to believe God, but we will see later on, he is still a man riddled with doubt.

So God will now give Gideon his first task, in order to be a mighty man of valor for the Lord, Gideon must first get his own household in order.

25 Now it came to pass the same night that the Lord said to him, "Take your father's young bull, the second bull of seven years old, and tear down the altar of Baal that your father has, and cut down the wooden image that is beside it; 26 and build an altar to the Lord your God on top of this rock in the proper arrangement, and take the second bull and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the image which you shall cut down." 27 So Gideon took ten men from among his servants and did as the Lord had said to him. But because he feared his father's household and the men of the city too much to do it by day, he did it by night.

Gideon Destroys the Altar of Baal

28 And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, there was the altar of Baal, torn down; and the wooden image that was beside it was cut down, and the second bull was being offered on the altar which had been built. 29 So they said to one another, "Who has done this thing?" And when they had inquired and asked, they said, "Gideon the son of Joash has done this thing." 30 Then the men of the city said to Joash, "Bring out your son, that he may die, because he has torn down the altar of Baal, and because he has cut down the wooden image that was beside it."

31 But Joash said to all who stood against him, "Would you plead for Baal? Would you save him? Let the one who would plead for him be put to death by morning! If he is a god, let him plead for himself, because his

altar has been torn down!" 32 Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, "Let Baal plead against him, because he has torn down his altar."

33 Then all the Midianites and Amalekites, the people of the East, gathered together; and they crossed over and encamped in the Valley of Jezreel. 34 But the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon; then he blew the trumpet, and the Abiezrites gathered behind him. 35 And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, who also gathered behind him. He also sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali; and they came up to meet them.

We see here a dramatic scene, and another revealing insight to the man God chose here.

Gideon, and his family were in involved in Baal worship.

And Gideon's first assignment was to declare that Yahweh was his God, by using his father's costly bull, and the material from the altar of Baal, and the wood from the Asherah pole next to it, to make a sacrifice to the One True God.

God needed to deliver them from idolatry before He would deliver them from the Midianites.

Understand if we do not practice our faith at home, how are we practicing it sincerely anywhere else?

Gideon had to take a stand for God in his own life, before he could be used to lead others.

I wonder what gods we have allowed to creep into our households, what other beliefs we are allowing to exist alongside with what we call Christianity.

Today, much of the church has taken on a blended religion, where they have a touch of mysticism, new ageism, eastern meditation practices, and our culture has produced a melting pot of belief, where people even within the church are fearful of declaring absolute truths, and many have incorporated these isms into the truth of Christianity.

We must first rid our homes of the isms that are linked to our faith before God can use us to lead others in truth.

We see the difficulty for Gideon, he tries to do this in the secret of the night with 10 of his servants, but where 10 people know of a secret, the secret becomes no secret at all.

Word gets out, and the people rise up, and we see the depravity in these people even clearer when they decide they want to kill Gideon for his sacrifice to God. They come to the defense of Baal.

Now, we see here something interesting, the man who should be most upset with Gideon, the man who lost the most in this incident is actually Gideon's first convert and the person who comes to his defense.

Joash, Gideon's father, has an awakening, as realizes if Baal was a real God, than wouldn't he have taken care of Gideon.

But the lifeless idols lay destroyed, and Joash declares, "If he is a god, let him plead for himself."

They then called Gideon, Jerubbaal, which means "Baal's antagonist."

And this seems to have triggered a revival in Gideon's hometown.

As the people realize the deception they were in, and we see the Spirit of God comes upon Gideon in verse 34, and these very people who wanted to kill Gideon are now gathered behind him to fight the invaders.

Church, I have seen this often, the people who come against the church or your witness the greatest, are usually the ones who will be inspired by your uncompromising spirit.

When they see your boldness and confidence in the Lord, even with great hostility coming toward you, they will eventually be inspired.

Do not be shocked when those who mock you today for your faith, tomorrow come to faith themselves after you stand your ground.

Gideon's stand in his home, is now inspiring not only his tribesmen, but other tribes are getting wind of Gideon's faith, and they too are joining to him.

Many of the northern tribes gather to him, but it is interesting Gideon does not try to muster up the powerful tribe of Ephraim.

We will see why in the chapters to come.

Now even after this great victory here, Gideon will still show an inner weakness.

Let's read verses 36-40

The Sign of the Fleece

36 So Gideon said to God, "If You will save Israel by my hand as You have said — 37 look, I shall put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that You will save Israel by my hand, as You have said." 38 And it was so. When he rose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece together, he wrung the dew out of the fleece, a bowlful of water. 39 Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me, but let me speak just once more: Let me test, I pray, just once more with the fleece; let it now be dry only on the fleece, but on all the ground let there be dew." 40 And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, but there was dew on all the ground.

Now many people today try to quote this portion of scripture as a tactic in finding the will of God for their life.

But it was to Gideon's detriment that he did this.

This is not a biblical way for the Christian to seek God's Will.

This is an approach used by people who like Gideon lack faith in God's Word.

You see... God's Word tells you to love your enemy.

"Surely God, you don't mean Fred from work, God if your really want me to love that rotten, no good man, than make it when I get to work, that someone gives me a hot coffee, then I will know you want me to love him that man."

Now God's Word already speaks about it.

"God, do you want me to share the gospel with my co-worker who keeps asking questions about church? If so, than show me a cloud in the shape of a heart."

His Word already told you **2 Tim 4:2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season.**

Fleece setting is for the faithless.

Who are we to tell the Maker of the Heavens and the Earth the conditions of our obedience to His Word.

We should never tell God what He has to do before we will obey Him.

Gideon spent two days throwing out a fleece.

The first night he asked God make the fleece wet, and keep the ground dry, and the next night he reversed it.

And we see God is so gracious and patient with His man here, and God leaves Gideon with no option now, but to obey.

But more tests lay ahead for this man, as Gideon is becoming the mighty man of valor God saw in the beginning.

Gideon's Valiant Three Hundred

7:1 Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the well of Harod, so that the camp of the Midianites was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley.

2 And the Lord said to Gideon, "The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.' 3 Now therefore, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, 'Whoever is fearful and afraid, let him turn and depart at once from Mount Gilead.'" And twenty-two thousand of the people returned, and ten thousand remained.

Now remember the enemies of Israel that are gathered are as numerous as the locusts, they are well over 100,000 with camels.

And it would seem even 32,000 was not enough to gain any significant victory.

And even the majority of the soldiers gathered that day realize this.

Gideon, at the command of God enacts **Deut. 20:8** where it says...

8 "The officers shall speak further to the people, and say, 'What man is there who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house, lest the heart of his brethren faint like his heart.'

Fear would easily spread within the ranks of soldiers here.

So God sends the timid home, and that leaves Gideon with 10,000.

He sifts out those who are focused on the enemy more than being focused on their God.

That surely 10,000 is a little enough number for God to get the glory for all that was going to take place.

But God has more sifting to do, and another test is put forth.

4 But the Lord said to Gideon, "The people are still too many; bring them down to the water, and I will test them for you there. Then it will be, that of whom I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,' the same shall go with you; and of whomever I say to you, 'This one shall not go with you,' the same shall not go." 5 So he brought the people down to the water. And the Lord said to Gideon, "Everyone who laps from the water

with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set apart by himself; likewise everyone who gets down on his knees to drink." 6 And the number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, was three hundred men; but all the rest of the people got down on their knees to drink water. 7 Then the Lord said to Gideon, "By the three hundred men who lapped I will save you, and deliver the Midianites into your hand. Let all the other people go, every man to his place." 8 So the people took provisions and their trumpets in their hands. And he sent away all the rest of Israel, every man to his tent, and retained those three hundred men. Now the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.

So another division was made on the basis of who was alert and ready or not.

The one's who carelessly went down on their hands and knees and drank the water, were separated from the 300 who brought the water up to their mouth and lapped the water like a dog, while remaining alert.

God kept only those who had an awareness of the urgency of the hour.

The departing soldiers left their equipment with the remaining 300.

And each man had a torch, a trumpet and a jar, strange weapons of warfare indeed.

Verse 9 we see Gideon is still little untrusting...

9 It happened on the same night that the Lord said to him, "Arise, go down against the camp, for I have delivered it into your hand. 10 But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant, 11 and you shall hear what they say; and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp." Then he went down with Purah his servant to the outpost of the armed men who were in the camp. 12 Now the Midianites and Amalekites, all the people of the East, were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the seashore in multitude.

13 And when Gideon had come, there was a man telling a dream to his companion. He said, "I have had a dream: To my surprise, a loaf of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian; it came to a tent and struck it so that it fell and overturned, and the tent collapsed."

14 Then his companion answered and said, "This is nothing else but the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel! Into his hand God has delivered Midian and the whole camp."

15 And so it was, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, that he worshiped. He returned to the camp of Israel, and said, "Arise, for the Lord has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand."

God so graciously dealt with the fear still in Gideon's heart.

God has already told Gideon 3 times now that Israel would be victorious.

Aren't you so glad, our God is a patient God, longsuffering, and willing to take His time with us?

God does not condemn us because we have doubts and fears, His Word assures us in..

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

God gives us what we need in our times of doubt.

God here allows Gideon to hear the enemies dream with the interpretation.

And Gideon's faith is emboldened and he is no longer double-minded and unstable, but sure and confident in his God.

Verse 16 now...

16 Then he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put a trumpet into every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and torches inside the pitchers. 17 And he said to them, "Look at me and do likewise; watch, and when I come to the edge of the camp you shall do as I do: 18 When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then you also blow the

trumpets on every side of the whole camp, and say, 'The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!'"

19 So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outpost of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just as they had posted the watch; and they blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers that were in their hands. 20 Then 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 they cried, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" 21 And every man stood in his place all around the camp; and the whole army ran and cried out and fled. 22 When the three hundred blew the trumpets, the Lord set every man's sword against his companion throughout the whole camp; and the army fled to Beth Acacia, toward Zererah, as far as the border of Abel Meholah, by Tabbath.

So the 300 men surround the enemy camp with trumpets and torches, and blew the trumpets, and broke the jars.

It seems the jars concealed the light of the torches until they were smashed and the light shown forth on the enemy below.

The shouts and trumpet blasts confused the enemy and in the dark of night, they began killing one another, and fleeing for their lives.

And the word got out about the victory of these three hundred men, and courage came over the surrounding tribes and they come to join in the fight next...

23 And the men of Israel gathered together from Naphtali, Asher, and all Manasseh, and pursued the Midianites.

24 Then Gideon sent messengers throughout all the mountains of Ephraim, saying, "Come down against the Midianites, and seize from them the watering places as far as Beth Barah and the Jordan." Then all the men of Ephraim gathered together and seized the watering places as far as Beth Barah and the Jordan. 25 And they captured two princes of the Midianites, Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb they killed at the winepress of Zeeb. They pursued Midian and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon on the other side of the Jordan.

It is only after the first attack, Gideon then invites the Ephraimites to join in.

Now they will be indignant about this, they were easily the most powerful tribe in the region, and all throughout Israel's history, we see the pride of this tribe.

And there is no doubt if they would have saw Gideon sending away the thousands of Israeli warriors, they would have tried to intervene and stop him in the plan of God.

There was a reason Gideon left them out until the mop up operations.

We read now in verse 1 of Chapter 8...

Gideon Subdues the Midianites

8:1 Now the men of Ephraim said to him, "Why have you done this to us by not calling us when you went to fight with the Midianites?" And they reprimanded him sharply.

2 So 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 delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. And what was I able to do in comparison with you?" Then their anger toward him subsided when he said that.

We see the way they viewed themselves, and as Gideon is leading Israel in this reform and revolution against their oppressors, Ephraim is only concerned about their own reputation.

And they reprimand God's chosen leader.

And Gideon uses tact and grace here, and explains they are in fact the better tribe, and God has used them to destroy the two princes of Midian.

And we see their anger subsided once their ego was fed.

But Gideon's 300 are still engaged and carrying on in their own mission.

4 When Gideon came to the Jordan, he and the three hundred men who were with him crossed over, exhausted but still in pursuit. 5 Then he said to the men of Succoth, "Please give loaves of bread to the people who follow me, for they are exhausted, and I am pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, kings of Midian."

6 And the leaders of Succoth said, "Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in your hand, that we should give bread to your army?"

7 So Gideon said, "For this cause, when the Lord has delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers!" 8 Then he went up from there to Penuel and spoke to them in the same way. And the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered. 9 So he also spoke to the men of Penuel, saying, "When I come back in peace, I will tear down this tower!"

So they pursue the fleeing kings of Midian across the Jordan, and they come into the land of Gad, and they are exhausted from their pursuit.

They request food and they are denied, because the people of Succoth and Penuel did not have faith that 300 men would come out victorious over their oppressors.

They thought if they helped Gideon, then when it was all over, the tribe of Gad being in a vulnerable place would pay the price for Gideon's failure.

Gideon does not show the patience he did with Ephraim here, because this is out right rebellion against God.

At least the Ephraimites were zealous for the cause of their God.

Gideon will keep his word to these two cities.

Next, we read...

10 Now Zebah and Zalmunna were at Karkor, and their armies with them, about fifteen thousand, all who were left of all the army of the people of the East; for one hundred and twenty thousand men who drew the sword had fallen. 11 Then Gideon went up by the road of those who dwell in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah; and he attacked the army while the camp felt secure. 12 When Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued them; and he took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and routed the whole army.

Understand Gideon is not as weak as he put on earlier when God met him.

This man is a tenacious warrior, and he and his 300 men go to battle with 15,000 here and they easily gain the victory.

They take the two kings captive... we read now in verse 13...

13 Then Gideon the son of Joash returned from battle, from the Ascent of Heres. 14 And he caught a young man of the men of Succoth and interrogated him; and he wrote down for him the leaders of Succoth and its elders, seventy-seven men. 15 Then he came to the men of Succoth and said, "Here are Zebah and Zalmunna, about whom you ridiculed me, saying, 'Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in your hand, that we should give bread to your weary men?'" 16 And he took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth. 17 Then he tore down the tower of Penuel and killed the men of the city.

18 And he said to Zebah and Zalmunna, "What kind of men were they whom you killed at Tabor?"

So they answered, "As you are, so were they; each one resembled the son of a king."

19 Then he said, "They were my brothers, the sons of my mother. As the Lord lives, if you had let them live, I would not kill you." 20 And he said to Jether his firstborn, "Rise, kill them!" But the youth would not draw his sword; for he was afraid, because he was still a youth.

21 So Zebah and Zalmunna said, "Rise yourself, and kill us; for as a man is, so is his strength." So Gideon arose

and killed Zebah and Zalmunna, and took the crescent ornaments that were on their camels' necks.

So we see at some point these two kings ruthlessly killed Gideon's brothers.

And Gideon is handling his families retribution here.

He tries to humiliate these kings, by having his timid son kill them, as it would still be seen as vengeance for the blood of Gideon's brothers.

And you can imagine a little boy hacking away at these kings, it would have been painful and brutal, as he worked his way through their necks.

Maybe the boy was a witness to the brutality of his uncles being murdered, and Gideon wanted him to pay them back.

But the timid boy was afraid to draw his sword.

Now, the way a man died was a big deal in antiquity, so these kings taunt Gideon, and Gideon's strong stature, skilled with the sword, strikes them dead quickly.

Riding high on this great victory, we read next...

Gideon's Ephod

22 Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, "Rule over us, both you and your son, and your grandson also; 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 Then Gideon said to them, "I would like to make a request of you, that each of you would give me the earrings from his plunder." For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.

25 So they answered, "We will gladly give them." And they spread out a garment, and each man threw into it the earrings from his plunder. 26 Now the weight of the gold earrings that he requested was one thousand seven hundred shekels of gold, besides the crescent ornaments, pendants, and purple robes which were on the kings of Midian, and besides the chains that were around their camels' necks. 27 Then Gideon made it into an ephod and set it up in his city, Ophrah. And all Israel played the harlot with it there. It became a snare to Gideon and to his house.

28 Thus Midian was subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted their heads no more. And the country was quiet for forty years in the days of Gideon.

We see here something good in Gideon's character, as the people wanted him to be king.

He told them God was their ruler, as he denies his family of becoming the monarchy of Israel.

Well, we see he did this by word anyway, because we will see in the end Gideon, without allowing himself to be called king, lived like a king, and even established his sons as inheritors of a kingdom.

But here he asks for gold, and he is given much gold from the spoils of war.

Enough to make an Ephod.

Now this is a divining instrument, and it was something the priests wore.

So of course, the nation of Israel was always drawn to idolatry, so they just made an idol out of the thing.

And you just scratch your head at these people, and you wonder why and how they could just after such an amazing display of power by their God, turn so quickly from Him.

And Gideon who started out so humble ends his life in complete rebellion...

Death of Gideon

29 Then Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and dwelt in his own house. 30 Gideon had seventy sons who were his own offspring, for he had many wives. 31 And his concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, whose name he called Abimelech. 32 Now Gideon the son of Joash died at a good old age, and was buried in the tomb of Joash his father, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

Gideon began to multiply his wives like a king, and he also had a concubine in Shechem who bore him a son.

Now a son of a concubine would be a part of his mother's family and not a legitimate heir.

But the name Abimelech says a lot about Gideon's heart toward the end of his career.

Abimelech means "My father the king."

And we will take up the story of Abimelech next time...

But we read once again in verse 33...

33 So it was, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals, and made Baal-Berith their god. 34 Thus the children 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 house of Jerubbaal (Gideon) in accordance with the good he had done for Israel.

So Gideon, a humble man, in his humility was used to deliver Israel from the hordes of Midianites.

A great victory was accomplished by God through a measly 300 men, against upwards of 135,000 with countless camels.

God made the odds impossible, He thinned the ranks, to a place, that when the story was retold, only He could get the glory.

Sometimes God allows the trials in our lives to feel so hopeless, to get so bad, sometimes it is impossible, but He allows this, so when you look back at that trial, you can shake your head, and say, "That was the Lord, I had nothing at all to do with that."

And God is glorified.

We learned through this account, that we are to keep our eyes on God and not our problems or our enemy.

When we focus on the trial ahead, fear can corrupt our lives.

When we look to God, faith and courage will fill our hearts.

If you are focused on your problems tonight, they will just continue to grow, and consume you.

If you look to God and His Word, your problems get smaller as your God gets bigger.

Keep your eyes on God.

Lastly, it is so important to give God the glory for all the victories in our lives.

When we start taking credit for what God has done, when we start enjoying praise from others, then we are in trouble of setting up a golden ephod, and living the compromised life.

We must keep our pride at bay, and remain humble to be usable.

Ps 138:6 Though the Lord is on high,

Yet He regards the lowly;

But the proud He knows from afar.

Stay humble and you will marvel at what God can do with your simple life!

Tonight if you need prayer, the elders will be up here to minister to you during and after this last song.

If the Lord has spoken to you tonight, please come up and get prayer.

Let's pray...