

Judges 7-8 Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

For the last 2 Sundays, we've been looking at the story of Gideon in ch. 6.

Tonight we'll conclude it with chs. 7 & 8.

But let's begin with a quick summary of what we've looked at so far .

..

II. The Judges

2:11-16:

E. Gideon

Chs. 6-8

1. Midianites hassle Israel 6:1-10
2. Gideon's call 6:11-24
3. Gideon's first mission 6:25-32
4. Gideon rallies the people 6:33-35
5. Gideon seeks to know God's will 6:36-40

Then we come to that interesting section in which Gideon seeks to discover God's will by asking for a sign.

We looked at this Sunday, but need to look at it again tonight because we left a question unanswered.

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.

V. 34 tells us the Spirit of God moved Gideon to rally the men of Israel for battle.

They came out in force.

But as a little time passes, Gideon begins to have second thoughts; he begins to over-analyze & hesitates.

He falls victim to the “paralysis of analysis” – a common problem for some leaders.

He knows God has called him, but he begins to wonder if he’s going about things in the right way. Is he following God’s will?

So he devises a test to determine if he’s doing the right thing at the right time.

One night he sets out an animal skin on the smooth stone surface of a threshing floor.

He asks that if he’s to now lead Israel against the Midianites, then in the morning let the fleece be wet with dew while the ground is dry.

The next morning, sure enough, the sign is clear.

But then, because Gideon is bent toward *analysis*, because he’s process-oriented, he realizes his test is flawed.

What if it’s the natural condition of a fleece to attract condensation?

So he asks God to verify the sign by reversing it the next night.

Sure enough, when he checks the next morning, the fleece is dry while the ground is wet.

The more common spin that you hear Bible teachers use with this passage is to *fault* Gideon for asking for a sign. They see it as a glaring lack of faith.

But because God graciously *answers* Gideon & there’s no rebuke in this passage, I tend to see it differently.

Gideon was *called & anointed* by God as v. 34 shows.

But his concern to perform God’s will got snagged on his tendency to over-analyze, & it created indecision.

Since God knew Gideon’s real desire was to *obey*, He went along with his request for a sign.

We’ll see that God had *further direction* for Gideon, but it wouldn’t come until he *needed* it.

At the point Gideon asked for the sign, he *already* had all the direction he needed.

He knew God had called him to lead in the deliverance of Israel.

He knew God had moved him to blow the trumpet & several tribes

had responded by sending men – 32,000 had answered the summons.

It was time to go to war.

But Gideon wanted *confirmation*.

Instead of simply stepping out in faith, he wanted to *make sure* God was with him.

This is what we ended with Sunday –

Some of us want to know God's whole plan for our lives before we take the first step.

We want a detailed set of blueprints before we'll begin.

But that's not the way God works.

He doesn't lay out the whole plan ahead of time, showing us every step of the way.

He shows us just *the next step*.

As we take that step in faith, we discover God is faithful, and it is that revelation that changes us into the men & women we need to be so that we can take the next step.

God has a goal & destination for all of us – He's conforming us into the image of Christ.

Each of us has a divine mission, some special work to perform.

What we need to keep in mind is that our life-journey is what God uses to mold & shape us into the glorious destiny He's ordained for us, & us for.

If God showed us His whole plan for our lives from the beginning, we'd dash off without waiting for Him, & we'd try to make it happen through our own wisdom & strength.

The result would be catastrophic, as the story of Abraham, Hagar, & Ishmael proves.

Gideon's desire to obey God's will got snagged on his tendency to over-analyze & second guess.

God did have more direction for Gideon as we will see.

But God didn't give that direction until Gideon stepped out to follow the direction he'd already been given.

Here's the lesson for us – Don't ask God for more direction until you've obeyed what He's already given.

The question we left unanswered Sunday was about the appropriateness of asking God for a sign.

Since God *answered* Gideon's request for a sign, is it okay for us

to “lay out a fleece.”

Not that we would literally set a sheepskin on the patio one night, but *figuratively*, is it proper to ask God to perform some sign that we might discover His will?

Well, in light of what we’ve just considered, while God *did answer* Gideon’s request, it’s clearly *not* the preferred method for following the Lord.

Why ask for a sign, when Gideon had already *heard God’s voice*?

Instead of using a fleece, why didn’t he just ask God *to speak*?

As we’ll see in just a bit, when Gideon *did need* more direction from God, He *spoke* to him again.

Following the Lord means, not looking for signs, but staying attentive to God’s voice.

We do that by looking for direction in the Word and by walking in the Spirit, trusting Him to direct us as we yield to His leading.

Orthodox is a big word which means, “right belief – correct doctrine.”

Orthoprax means “right practice.” It’s the *application* of orthodoxy.

There are rules for determining what’s orthodox.

- 1) Did Jesus teach it?
- 2) Do we see it practiced by the Early Church in the Book of Acts?
- 3) Do the NT Epistles “regulate” it; do they treat it as a part of the normal Christian life?

The aim of every Christian ought to be to make sure there’s a 1 to 1 correspondence between his/her orthodoxy & orthopraxy – that faith is translated into practice.

So, as it relates to the issue of laying out a fleece in seeking a sign from God, we have to apply the tests for orthodoxy . . .

Jesus didn’t teach us to ask for signs to confirm God’s will.

It wasn’t practiced in the Book of Acts.

And we don’t find it mentioned in the Epistles.

Now, there is the interesting story in Acts 1 of Matthias.

We read that the apostles *cast lots* to find a replacement for Judas.

They came up with a list of qualifications for who could be an apostle & found 2 guys who met the criteria, Justus & Matthias.

It seemed a simple matter to discover God’s will by casting lots, &

Matthias was chosen.
But Matthias wasn't God's choice – Saul of Tarsus was Judas' replacement.
The 11 came up with a faulty set of qualifications on who could be an apostle.
That example from Acts, along with Gideon's story ought to convince us that using signs to discern God's will is not the best way to go. Even Gideon realized that after the first night.
When we devise a test for discovering God's will, we're *limiting* Him.
We're placing Him in a "yes/no" situation that could have far-reaching consequences beyond the simple sign we're seeking.
And reading the answer isn't as clear as we might think, as the choice of Matthias reveals.
How much better to wait on God, to follow the counsel of His Word & the leading of His Spirit.

6. Selecting the fighters 7:1-8

¹ Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon)

Joash, Gideon's father, had nicknamed him "Let Baal deal with it" when Gideon had torn down the altar to Baal & the men of his hometown had demanded he be put to death.
Joash said, "Hey, if Baal's really a god, then let him exact his own judgment."
Gideon's survival & growing power as a leader became convincing evidence Baal was nothing more than a stupid idol.
His nickname – "Jerubbaal" was a humorous taunt against the silliness of idolatry.

¹Then 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. ²And the LORD said to Gideon,

Note that – God comes to Gideon on the eve of battle with more direction.
As they are poised to attack, it is only then that God speaks.
Gideon has taken the step of faith he needed to, so the next step is

shown him, not by a sign, but by God's voice, *His Word*.
“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.’
³Now 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. ⁴But 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.”

Later we'll learn that the fighting men of Midian numbered 135,000!

The number who answered Gideon's summons was 32,000.

Israel was out-numbered 4:1. But God Gideon he had too many men!

When Israel won, as they surely would because God would ensure it, His blessing & the miracle they would experience would be obscured by their number.

So Gideon needed to think his ranks.

God told him to tell anyone who was afraid, they could split & 2/3's of the army took off!

These were guys who'd answered the initial summons, thinking that far more would show up.

But when they got into camp & compared their number to the Midianites, they realized they were vastly outnumbered.

Having no vision for victory & no confidence in the sufficiency of God, they'd make rotten warriors.

At the first sign of battle, they would turn tail & run.

This is the kind of thing that military leaders know is *ruinous* to an army.

It only takes one coward to run from the battle line to demoralize & panic dozens, even hundreds more.

Left with 10,000, a 13:1 ratio in favor of Midian, God *then* said

Gideon *still* had too many.

So He told him to take them down to the water that was nearby &

there a test would be performed.

Do you see how God *only gave Gideon* direction on what to do **NEXT**.

God: “Send home the cowards.”

22,000 split → **NEXT**

God: “Go down to the water & perform a test.”

Gideon: “What test?”

God: “I’ll tell you when you get there.”

⁵So 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.” ⁶And 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. ⁷Then 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.”

The image pictured by the words here seems backward.

If this was a river or lake they were drinking from, it would be the ones on their knees who were lapping like dogs, not the one’s who cupped their hands.

Here’s where understanding both the language and the geography help.

At Harod where Israel was camped was a spring.

The water bubbles out of the grounds & falls over the rocks in streams.

The word translated here as “lap” is the Hebrew word that refers not to the *motion* a dog makes when it drinks, but the *sound* it makes.

The idea was this, when they got to the springs, those who knelt or bent over to put their mouth directly in the stream would be sent home.

It was only those who cupped their hand into the flow, then drank from their hand that would pass the test.

Some say those who cupped their hands instead of kneeling showed

better battle sense. Keeping they eyes forward, instead of distracted by the falling water.

Well, in light of God's whole purpose here of thinning Israel's ranks, does paring the army down to *the most capable men* seem consistent?

Hardly! These guys probably cupped their hands because the *were too old & stiff to kneel.*

They simply couldn't get down there!

They're so tired & thirsty, that when they do drink, they guzzle it like a dog.

Our dog Lady is no lady, she's all dog!

When she drinks, she just plows into her bowl & slops it all over.

She gets more water on the ground around her bowl than in her belly.

That's what these guys were doing.

Don't forget that in that culture, dogs weren't friendly pets. They were vicious pests.

The Jews referred to Gentiles as dogs because it was a harsh put down.

Saying someone drinks like a dog isn't a compliment – it's referring to them as pretty worthless.

That was God's aim – to pare Gideon's force down to a bunch of *losers* so that when the battle was won, **EVERYONE WOULD KNOW** it was God who'd done it.

I shared this passage 2 Sundays ago, but let me read it again – 1

Corinthians 1:26-31

26 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. 27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; 28 and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, 29 that no flesh should glory in His presence. 30 But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and

redemption—³¹ that, as it is written, “*He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.*”

Zechariah 4:6 says,

Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.

Psalm 20:7

Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God.

⁸So 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.

The people of Israel had at this time been mostly disarmed by their oppressors.

What few bronze weapons they had, had been confiscated by the endless raids of the Midianites, Amalekites, Ammorites, Ammonites, Canaanites, Philistines, & others.

So when the 300 prepared to go into battle, all they had were some rams’ horns trumpets.

What are you going to do with a trumpet when what you need is a good sword?

7. Gideon Scouts the enemy camp 7:9-14

⁹It 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.

God tells Gideon to attack.

But He knows the kind of person Gideon is, & how as an analyst he needs something to *activate* his faith.

¹⁰But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant, ¹¹and 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. ¹²Now 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.

As nomads, there was no real organization to their camp, no cohesive central authority.

A couple of powerful chieftains we'll meet later had managed to rally them behind a common objective of laying siege to Israel, but there was no real organization to their forces.

It was easy for Gideon & his servant to sneak into their camp.

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."

Gideon & Purah overhear a conversation between 2 of the Midianites.

One guy says, "Man, I had a wild dream! Without any warning, a loaf of common bread rolled into one of our tents & knocked it down."

The other man then said, "I know what that means – Gideon of Israel will defeat us."

Now, we're told nothing about who these guys were – but I wonder if the one who interpreted the dream wasn't an angel.

God caused the Midianite to have this dream, then sent an angel to interpret it for him, all so that Gideon could hear it and be encouraged.

You see, people of the ancient world put a lot of stock in dreams.

They believed that when you slept, your spirit entered into the spiritual realm where you saw & heard things that had a *direct impact* on your waking life.

When Gideon overheard this, he realized God was at work in all kinds of ways to make sure of the victory.

8. The battle 7:15-8:21

a. Gideon arranges his forces 7:15-18

15 And so it was, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, that he worshiped.

Now **THAT** is faith! This is where Gideon finally breaks through into full faith in God.

The battle hasn't even been joined yet, but he has finally come to understand things from the right perspective – When God says it, it's already done.

There's no doubt or hesitation any more of Gideon's part.

In fact, his anticipation of the victory is so solid, he begins to worship.

When you are facing a battle, remember that we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us. [Romans 8:37]

So instead of fear, ***begin to worship*** in the confidence of God's presence & power.

He returned to the camp of Israel, and said, "Arise, for the LORD has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand." 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!'"

Gideon's new found faith has emboldened him to bring encouragement to others.

Though they are just 300, their courage grows as Gideon's faith stimulates theirs.

This is one of the reasons why regular fellowship with other sincere and growing believers is crucial, because we need to stimulate and encourage each other's faith.

This world is a war zone and the battle are many.

There are times when my faith will stimulate yours, & times when your faith will encourage me.

Gideon's plan was to divide his force of 300 into 3 equal groups of a hundred.

They would then position themselves around one of the outposts of the Midianite camp.

At the command of Gideon, they were to break the pitchers that hid their torches, and blow on their shofars the call to attack.

The light, noise, and confusion would send the Midianites into a panic.

They were to shout out, “The sword of Yahweh & of Gideon!”

This wasn’t self-advancement on Gideon’s part - it was wisdom. From his venture into the Midianite camp, he knew God had already been softening up the Midianites with a little psychological warfare.

He’d been placing Gideon’s name in their hearts as something to fear.

When they heard it now in the middle of the night, along with the sound of the trumpet calling for battle, his name would be a trigger that would set off the panic.

When soldiers panic - it’s not a good thing.

b. the attack 7:19-22

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.

When Gideon’s 300 blew their trumpets & exposed their light, the enemy flew into disarray & began hacking at each other.

Gideon’s men weren’t even part of the fighting at this point.

The Midianites began a full scale retreat back toward their homeland in the East.

All of this is a picture of → well, of something really important – which we’ll look at Sunday.

c. the other tribes join in 7:23-8:3

1) the call goes out 7:23-25

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

These were the same guys who'd gone home with their tails tucked between their quivering lil' leggies before.

Now that the Midianites are running away, they are emboldened and come charging into the battle.

It's always the case that there are people who hang out & play it safe, refusing to move forward when there's a risk – but as soon as they see God's favor is on something, **THEN** they get involved.

Now, that's good – when we see God's using something, when His blessing is on something or someone, it's wisdom to invest in it.

But how much better to instead of playing it safe by never moving forward, to take God at His word & press the boundaries of the Kingdom of God into new territory?

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.

Gideon sent word to the rest of the tribes to join in the battle, suggesting they race ahead and cut off the Midianite escape back across the Jordan.

They did and captured two of the Midianites leaders.

They then met up with Gideon just east of the Jordan.

Now, you would think the tribes would be happy about this victory and would be pounding Gideon on the back with a lot of ‘attaboys.’

But that is not what they said or did.

2) Ephraim rebukes Gideon 8:1-3

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.

They berated Gideon & demanded to know why he hadn't called them to help when he first went against the Midianites.

Now, if they were so keen to fight, why didn't they go against the Midianites on their own?

These guys were hiding their cowardice behind false bluster.

There was no way they were going to join in the fight unless the victory was already assured.

There will always be people like this – no matter what good you do, they come with criticism, even when they get to enjoy the benefit of what you're doing.

They are critics, nay-sayers, negative ninnies who can do nothing but poke holes in everyone else's balloon.

Gideon shows real wisdom in dealing with them.

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.

Instead of defending himself, Gideon says, “You guys are awesome!

I mean, wow – look at who you are! You're the mighty tribe of Ephraim!”

“Why, even the *leftovers* of your grapevines are vastly superior to the first pick of the vines where I live.”

“And this day, you guys caught the princes of Midian. Man, you guys rock!!!”

Though Gideon is in fact the God-ordained leader, these clowns are never going to recognize it.

And Gideon doesn't have time to get into a tiff with them, so he tells them what they want to hear, & it reaffirms their silly pride.

Now the story backtracks a bit . . .

d. the punishment of Succoth & Penuel 8:4-17

4 When Gideon came to the Jordan, he and the three

hundred men who were with him crossed over, exhausted but still in pursuit.

He's not lost a single man!

By this time, they've grabbed weapons from the battlefield.

⁵ Then he said to the men of Succoth,

Which lies just east of the Jordan River.

“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.” ⁶And the leaders of Succoth said, “Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in your hand, that we should give bread to your army?” ⁷So

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!”

It's been a long, tiring battle & Gideon's men need provisions.

When they asked the people of Succoth for eats, the leaders of the city refused.

They considered Gideon & his band as a bunch of rough country nobodies.

Zebah & Zalmunna, on the other hand, were the rulers of the Midianites who they were sure would be back.

Anyone who had assisted Gideon would suffer, so they refused him help.

Gideon said, “Okay! Fine. I'll be back, & when I come, you guys are gonna' hurt.”

⁸Then 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. ⁹So he also spoke to the men of Penuel, saying, “When I come back in peace, I will tear down this tower!”

Succoth & Penuel were *Israelite* cities, but they'd known the oppression of the enemy for so they didn't think they could ever be free.

When one of their own came with the hope of freedom, they not only refused to join in, they wouldn't even assist him.

Some who consider themselves Christians have lived a life of

compromise with the world & sin for so long the thought of living any other way is not something they are willing to consider.

When a genuine Christian crosses their path and shows what kind of a life they ought to be living, they reject him, call him a *radical*, or a *rough, wild-eyed fanatic*.

Gideon warned Succoth & Penuel of judgment, and in the same way, there will be some who think they are safe because *they consider themselves Christians*, who in fact are lost.

Jesus warned of those who said, “Lord!” But to whom He said, “I don’t know you!”

10 Now Zebah and Zalmunna were at Karkor, [east of the Dead Sea] 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.

The Midianites were back in their traditional homeland. They felt safe.

They counted up their remaining forces & realized they’d suffered a terrible defeat – of the 135,000 men they’d started with, only 15,000 were left.

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.

It’s still 300 against 15,000 – but Gideon knows the battle will not be determined by numbers; it had *already been determined* by God.

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. 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.

Once the Midianites were defeated & the threat of any reprisals against Israel were put to rest, Gideon returned to Succoth to make good on his promise.

He caught one of the men of the city who he found outside the city walls and had the guy give him a list of the leaders of the city.

He wasn't going to punish everyone – only those responsible for closing the city against him.

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.

While it was only the leaders of Succoth who deserved to be punished, the entire city of Penuel had stood against him.

e. Midianite kings executed 8:18-21

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.

When the Midianites had first invaded, they'd put as many of the men of fighting age to death as they could find.

Gideon's brothers were some of those these two Midianite chieftains had killed.

He told his eldest son to execute them, this would be sweet revenge – having his own son kill them for killing his brothers.

Plus, since Jether was still just a boy, it would be a *huge disgrace* to these 2 guys who considered themselves such great men.

When Jether balked because of his youthful timidity, the 2 Midianites provoked Gideon to kill them.

They knew they were going to die – they wanted it to be a *fitting*

execution, so they asked Gideon to do it.

Gideon took their camels' decorations as the trophy of his victory.

As the rulers of the Midianites they would have been badges of their exalted position & fitting spoil for Gideon.

9. Gideon's trophy

8:22-28

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."

Gideon has proven himself to be quite the man, so they ask him to become ruler.

Not just him though; they propose that he start a *royal dynasty*.

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."

Gideon knows God had said there's to be no king over the nation –

He is their King.

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.

The leader of a battle had the right to take his choice of the spoils.

Usually what would happen was that each guy got to keep 1 item of whatever of the spoils he collected.

The rest was all placed in a communal heap.

Then the ruler came and took what he wanted.

Next came the next tier of command, then the next, and so on down to the common foot soldier.

Gideon just asked for all the earrings, which there was an abundance of because as Midianites, descendants of Ishmael, earrings were a cultural fashion.

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.

The weight of the gold was nearly 50 lbs.; no small sum.

Notice the reference to crescent ornaments.

The crescent was an ancient symbol representing the *moon god*, or as the Arabic language says it – al-ilyah – shortened to *Al'lah*.

The Allah of Islam is **NOT** the God of the Bible.

He is *not* the God of Abraham, *not* the Yahweh of Moses.

Allah is the ancient moon god of the descendants of Ishmael, thus the crescent as his symbol.

And that is why on the top of every mosque is the figure of the crescent moon.

Don't let anyone fool you with silly talk about how the Muslims, Jews, & Christians all worship the same God.

We don't! Allah is *not* Yahweh.

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.

Gideon took the gold from his share of the spoils, melted it down, & cast it as an *ephod*.

An ephod is a special vestment worn by a priest when he performs his office.

Why would Gideon make a priest's garment?

He'd just refused to take the office of king because he knew that was God's role.

But he also knew the priests of Israel weren't doing their job; that's why the Midianites had come in, in the first place.

So Gideon figured that if the priests weren't doing their job, somebody needed to – why not him?

After all, God had *appeared* to him.

God had *spoken* to him.

God had *called* him – that sounded like enough of a qualification for Gideon to step into the role of priest.

So he made an ephod, and returned to the city of Ophrah where the Lord had first appeared to him.

Gideon's desire was to keep Israel from falling into the same error as before & figured while he couldn't lead the nation *politically*, because that was God's job, he *could* lead it *religiously*, because that was a priest's job.

Gideon was doing the *wrong thing* for the *right reason*.

He got things backward.
He could have led the nation just fine within the sphere of his calling, which was to simply be a godly man.
The influence of his life as a believer would have been more than enough to influence the people around him to live for God.
This is what the rest of the Judges did – they weren't priests, but as long as they lived, the people served Yahweh.
Gideon thought he had to take the office of priest in order to be effective at leading the people.
The result was that because he sought an office & calling that wasn't his, it ended up turning into a disaster.
Instead of people being drawn closer to the Lord, it led them away & the very thing Gideon had refused for himself & his family became the thing that destroyed them.

While all Christians ought to live godly lives & exert an influence for righteousness on those around them, only those who are called by God ought to lead the Body of Christ.

One of the greatest banes for the Church has been men & women who sought to take control who were never called or anointed by God.

Like Gideon, they may be dynamic individuals who are skilled in other ways, but they simply are not called by God to lead the flock.

Such people can make quite a splash with the force of their gifts & cleverness of their ingenuity – but they end up hijacking the church, dragging it into a course other than God intends.

Having an influence for Christ & being effective for the Kingdom does not mean a person has to be a pastor.

Some of the most Kingdom-effective believers are business people who spread the influence of a godly life among their peers at work.

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.

Gideon's error, while glaring, took a while to grow.

It was during the time of his sons, after he was gone, that it came back to haunt Israel.

10. Gideon dies & Israel reverts to form 8:29-

35

29Then 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.

There's a sign his heart had begun to stray from the Lord.

Marriage is a covenant that requires loyalty.

Polygamy & loyalty don't go together.

If a man or woman can't be loyal in their marriage, they certainly aren't going to be loyal in their relationship with God.

Besides having many wives, he also had *concubines*, which is just an old-fashioned word for mistresses,

31And 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. **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 [the Master of 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.

Gideon's family reminded them of Gideon, and they didn't want to remember Gideon because as a judge, he had stood in the way of their desire to go after the sensual & seductive practices of those who serve Baal.

So the cycle started all over again, though they ought to have realized where that cycle would take them – back into oppression.