



Judges 6-8

Tape #7072
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By Chuck Smith

CHAPTER 6

But, *the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD:* and we go into the next cycle: the fourth apostasy; and Gideon, who is raised up as the sixth judge.

"These things," the Scripture says, *"were written for us as examples so that we would not fall into the same errors."* The story is one of man's failure to keep covenant with God, man's failure to heed the warnings of God. The tragedies that befall a person who turns their back on God and who begins to worship and serve other gods; and in these days those would be the gods of materialism, the gods of this world: the gods of pleasure, the gods of money, the gods of power. If these become the gods of your life, if you turn from serving the true and living God, then you are courting disaster. Your life will go into bondage. You will become a slave of your possessions. And so these things are written so that we might be warned against the dangers of turning our backs on God, and that we might live for God and serve God with all of our hearts, with all of our souls, with all of our mind, and with all of our strength.

The 5th chapter of Judges, as you recall, is the song of Deborah that rose out of the victory that God had given to the forces of Israel over Jabin, the king of Hazor, and his captain of his army, Sisera. The 5th chapter ends with, *"And the land had rest forty years."* Chapter 6 begins,

And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years.

This is becoming now a pattern: this is the fourth apostasy, and the fourth servitude that Israel has gone into as the result of their apostasy.

The hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made dens in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds. And so it was, when Israel had planted, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them; and they encamped against them, and they destroyed the increase of the earth, till you come unto Gaza, which is in the south coastal area of the land.

Now, the Midianites would be coming from the north, and so they really took the entire land: they went all the way on down as far south as Gaza. The Midianites were nomadic type of people. They did not build cities, they lived in tents. And they just sort of moved from area to area. So was it true of the Amalekites. And so, they had more or less just moved into the land, invaded the land. More or less, as with the Amalekites, they are the Bedouin type of people. And whenever the children of Israel would plant, they would go out and rip off the harvest.

They encamped against them, destroyed the increase of the land, all the way to Gaza, they left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor donkey. They had completely devastated all of the crops, and all of the animals. *They came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitudes;* like a plague of locusts, just covering the ground *for both they and their camels were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it.*

Now, we do know that just from the forces of Midian there were 135,000 men who were killed who were part of the army: those who were able to draw a bow. And so, the total number was into the hundreds of thousands that came into the land.

Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the LORD.

And so, we see the pattern: God blesses them, they turn their backs on God. God turns His back on them, and they are oppressed by their enemies. Finally, they cry unto the LORD and God delivers them. They serve the LORD, they're prospered; they forget the LORD, they go into captivity again.

And so they cried unto the LORD. And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of the Midianites, that the LORD sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage; and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of all that oppressed you, I drove them out from before you, and gave you their land; and I said unto you, I am the LORD your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell: but you have not obeyed my voice.

And so, the people were crying unto the LORD, and God sent a prophet that rebuked them. Rebuked them for breaking the covenant with God: declaring, really, that 'Your calamity has come because you have not walked in the way of God.'

And as we look at our own lives, we find that this is so often true: our calamity comes because we forsake the Lord. And we begin, really, to worship other gods: materialistic kind of gods. And we get into all kinds of problems. And in our difficulties we cry unto the LORD.

Now, the LORD is rebuking them through the prophet, calling their attention to the reason why they're experiencing their calamity. But God doesn't just rebuke us, He is so good: He just tries to instruct us. He tries to teach us through these things. And you wonder, why don't we learn?

And so, the LORD came, really, to deliver.

There came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which was at Ophrah, that pertains to Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites. So, Gideon is the son of Joash, an Abiezrite: which is the family name of the tribe of Manasseh. And the angel of the LORD appeared unto Gideon, and said unto him, The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valour. And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD is with us, why then is all of this befallen us? and where are all of the miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and has delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.

I find this beginning of a conversation, Gideon with the angel, quite interesting. First of all, I find it interesting that the angel would call him *a mighty man of valour*. He surely did not perceive himself that way. And yet, that's how the LORD looked upon him. The LORD's perception of him was better than his own perception.

If we only realized how valuable we were in the sight of God. A lot of times we sort of deprecate ourselves, we put ourselves down. And yet, the LORD places such tremendous value upon you.

Paul the apostle, when he wrote to the church at Ephesus, spoke of how he prayed for them. And one of his prayers for them was that they might *know His exceeding rich inheritance in the saints*. In other words, he was saying, 'If you only knew how much God prized and valued you.'

God was looking at Gideon and saying, 'Hey, you're a mighty man of valour.' Gideon says, 'Hey man, I'm nobody.' Yet, how the LORD perceives him.

Secondly, Gideon arguing with the angel: he said, *"The LORD is with you,"* he said, 'Hey man, *if the LORD was with us, then why are we having all of this trouble? where are the miracles that our fathers told us about?* They said that God was able to work miracles: where are they? We've been suffering oppression under these Midianites.'

So the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this your might, and you will save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have I not sent you? And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewithal shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.

God has the hardest time conscripting men to do His work. When God called Moses at the burning bush, he said, 'Oh LORD, I can't go. I'm not eloquent. I can't speak.' When God called Jeremiah, he said, 'Oh LORD, I'm too young: they'll never listen to me.' God calls Gideon: he says, 'I can't go, my family is poor: one of the poorest tribes in the tribe of Manasseh, and I'm the least in the family.' When Samuel instructed Saul, (and we'll be getting that in a few weeks), that God had chosen him to be the first king over Israel, he said, 'Oh no, no: it can't be. My father's house is nothing, and I'm the least of my father's house.' And yet, it is interesting that God so often chooses a man who is humble to do His work. And it's probably this very attitude of humility that God is often looking for when He is seeking a servant to go out and to do His work.

The LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with you,

And that is God's answer to his cry of weakness: 'LORD, I can't do it;' and the LORD's answer always to our sense of weakness and inability, the LORD's answer is always, *"I will be with you."* That's all I need. 'LORD, I'm nothing: I can't do it.' *"--I'll be with you."* *'Well, if God be for us, who can be against us?'*

I will be with you, Surely you will smite the Midianites as one man. And he said unto him, 'Now, LORD, is this for real?' If I have really found grace in your sight,

'If You're really talking to me,' - you know, ('Am I just imagining all of this? Is this just some) -- would you just wait here a minute?'

Let me go get a present for you, or, a sacrifice for you. And he said, I will wait I will not depart. And so Gideon went in, and he made ready a little goat, and unleavened cakes he didn't have time for them to rise, and so he just baked them without waiting for them to rise *out of an ephah of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and he brought it out unto him under the oak, and he presented it. And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon the rocks,*

So, he came out with this basket, with this shish kabob from the little goat that was prepared, and the unleavened cakes, and this broth, and says, 'Set them there on the rock,' *and then he said, pour the broth over it.*

Now, this turned out to be a burnt offering and a peace offering: the meal. The cakes were a meal offering, which was a peace offering. The burnt offering: the goat. And the drink offering: *"pour the broth over it."*

And so he poured the broth over it. And the angel of the LORD put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and he touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there arose up a fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the LORD departed out of his sight.

So, here was quite a manifestation. Now, in a couple of weeks when we get to Samson, we're going to find the angel doing much the same thing, only the angel ascends up into heaven in the fire in the case of Samson. Maybe he did here; maybe it's the same angel that likes to pull this little stunt. But the awareness that Gideon had was that he had seen the angel of the LORD:

And when Gideon perceived that it was an angel of the LORD,

You see, he was wanting proof. You know, *'If I have found grace in your sight, if you're really talking to me, if this is for real, then wait and let me offer you a present.'* And when he did this, then *Gideon perceived that it was an angel of the LORD,*

and he said, Alas, O Lord GOD! because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face. And the LORD said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: you will not die.

How many times the words of God to us are *"Peace be unto you?"* How many times God's word to us is, *"Fear not?"* How many times we need those words: peace. Our hearts are troubled over the issues of life, and God speaks, and says, *'Peace.'* We're fearful of the uncertainty of the future, and God says, *'Fear not.'*

Then Gideon built an altar there unto the LORD, and he called it Jehovah-shalom: unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

Gideon picked up on the statement that God said--*Peace unto you.* And he called the altar *Jehovah-shalom*, which is, "Jehovah is our peace." Now, he is been called to war. He's been called to lead the people of God against the Midianites. But by faith in the promise of God, when he built the altar and called it 'Jehovah-shalom,' he looked beyond the war to the peace that God would bring. And so, really, the whole experience is one of faith: as he looks beyond the conflict that is coming to the peace that God gives, and he called the altar, in faith, 'Jehovah-shalom:' or, "the LORD has become our peace."

And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Take your father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that your father has, and cut down the grove that is by it:

The grove was the pillar unto the goddess Astharoth: the female counterpart to Baal. And so he is told to take this bullock, and to *break down his father's altar unto Baal, and the grove that was by it.*

And build instead an altar unto Jehovah your God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove thou shalt cut down. So, this wooden pillar that was worshipped as a monument to Astharoth was to be used to kindle the fire on the altar. *And Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the LORD had said unto him: and so it was, because he feared his father's household, and the men of the city, he could*

not do it by day, so he did it by night.

Now, the people were pretty much into the worship of Baal: they were into idolatry. So much so, that had he tried to do that during the day, there would have been one big confrontation, there would have been a battle. And so, he decided to do it at night while they were all asleep. He would go out there, break down the altar of Baal; and on that spot, the rock, where the altar had been built, he would take the wood from the grove, and build an altar unto the LORD, and offer this bullock unto Jehovah.

So when the men of the city arose early in the morning, and behold, the altar of Baal was cast down, and the grove was cut down that was by it, and the second bullock was offered upon the altar that was built. They said one to another, Who has done this thing? And they asked around, and they said, It was Gideon the son of Joash who has done it. So the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out your son, that he may die: because he has cast down the altar of Baal, and because he has cut down the grove that was by it. And Joash said unto them that stood against him, Will you plead for Baal? will you save him? Do you have a god that you have to rescue? Isn't your god able to take care of himself? he that will plead for him, let him be put to death

It shows you really how deeply entrenched was the worship of Baal in the hearts of these people: they're ready to kill Gideon because he broke down the altar of Baal.

while it is yet morning: if he is a god, let him plead for himself, because one has cast down his altar. In other words, 'let him defend himself.'

I think how many times we find ourselves foolishly caught in the position of trying to defend God as though God needs defense. We don't have to defend God, He's perfectly capable of defending Himself. And so was the logic of Joash, the father of Gideon: *if Baal is a god, let him defend himself.*

Therefore on that day he called Gideon Jerubbaal, saying Let Baal plead for himself, and Jerubbaal literally means, 'let Baal plead' because he has thrown down his altar. Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together, and they went over, and they pitched in the valley of Jezreel.

Now, Jezreel is the valley between mount Gilboa and mount Moreh. It is in the eastern part of the valley of Megiddo. It is known as the valley of Jezreel, the valley of Megiddo; they all more or less run together. And it begins at Bethshemesh which is just up out of the Jordan river at the northern end of mount Gilboa range. And the valley is about 15 miles long and 12 miles wide: a very fertile valley. It is the valley where the final battle will be fought: the battle of Armageddon.

Coming up from Bethshemesh is the natural way to invade the land of Israel if you're coming from the north. It's a natural pass into the valley, and it goes all the way to Haifa on the Mediterranean.

And so, the Midianites, the Amalekites, and these people from the east had come into this valley of Jezreel.

But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; and Abiezer was gathered after him.

So, we notice here: *the Spirit of God coming upon Gideon.* And we are going to be reading about this more and more as God's Spirit begins to move upon these men, upon the judges of Israel.

And he sent messengers throughout all of Manasseh; who also was gathered after him: and he sent messengers unto the tribes of Asher, to Zebulun, to Naphtali; and they came up to meet him.

So, he sent messengers to, basically, the tribes that were in the northern section. No mention of messages down to Judah, or Simeon, or Benjamin, or even Ephraim; but just those that were in the northern portion.

And Gideon said unto God, If you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said, Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew is on the fleece only, and it is dry upon all of the earth around it, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said.

Now, this is the second test, really. The first was, 'If you're really for real, and you really mean this, and you're for real: then let me bring you the present:' and then he saw the angel kindle the fire with his staff and consumed the sacrifice. Now, again, he is putting the thing to the test. He's uncertain still if God is really in this. And so, Gideon put the fleece out on the ground.

And on the next day, he thrust the fleece together, he wrung out the dew out of the fleece, and there was a bowl full of water.

Then Gideon probably thought, 'Perhaps there is some kind of principle here that I'm not familiar with: some law of physics that I don't know. It may be that fleece always collects water.' So he said, 'LORD, give me one more chance. I would like to do it again tonight: only, let's reverse it.'

in the morning let the ground be covered with dew, and let the fleece be dry.

And so, the next morning: when the ground was covered with dew and the fleece was dry, Gideon determined that God had called him, and would deliver the Midianites into his hands.

Now, because of Gideon's putting out this fleece it is instituted a practice by many people of creating some kind of a fleece whereby they might ascertain the will of the Lord, or the plan of God.

We find that even in the New Testament they sought by drawing straws, so to speak, *casting lots*, to determine which of the two disciples should take the place of Judas Iscariot: whether it would be Barnabas or Mathias. And when they cast the lots, the lot fell on Mathias and he was numbered with the twelve.

We do not read of this practice taking place in the New Testament after the day of Pentecost. There is no further mention of people seeking to ascertain the will of God by the casting of lots, or by drawing straws, or by any other method; as God's Spirit began to direct the early church: *"And the Spirit spake and said, Separate unto me Paul and Barnabas for the ministry wherein I have called them."* And there began to be a more direct leading of the Spirit that they understood, and no further checking or testing of the leading.

I think that one of the most important things is to know whether or not God is in an issue, and I think that it is also one of the most difficult things to ascertain. People are always coming and saying, "How can I know the will of God? I feel like I want to do *this*, but I don't know if God wants me to do it or not. How can I really know if that's what God wants?" And that is not an easy question to answer. I can't tell you how you can know for sure. All I can do is tell you what I do. As Jesus said, *"Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."* So, I ask the Lord to guide me, and then I knock on doors and see which one opens.

I don't try to force doors open. I think that a lot of times we make a mistake when we get something in our mind, and we're determined that 'this is what God wants, and we're going to see it through no matter what.' And we find ourselves constantly pushing, constantly under pressure: trying to push things, trying to make it happen. I don't think that we have to make the things of God happen. I think that if we are in God's will, they're going to happen: the doors are going to open up. As the Lord said to the church of Philadelphia, *"I have set before thee an open door that no man can shut."* And if God is in it, God is going to bless it, and God is going to anoint it: and it's just going to flow.

I think where we get into trouble is trying to make a program go, trying to keep a program alive when God is maybe wanting to kill it. I don't think that we should have any artificial support systems on any program within the church. If it can't live on its own, then let's let it die. Let's not try to keep it alive with all kinds of efforts, and energies of man. And I think that a lot of times we make a mistake in that we are determined that, 'this is what we're going to do: we're going to push this thing through.' Rather than saying, 'Hey Lord, if this is what You want: we're available, we're open. Do the work,.. and we'll be glad to do it.' God works, and He is able to work. He's able to open the doors He wants, and He's able to close the doors He wants.

[I have found that many times when God was closing a door, I did not understand it, but yet I committed myself to it: I said, 'Well, we tried.'] When we were looking for property to build Calvary Chapel, we had found a piece of property over on Bay Street in Costa Mesa; in fact, it had belonged to Theodore Robbins Ford. And they were going to sell us 2/3 of an acre to build our sanctuary. And at that time we were planning a sanctuary for about 250 people, and that was a big jump for where we were. And Theodore Robbins was going to build a parking lot for his employees, but give us the use of the parking lot on Sundays for our services.

And so we went to the planning commission of Costa Mesa, and showed it to them, and they thought that it looked good - they told us. They said, "You know it's always hard for churches to build parking lots," and so forth. "This might be an interesting answer." And so we took it to the planning commission, and they denied our permit. And I was upset with the planning commission of Costa Mesa, I was upset with bureaucracy, and the whole thing. We appealed it to the city council, and they were more diplomatic, more astute politicians. They granted us the permit providing we would purchase enough extra property, in case Theodore Robbins ever rescinded the parking lot, we would have enough property of our own to park the cars. The neighbors who were in the council meeting immediately tripled the prices of their property, figuring they had us over a barrel. But instead, we said, 'Well, evidently this isn't what the Lord wants.' And we didn't try to force it, we didn't try to push it, we walked away from it.

I think now of what a foolish mistake it would have been to have bought that property. How God intervened, and how much trouble we could have gotten into had we forced the issue. I think that we need to be flexible, we need to be open; but I don't think that we ever need to really just 'do or die,' or force the issues. God is able to take care of things. I think that it's when we get into that area of forcing issues that we can easily get out of God's will, and go beyond what God is seeking or desiring to do.

You say, "Well, do you use fleeces today?" No, I really don't. "Do you object to fleeces?" No, I really don't. But I can't really tell you some simple, easy way to know what God's will is in a given situation. It just takes a lot of prayer, a lot of waiting upon God, and then stepping in faith.

CHAPTER 7

Then Jerubbaal, who is Gideon, and all the people that were with him, rose up early, and pitched

beside the well of Harod: now, the well of Harod is at the foot of mount Gilboa towards the center end, approximately 8 miles from Bethshemesh, so that the host of the Midianites were on the north side of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley of Jezreel. So, from the spring of Harod you can look out across the valley and they could see the vast host of the Midianites out there. And the LORD said unto Gideon, the people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, My own hand hath saved me.

It is interesting that though they were outnumbered by a vast amount, 135,000 Midianites were slain, there were 32,000 Israelites, yet God said, 'If I deliver the Midianites to the 32,000, they'll vaunt themselves, and they will declare what they have done.' They won't give God the glory.

God, when He works, desires to receive the glory for the work that He has done. He doesn't want man taking the glory that belongs to God. And yet, there seems to be a prevalent danger of men taking the glory for what the Lord has wrought. God does not appreciate that. God did not want that. And so God said, 'Cut the army down.'

Go out to the men, and proclaim to the ears of the people, saying, Whoever is fearful and trembling, the word 'afraid' there in the Hebrew is 'trembling,' let him return and depart early from the mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty two thousand; and there remained only ten thousand.

And so God, now, is thinning out the forces in order that He might get men that He might use to bring the victory to Israel in such a way that God will get the glory for the victory. And the first that God eliminates are those that are fearful and those that are trembling. They were disqualified. God knows that those that are fearful are looking at the enemy rather than looking at God. God knows that those that are fearful, in the midst of the battle, can turn and run, and create a panic among the people of God. God knows that those that are trembling are weak, cannot stand up to the fight. And so He sent home those that were fearful and trembling.

And the LORD said to Gideon, The people are still too many; bring them down to the water, and I will try them for you there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, These shall go with you, the same will go with you; and whosoever I will say unto you, These shall not go with you, the same shall not go. So he brought the people down to the water: and the LORD said unto Gideon, Every one that laps the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shall you set by himself; and likewise every one that bows down upon his knees to drink. And the number of them that lapped, putting their hands to their mouth, were three hundred men: but all of the rest of the people bowed down on their knees to drink the water.

So, the division was made between those that would cup the water in their hands, and drink it out of their hands, and those that just got down and put their face in the water. And those who would cup the water, the 300, then God said: verse 7,

By these three hundred I will deliver the Midianites into your hand: and let the rest of the people go home to their own villages.

So, those who were not alert, those who did not have the sense of urgency, those that just buried their faces in the water were sent home. And God kept only those who had the awareness of the urgency of the hour: those that cupped the water in their hands and lapped it out of their hands.

So the people took victuals in their hands, and their trumpets: and they sent home the rest of

Israel every man to his own tent, and they retained the three hundred men: and the host of Midian was beneath them in the valley. Now it came to pass that same night, that the LORD said unto him, Arise, and go down to the host; for I have delivered them into your hand. 'Okay Gideon, go down and wipe them out.' But if you are afraid, now, remember he sent those that were afraid, those who were fearful and trembling: 'If you are afraid, if you are fearful,' go down with Phurah your servant to the host: and you will hear what they are saying; and afterwards your hands will be strengthened to go down unto the host. So he went down with Phurah his servant which, of course, indicates that he was fearful, unto the outside of the armed men that were in the host. And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east were laying along the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; their camels were without number, like the sand by the sea side for multitude. And when Gideon was come, behold, there was a man that told a dream to his friend, and he said, Behold, I dreamed a dream and, lo, there was cake of barley bread and it tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along. And his fellow answered and said, This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all of the host.

So, here was a fellow who was sharing his dream, and another guy who interpreted his dream, and Gideon hears his name and the interpretation. 'That's Gideon the son of Joash, and God has delivered Midian into his hand.'

And so it was, that when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation, he worshipped, 'All right, Lord,' and he returned to the host of Israel, and he said, Arise; for the LORD has delivered into your hand the host of Midian. So he divided the three hundred men into three companies, he put a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers. And he said unto them, Now watch me, and do as I do: behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, and it shall be, as I do, that ye shall do. When I blow with a trumpet, and all that are with me, then blow with your trumpets also on every side of the camp, and say, The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon. So Gideon, and the hundred men that were with him, came unto the outside of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch; or, at 12:00 midnight, because they had just newly set the watch: the middle watch was from 12:00 midnight till 3:00 in the morning, and they had just newly set the watch so it was just about midnight, and they blew the trumpets, and broke the pitchers that were in their hands.

So, the 'flaming torches.' And so, the Midianites were awakened out of their sleep in the middle of the night with a blare of these trumpets. They looked, and here were these flaming torches, and the trumpets blaring: and confusion came upon them.

And the three companies blew their trumpets, broke the pitchers, held the lamps in their left hands, trumpets in their right hands: and they cried, The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon. And they stood every man in his place round about the camp: and the host ran, and cried, and fled. Panic struck the Midianites. And the three hundred blew the trumpets, and the LORD set every man's sword against his fellow, so, they started swinging with their swords but they were wiping out each other in the darkness there, even throughout all the host: and the host fled to Bethshittah in Zererath, and unto the border of Abelmeholah, unto Tabbath. And the men of Israel gathered themselves together out of Naphtali, and out of Asher, and out of all Manasseh, and they pursued after the Midianites. Then Gideon sent messengers throughout all mount Ephraim, saying to the tribe of Ephraim, Come down against the Midianites, and take before them the waters unto Bethbarah and Jordan. In other words, 'Go cut off the pass so that they can't cross over Jordan and escape.' And the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and took the waters unto Bethbarah and Jordan. And they took the two princes of the Midianites, Oreb and Zeeb; and they slew Oreb on the rock, and

Zeeb they slew at the winepress of Zeeb, and they pursued Midian, and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon on the other side of Jordan. So they caught two of the princes, beheaded them, and brought the heads to Gideon.

CHAPTER 8

And the men of Ephraim said unto him, Why have you treated us like this, why didn't you call us, when you went out to fight with the Midianites? And they did chide with him sharply.

So, here are troublemakers: 'Why didn't you call us,' you know? Had Gideon been defeated it would have been a different story, you can be sure of that. But victorious: they're chiding with him, they're really getting on his case. And Gideon shows some real diplomacy here.

He said unto them, What have I done in comparison to what you have done? Is not the gleanings of the grapes of Ephraim

Now, the gleanings are going in and just picking the grapes after the harvesters are gone through: those little grapes that are still there. The gleanings:

Are they not better than the vintage that is, the first picking of Abiezer?

'Man, you guys. Your gleanings are more than our vintage.' You know, 'What have we done compared to you?'

God has delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb: what was I able to do in comparison to what you did? Then their anger was abated toward him, when he said that.

Very diplomatic to be sure. And Gideon does show some depth of character. The men of Ephraim are going to do this again next week, but they're going to be dealing with a different kind and they're going to wish they hadn't done it. They did it once too often. Gideon was gracious, the next guy won't be.

And Gideon came to Jordan, and passed over, he, and the three hundred men that were with him, and they were fainting, they were weak, still they were pursuing. And he said unto the men of Succoth, Give, I pray you, some loaves of bread unto the people that follow me; for they are faint, and I am pursuing after Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian.

And man, these guys have quite the names, don't they? Zebah, and Zalmunna, and Zeeb, and Oreb. I mean, the names are sort of terrifying. ZALMUNNA!

And the princes of Succoth said, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in your hand, that we should give bread unto your army? And Gideon said, 'Let me tell you something, fellows.' When God has delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, I'm going to tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with the briers.

Here, he came to the men of Succoth: he was needing bread, he was needing supplies for his troops. But they were trying to play it safe when they said, 'Hey, you haven't conquered them yet. What if they defeat you? Then they're going to come back and get even with us.' And so, they refused to help.

And so he came to Penueel, and they answered him the same way as the men of Succoth: and so he

said unto the men of Penuel, When I come again in peace, I'm going to break down your tower. Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor, and their host were with them, there were only about fifteen thousand left, of all of the children of the east: they had already slain about one hundred and twenty thousand of them that drew the sword. And Gideon went up by the way of them that dwelt in the tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and he smote the host: for the host was secure. And when Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued after them, and he took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and he discomfited all of their host. And Gideon the son of Joash returned from battle before the sun was up. And he caught a young man of the men of Succoth, and he inquired of him: and he said, Describe to me the princes of Succoth, and the elders of the city, even seventy seven men. And they came to the men of Succoth, and he said, Behold, Here is Zebah and Zalmunna, with whom you did upbraid me, saying, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in your hand, that we should give you bread for your men that are weary? And he took the elders of the city, and he took the thorns of the wilderness he got some cacti type plants and briers, and with them he taught them a lesson. They do grow some pretty thorny bushes, and all, around that area. It would be pretty miserable. And then he came to Penuel, and he beat the tower in Penuel and slew the men of the city. And then he said unto Zebah and Zalmunna, What manner of men were they whom you killed at Tabor? And they answered, They are a lot like you: each one of them resembled the child of a king. And he said unto them, They were my brothers, they are the sons of my mother: and as the LORD lives, if you had saved them alive, I would not kill you. And he said to Jether his oldest son, Kill them, son. But the youth did not draw his sword: for he was afraid, because he was still just a young boy. Then the kings Zebah and Zalmunna said, Rise up, and fall on us: for as a man is, so is his strength. In other words, 'Be a man.' And Gideon arose, and slew Zebah and Zalmunna, and took away the ornaments that were on their camels' necks. Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule over us, and your sons, and your son's sons: for you have delivered us from the hands of the Midians. And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, nor will my sons rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you.

So, again: the depth of the character of Gideon: tremendous. Here they are wanting to elevate him, 'Rule over us, and let your sons.' They want him to set up, really, a dynasty. They're wanting to set up a monarchy. He says, 'No way. The LORD will rule over you.'

So Gideon said, I will just have one request, I would like to have all of the earrings that you took off of those guys that you wiped out. So he laid out a blanket, and they willingly gave the earrings on the garment. And the weight of the gold in these earrings was about fifty pounds of gold; pretty good amount, besides all the ornaments, and collars, and the purple raiment that were on the kings that he took, beside the chains that were about their camels' necks. So Gideon made an ephod

Now, an ephod is sort of a divining instrument. The priest wore the ephod. And they would often come to inquire of the ephod. And it's spoken of in the Old Testament as a divining instrument, an instrument by which they could ascertain the will of God. And it could be that Gideon's purpose in this ephod was to ascertain God's will. He made the ephod out of the gold that was taken but it became sort of an idol to the people of Israel.

He put it in his city, in Ophrah: and all of Israel went there whoring after it: and it became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house. It became a real problem as it became an object of worship. And thus was Midian subdued before the children of Israel, and they lifted up their heads no more. That was the end of Midian's power. And the country was in quietness for forty years during all of the days of Gideon. And Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and dwelt in his own house. And Gideon had seventy sons begotten of his own body: for he had many wives. And so, this was a period beginning in Israel where there was a multiplicity of wives, but seventy sons. He had a concubine

that lived in Shechem, and she also bore him a son, whose name is called Abimelech. And we'll get in the next chapter all about Abimelech and his treachery. Gideon the son of Joash died in a good old age, buried in the sepulchre of Joash his father, there at Ophrah of the Abiezrites. And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, what do you suppose? the children of Israel turned again, and went a whoring after Baalim, and made Baalberith their god. And the children of Israel remembered not Jehovah their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side: and neither showed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely, Gideon, according to all of the goodness which he had showed to Israel.

So, in the next chapter we get the treachery against the sons of Gideon by the men, and the rising of Abimelech. And we'll be taking next week the next three chapters again because we would like to get the whole story of Abimelech and Jephthah in if possible.

Again, important lessons that we can learn from the story of Gideon: never worry when God thins the ranks. If God is cutting down the numbers, He's doing it for a purpose. It's interesting to me that God had to thin the ranks until it became ludicrous: 300 men against 135,000 that '*drew a sword.*' I mean, God made the odds so impossible that there was just no way that man could boast.

You know, sometimes God lets things get so bad that only He could deliver so that you can't possible take any credit or glory for what happens at all. You just shake your head, and say, 'Well, the Lord did it, man. Nothing I could do.'

And I think it's sort of sad that we sometimes force God to make us get in such horrible straits before He can work. Because He knows our hearts: He knows how we like to glory. We like to say, "Well, now, I've got this program: and I just decided that *this*, and *this*," and we're always ready to bring glory to ourselves. "Well, I set my mind; I determined that I was just going to correct my thinking; and, I've been thinking the wrong way. When I decided to just--" you know. And we try to bring glory to ourselves. But God will not allow any flesh to glory in His sight.

And so, sometimes we just make it tough on ourselves because of our desire to glory; and God just lets it get worse, and worse, and worse: as He sort of thins out the ranks until we say, "God, help; there's nothing I can do. Lord, this is hopeless, Lord." And then He works, and all I can say, "Well, man: it was a hopeless mess, but God took care of it." To God be the glory: great things He has done.

Keep your eyes on God rather than on the problems, or the enemy. Looking at the enemy: fear will fill your heart. Looking at God: faith will fill your heart. Whatever you look at seems to grow. If you're looking at the problems, they grow, they compound, they get worse. If you're looking at God, He grows, gets greater. The more I look at God, the smaller my problems look. The more I look at my problems, the smaller God looks. I get overwhelmed by my problems. Keep your eyes on the Lord.

Keep on a constant alert: even when doing the necessary things of life like drinking water. Knowing that we are in a battle, we're facing an enemy: be alert! Live in that sense of urgency. The urgency for prayer, the urgency for the reading and the studying of the Word, the urgency of getting the gospel out, the urgency of witnessing. Live in a sense of urgency - for these are desperate days.

Make sure that I am in the will of God: being open, being flexible, being ready to change; not getting so set in my ways. Oh, how many problems arise because, 'I am determined that *this* is the way it's to be done:' and I am inflexible, in trenchant - that's not good.

Give God the glory for any and all of the victories that may come for His deliverance that He has

given over the enemy. Always be ready to give God the glory. Don't take the credit, don't take the glory.

Important lessons. God help us.

Hide them, Lord, in our hearts.

May the Lord be with you, may the Lord bless you; may He keep you in His love. May He guide you through this week. And may we give thanks unto God continually for His grace, His mercy, and His love toward us through Jesus Christ.