

Adult Bible Class

The Book of Judges

Lesson 3 - March 6, 2022

As we read the first few chapters of Judges, we see a pattern developing. Israel serves the Lord for a period of time but then falls into idolatry. Then God sends an oppressor to get Israel's attention. Israel calls on God for help and the Lord sends a deliverer - a judge - to save them from their oppressor. This cycle is the theme of the book of Judges.

We have read how God sent Othniel to deliver the Israelites from servitude to the king of Mesopotamia - Cushan-Rishathaim. Then Ehud delivered them from the Moabites, Shamgar from the Philistines, and then Deborah - along with Barak - delivered the Israelites from the Canaanites. After this last deliverance, there was peace in the land for forty years. However, Israel had a habit of forgetting God and repeating the cycle.

Judges Chapter 6

Judges 6:1 (NLT) The Israelites did evil in the Lord's sight. So the Lord handed them over to the Midianites for seven years.

Here we go again! Once again, Israel sins against the Lord and practices idolatry. And once more, God brings an oppressor to them to get their attention.

Moses' father-in-law was a Midianite leader from the south. However, these were Midianites from the east - east of Moab, to be exact. In former times under Moses, Israel had subdued the Midianites from this region (Numbers 31). Now (200 years later), they were much multiplied, and God was going to use them to get Israel to call on Him for help.

The Midianites did not come against Israel as an elite army with brilliant battle strategy, but they came as a horde of bandits - conquering by sheer numbers. They came as robbers and thugs to plunder the land.

Judges 6:2 The Midianites were so cruel that the Israelites made hiding places for themselves in the mountains, caves, and strongholds. **3** Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, marauders from Midian, Amalek, and the people of the east would attack Israel, **4** camping in the land and destroying crops as far away as Gaza. They left the Israelites with nothing to eat, taking all the sheep, goats, cattle, and donkeys. **5** These enemy hordes, coming with their livestock and tents, were as thick as locusts; they arrived on droves of camels too numerous to count. And they stayed until the land was stripped bare. **6** So Israel was reduced to starvation by the Midianites. Then the Israelites cried out to the Lord for help.

There are several reasons why God's people experience trouble. One reason is persecution. Another is that God brings a time of testing. But *most* trouble comes to God's people when they are disobedient (either willfully or ignorantly). In the book of Judges, God brings trouble to turn His people back to Him.

Israel imprisoned themselves in dens and caves, hiding from the marauders that have stolen every good thing from them. They lived in fear, and they didn't

have the heart to go to battle against their enemies. This is what their sin brought them to. Finally, starvation made them cry out to the Lord for help.

Think back to the time when Joshua led the Israelites across the Jordan River. At that time, the people of the land of Canaan fled from the approaching Israelites. Israel then ate the crops that they had not planted but had been left by the people who fled (Joshua 5:10-12).

But now, the tables are turned. Their enemies are now devouring the crops that they had worked so hard to bring to harvest. The Midianites also stole their flocks and herds. All this was happening because Israel forsook their God and instead worshiped Baal and Ashtoreth, the gods of the Canaanites.

For seven years the Midianites stripped the land of its fruitful bounty. Finally Israel called on the Lord.

Judges 6:7 When they cried out to the Lord because of Midian, **8** the Lord sent a prophet to the Israelites. He said, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of slavery in Egypt. **9** I rescued you from the Egyptians and from all who oppressed you. I drove out your enemies and gave you their land. **10** I told you, 'I am the Lord your God. You must not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you now live.' But you have not listened to me."

God is rich in mercy. When we cry out to Him, He is quick to help us. God sends a man - a prophet who is not named - to preach a message to the people of Israel. This prophet states the facts as they are. Israel shouldn't just complain to the Lord about all their trouble. Israel needs to repent and confess their sin. The problem is not with the Midianites - the problem is with Israel!

Now, God is ready to send a judge to deliver Israel from the cruel Midianites.

11 Then the angel of the Lord came and sat beneath the great tree at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash of the clan of Abiezer. Gideon son of Joash was threshing wheat at the bottom of a winepress to hide the grain from the Midianites. **12** The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, "Mighty hero, the Lord is with you!"

13 "Sir," Gideon replied, "if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? And where are all the miracles our ancestors told us about? Didn't they say, 'The Lord brought us up out of Egypt'? But now the Lord has abandoned us and handed us over to the Midianites."

Gideon is called by God to deliver Israel. He is from the half tribe of Manasseh that is west of the Jordan River. His father, Joash, is a worshiper of Baal. Gideon is threshing wheat - a job that was really beneath him (he had servants for such work), but he is willing to do it, and that in secret so that the Midianites cannot find him.

The Angel of the Lord calls him a "*mighty hero*." Gideon thought he was anything *but* a hero. Gideon immediately speaks like those who haven't seen the hand of God in their lives and who ask, "If there is a God, and if He really cares, why is all this bad stuff happening?" Though God assured Gideon, "*The Lord is with you*," Gideon replies, "*If the Lord is with us . . .*" Because of the terrible trouble they are experiencing, Gideon questions whether God really did miraculously deliver his ancestors from Egypt! God ignores Gideon's complaint and commands him to rescue Israel from Midian.

Judges 6:14 Then the LORD turned to him and said, "Go with the strength you have, and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I am sending you!"

The LORD Himself (Jehovah), who appeared in the form of an angel, commissioned Gideon to lead the deliverance. He turned to him and said, "*Go with the strength you have.*" This is what God asks of each one of us. We are to do His will and obey His callings in the strength He has given us. It will be enough. God gets great glory when "weak" people do great things for God simply because they believe Him. God would not have called him if He did not intend for him to succeed.

15 "But Lord," Gideon replied, "how can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the whole tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least in my entire family!"

16 The Lord said to him, "I will be with you. And you will destroy the Midianites as if you were fighting against one man."

Gideon looks at his own weakness, but God says, "*I will be with you.*" That is what will bring success. Though the Midianites were a great multitude, God said Gideon would defeat them as if they were one man.

17 Gideon replied, "If you are truly going to help me, show me a sign to prove that it is really the Lord speaking to me. **18** Don't go away until I come back and bring my offering to you." He answered, "I will stay here until you return."

19 Gideon hurried home. He cooked a young goat, and with a basket of flour he baked some bread without yeast. Then, carrying the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot, he brought them out and presented them to the angel, who was under the great tree.

20 The angel of God said to him, "Place the meat and the unleavened bread on this rock, and pour the broth over it." And Gideon did as he was told. **21** Then the angel of the Lord touched the meat and bread with the tip of the staff in his hand, and fire flamed up from the rock and consumed all he had brought. And the angel of the Lord disappeared.

We can't imagine what a sacrifice it was for Gideon to bring a young goat and the bread. This was a time when Israel was starving to death.

This is one of the few times in Scripture where the fire of the Lord consumes an offering. The food was brought by Gideon, then the Angel of God told him to arrange it as an offering. Then the fire consumed the sacrifice. This let Gideon know that this was truly the LORD. Gideon had asked for a sign, and he got one - fire from the Lord consumed the offering, and then the angel of the Lord vanished.

22 When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the Lord, he cried out, "Oh, Sovereign Lord, I'm doomed! I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face!"

23 "It is all right," the Lord replied. "Do not be afraid. You will not die." **24** And Gideon built an altar to the Lord there and named it Yahweh-Shalom (which means "the Lord is peace"). The altar remains in Ophrah in the land of the clan of Abiezer to this day.

Though the angel of the Lord disappeared, the voice of the Lord is still there to speak to Gideon. Gideon should not fear. God is peace, and He is in control.

25 That night the Lord said to Gideon, "Take the second bull from your father's herd, the one that is seven years old. Pull down your father's altar to Baal, and cut down the Asherah pole standing beside it. **26** Then build an altar to the Lord your God here on this hilltop sanctuary, laying the stones carefully. Sacrifice the bull as a burnt offering on the altar, using as fuel the wood of the Asherah pole you cut down."

Judges 6:27 So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the Lord had commanded. But he did it at night because he was afraid of the other members of his father's household and the people of the town.

The first thing that Gideon needed to do was tear down the altar to Baal and to cut down the Asherah pole - both are areas of idol worship. If Israel was going to have victory, they needed to rid themselves of the source of their defeat. It would do no good for Gideon to defeat the Midianites if the Israelites were just going to continue to worship Baal and Ashtoreth!

Then God specifically told Gideon to build an altar there, according to the method of building altars that God had ordained. Now, we realize that Israel had one altar, and that it was at the Tabernacle in Shiloh. However, since God directed Gideon to build *this* altar, we know it was an appropriate thing to do.

Gideon was to offer his father's seven year-old bull as a sacrifice. It was a very symbolic thing to do since Israel had been oppressed by the Midianites for seven years. It marked the end of that oppression. Gideon's ten servants helped him to tear down the idols, build the altar, and offer the large animal on it.

28 Early the next morning, as the people of the town began to stir, someone discovered that the altar of Baal had been broken down and that the Asherah pole beside it had been cut down. In their place a new altar had been built, and on it were the remains of the bull that had been sacrificed. **29** The people said to each other, "Who did this?" And after asking around and making a careful search, they learned that it was Gideon, the son of Joash.

30 "Bring out your son," the men of the town demanded of Joash. "He must die for destroying the altar of Baal and for cutting down the Asherah pole."

31 But Joash shouted to the mob that confronted him, "Why are you defending Baal? Will you argue his case? Whoever pleads his case will be put to death by morning! If Baal truly is a god, let him defend himself and destroy the one who broke down his altar!" **32** From then on Gideon was called Jerub-baal, which means "Let Baal defend himself," because he broke down Baal's altar.

Gideon's father, Joash, defended his son. Though Joash followed the idol worshipers before, yet now he speaks for his son who speaks for the God of Israel. The Israelite people of the town not only sinned greatly by worshiping Baal, but they sinned doubly by pleading for their sin.

Gideon is given a new name - Jerubbaal. This name was a standing defiance to Baal - let Baal defend himself! Let Baal do his own talking!

Gideon Asks for a Sign

33 Soon afterward the armies of Midian, Amalek, and the people of the east formed an alliance against Israel and crossed the Jordan, camping in the valley of Jezreel. **34** Then the Spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon with power. He blew a ram's horn as a call to arms, and the men of the clan of Abiezer came to him. **35** He also sent messengers throughout Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, summoning their warriors, and all of them responded.

The enemy was camped in the Jezreel valley which was in the heart of the tribe of Manasseh. The Spirit of the Lord "*clothed Gideon with power.*" God, by His Spirit, put life and strength in Gideon. Then Gideon blew the trumpet and called for volunteers for war. All the warriors from the above tribes responded to the call.

Judges 6:36 Then Gideon said to God, "If you are truly going to use me to rescue Israel as you promised, **37** prove it to me in this way. I will put a wool fleece on the threshing floor tonight. If the fleece is wet with dew in the morning but the ground is dry, then I will know that you are going to help

me rescue Israel as you promised.” **38** And that is just what happened. When Gideon got up early the next morning, he squeezed the fleece and wrung out a whole bowlful of water.

39 Then Gideon said to God, “Please don’t be angry with me, but let me make one more request. Let me use the fleece for one more test. This time let the fleece remain dry while the ground around it is wet with dew.” **40** So that night God did as Gideon asked. The fleece was dry in the morning, but the ground was covered with dew.

Gideon humbly asked for two signs so that he would know without a doubt that God called him to rescue Israel. He had faith, but he needed his faith boosted. He sought God’s will and favor with great reverence, “*Please don’t be angry with me, but . . .*”

These signs were miraculous because the one was the opposite of the other. Gideon’s commission was confirmed.

Seeking God’s will and asking for confirmation is a necessary part of the Christian walk. We learn to know God’s will as we interact with Him in prayer, faith, the Word, and through the preached word of God. When we get an answer or a confirmation from God, it is a most wondrous thing.

Judges Chapter 7

Judges 7:1 (NLT) So Jerub-baal (that is, Gideon) and his army got up early and went as far as the spring of Harod. The armies of Midian were camped north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh. **2** The Lord said to Gideon, “You have too many warriors with you. If I let all of you fight the Midianites, the Israelites will boast to me that they saved themselves by their own strength.” **3** Therefore, tell the people, “Whoever is timid or afraid may leave this mountain and go home.” So 22,000 of them went home, leaving only 10,000 who were willing to fight.

Gideon was certainly not the man he used to be (hiding in a winepress to thresh enough wheat for a scant meal). Now Gideon was God’s man for the hour. He was to lead Israel’s army into battle. But God had two tests. Just as wheat must be “winnowed,” meaning, the chaff must be blown away to leave only the good grain, Israel’s army must be sifted. There was a “method to the madness” in these tests. God wanted warriors that were fit to fight on His terms. The Lord is able “*to save by many or by few*” (1 Samuel 14:6).

God’s first concern was that Gideon check the faith of his men. This battle was in the hands of God, and each warrior must have total confidence that God would bring the victory. Fear is the opposite of faith, so the men were told, “*Whoever is timid or afraid may leave this mountain and go home.*” Gideon lost two-thirds of his men.

4 But the Lord told Gideon, “There are still too many! Bring them down to the spring, and I will test them to determine who will go with you and who will not.” **5** When Gideon took his warriors down to the water, the Lord told him, “Divide the men into two groups. In one group put all those who cup water in their hands and lap it up with their tongues like dogs. In the other group put all those who kneel down and drink with their mouths in the stream.” **6** Only 300 of the men drank from their hands. All the others got down on their knees and drank with their mouths in the stream.

7 The Lord told Gideon, “With these 300 men I will rescue you and give you victory over the Midianites. Send all the others home.” **8** So Gideon collected the provisions and rams’ horns of the other warriors and sent them home. But he kept the 300 men with him.



Pastor Triplett standing by Harod Spring in Israel (left). Israel tour group imagining Gideon's men drinking at the spring (above).

Those men that put their mouths to the water to drink could not at the same time keep an eye on the enemy. They left themselves open to attack and showed that they were not diligent at all times. The men that made a cup with their hands and lapped the water like a dog showed that they were keeping their eyes on the enemy, even when getting a needed drink.

Usually, a general must make sure that he has enough men to win a battle. That is basic battle strategy. But in this story, we find that quality is preferred over quantity. When God is in it, the group is a majority anyhow. In Christian work, we must be pleasing to God. To have a church of thousands of people, but to have people that are not Spirit filled, not baptized in the name of Jesus, not interested in pleasing God and following His Spirit - is to have a lot of people, but not a group that can be used by God in His fullness. Yes, God wants multitudes, but they must be true to God's will and way. The true laborers tend to be few in number (Matthew 9:37). God wants laborers in His harvest field, but they must be called, chosen and faithful (Rev. 17:14). When Gideon sounded the alarm for warriors, many showed up in response to the call. But when God was finished with the group, Gideon was left with only 300. But this 300 were just what God wanted!

In God's work, the true power comes from Him. His workers must be centered on that fact. God told Israel through Moses:

Deuteronomy 8:6 "So obey the commands of the Lord your God by walking in his ways and fearing him. **7** For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land . . . **10** When you have eaten your fill, be sure to praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you.

11 "But that is the time to be careful! Beware that in your plenty you do not forget the Lord your God and disobey his commands . . . **12** For when you have become full and prosperous . . . be careful!

14 Do not become proud at that time and forget the Lord your God, who rescued you from slavery in the land of Egypt . . .

19 "But I assure you of this: If you ever forget the Lord your God and follow other gods, worshiping and bowing down to them, you will certainly be destroyed. **20** Just as the Lord has destroyed other nations in your path, you also will be destroyed if you refuse to obey the Lord your God.

Israel had been forewarned years ago, but here they were - hiding in dens and caves from their enemies because they did exactly what God warned them not to do. But now, Gideon was sent by God to deliver Israel - but with only 300 men!

Judges 7:8b The Midianite camp was in the valley just below Gideon. **9** That night the Lord said, "Get up! Go down into the Midianite camp, for I have given you victory over them! **10** But if you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah. **11** Listen to what the Midianites are saying, and you will be greatly encouraged. Then you will be eager to attack." So Gideon took Purah and went down to the edge of the enemy camp.

The Midianite host numbered about 135,000 men, and they were within an hour's march of them. God told Gideon to attack. But God in His mercy knows the human heart. Gideon needed to be encouraged that His faith in God would not fail Israel. He took Purah, his servant, to listen to what the Midianites were saying.

12 The armies of Midian, Amalek, and the people of the east had settled in the valley like a swarm of locusts. Their camels were like grains of sand on the seashore—too many to count! **13** Gideon crept up just as a man was telling his companion about a dream. The man said, "I had this dream, and in my dream a loaf of barley bread came tumbling down into the Midianite camp. It hit a tent, turned it over, and knocked it flat!"

14 His companion answered, "Your dream can mean only one thing—God has given Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite, victory over Midian and all its allies!"

15 When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he bowed in worship before the Lord. Then he returned to the Israelite camp and shouted, "Get up! For the Lord has given you victory over the Midianite hordes!"

Gideon had feared to go and attack the Midianites - until he learned that the Midianites feared him! This revelation was what Gideon needed. God had truly orchestrated this from beginning to end. God was going to give the victory, and Gideon and his 300 could fight the battle - believing that the Word of the Lord would be fulfilled that day.

Faith is an entire trust in the Word of God that produces obedience to that word. For Gideon, the Word of God came to him to go and fight the Midianite hordes and defeat them. It had to be done God's way with God's chosen people. God worked with Gideon as he first tore down the places of idol worship and then as he asked for God's confirmation through the two fleeces. God continued to work with Gideon as the 32,000 fighting men were whittled down to 300! Now, Gideon was ready! He told his 300 men, *Get up, for the Lord has given you victory over the Midianite hordes!* The promise was sure; now they must fight the battle.

16 He divided the 300 men into three groups and gave each man a ram's horn and a clay jar with a torch in it.

17 Then he said to them, "Keep your eyes on me. When I come to the edge of the camp, do just as I do. **18** As soon as I and those with me blow the rams' horns, blow your horns, too, all around the entire camp, and shout, 'For the Lord and for Gideon!'"

19 It was just after midnight, after the changing of the guard, when Gideon and the 100 men with him reached the edge of the Midianite camp. Suddenly, they blew the rams' horns and broke their clay jars.

20 Then all three groups blew their horns and broke their jars. They held the blazing torches in their left hands and the horns in their right hands, and they all shouted, "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!"

The weapons of Gideon's 300 were lamps, pitchers (clay jars), and trumpets (ram's horns). Each moment in life has its own method for success. Here, lamps, pitchers, and trumpets were the keys to success. Using these in some other moment in time would be silly or even deadly. But here, these tools were just right to bring victory - making Gideon's 300 look like a large army and creating noise and light that brought confusion to the enemy camp. Gideon had just been given a knowledge of what his enemy was thinking - that Gideon already had the victory over them! They were ignorant of the real number of Israel's army. They created an imaginary enemy in their minds.

Judges 7:21 Each man stood at his position around the camp and watched as all the Midianites rushed around in a panic, shouting as they ran to escape. **22** When the 300 Israelites blew their rams' horns, the Lord caused the warriors in the camp to fight against each other with their swords. Those who were not killed fled to places as far away as Beth-shittah near Zererah and to the border of Abel-meholah near Tabbath.

23 Then Gideon sent for the warriors of Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh, who joined in chasing the army of Midian. **24** Gideon also sent messengers throughout the hill country of Ephraim, saying, "Come down to attack the Midianites. Cut them off at the shallow crossings of the Jordan River at Beth-barah."

So all the men of Ephraim did as they were told. **25** They captured Oreb and Zeeb, the two Midianite commanders, killing Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb at the winepress of Zeeb. And they continued to chase the Midianites. Afterward the Israelites brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon, who was by the Jordan River.

Some of the tribes were summoned to help finish the job. Though these warriors were not used in the initial battle, they were now used to chase the Midianites to the furthest corners of Israel.

Judges Chapter 8

Judges 8:1 (NLT) Then the people of Ephraim asked Gideon, "Why have you treated us this way? Why didn't you send for us when you first went out to fight the Midianites?" And they argued heatedly with Gideon.

The Ephraimites, instead of congratulating and thanking Gideon for his great victory, picked a quarrel with him. Remember that Ephraim and Manasseh were the two sons of Joseph. Therefore, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh were often jealous of each other - even here when Gideon (of the tribe of Manasseh) won a great victory.

2 But Gideon replied, "What have I accomplished compared to you? Aren't even the leftover grapes of Ephraim's harvest better than the entire crop of my little clan of Abiezer? **3** God gave you victory over Oreb and Zeeb, the commanders of the Midianite army. What have I accomplished compared to that?" When the men of Ephraim heard Gideon's answer, their anger subsided.

When the people of Ephraim exhibited pride and jealousy, Gideon's "soft answer" turned away wrath. Gideon skillfully soothed their pride with compliments.

4 Gideon then crossed the Jordan River with his 300 men, and though exhausted, they continued to chase the enemy. **5** When they reached Succoth, Gideon asked the leaders of the town, "Please give my warriors some food. They are very tired. I am chasing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian." **6** But the officials of Succoth replied, "Catch Zebah and Zalmunna first, and then we will feed your army."

Judges 8:7 So Gideon said, "After the Lord gives me victory over Zebah and Zalmunna, I will return and tear your flesh with the thorns and briers from the wilderness."

8 From there Gideon went up to Peniel and again asked for food, but he got the same answer. **9** So he said to the people of Peniel, "After I return in victory, I will tear down this tower."

10 By this time Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor with about 15,000 warriors—all that remained of the allied armies of the east, for 120,000 had already been killed. **11** Gideon circled around by the caravan route east of Nobah and Jogbehah, taking the Midianite army by surprise. **12** Zebah and Zalmunna, the two Midianite kings, fled, but Gideon chased them down and captured all their warriors.

When doing a great work for God, side issues often arise. Though Gideon did not get cooperation from his countrymen, he steadfastly continued to finish the job he had started. Though he was faint from hunger, he kept pursuing the enemy. Gideon finished thoroughly what God commanded him to do. The Midianites and their allies had to be completely crushed to end seven years of oppression - and to ensure that Midian would not return.

13 After this, Gideon returned from the battle by way of Heres Pass. **14** There he captured a young man from Succoth and demanded that he write down the names of all the seventy-seven officials and elders in the town. **15** Gideon then returned to Succoth and said to the leaders, "Here are Zebah and Zalmunna. When we were here before, you taunted me, saying, 'Catch Zebah and Zalmunna first, and then we will feed your exhausted army.'" **16** Then Gideon took the elders of the town and taught them a lesson, punishing them with thorns and briers from the wilderness. **17** He also tore down the tower of Peniel and killed all the men in the town.

As judge in Israel, Gideon disciplined the men with thorns and briers as he had promised.

18 Then Gideon asked Zebah and Zalmunna, "The men you killed at Tabor—what were they like?" "Like you," they replied. "They all had the look of a king's son."

19 "They were my brothers, the sons of my own mother!" Gideon exclaimed. "As surely as the Lord lives, I wouldn't kill you if you hadn't killed them."

20 Turning to Jether, his oldest son, he said, "Kill them!" But Jether did not draw his sword, for he was only a boy and was afraid.

21 Then Zebah and Zalmunna said to Gideon, "Be a man! Kill us yourself!" So Gideon killed them both and took the royal ornaments from the necks of their camels.

Gideon not only acts as a judge but as "the avenger of blood," which was an Old Testament custom. Apparently these men had killed Gideon's own brothers.

22 Then the Israelites said to Gideon, "Be our ruler! You and your son and your grandson will be our rulers, for you have rescued us from Midian."

23 But Gideon replied, "I will not rule over you, nor will my son. The Lord will rule over you!"

After his great victory, Gideon modestly refuses to rule over the people as they asked. Israel at this time was a "theocracy," meaning it was a country ruled by God (with human judges in time of need). Gideon meant to keep it that way.

24 However, I do have one request—that each of you give me an earring from the plunder you collected from your fallen enemies." (The enemies, being Ishmaelites, all wore gold earrings.)

25 "Gladly!" they replied. They spread out a cloak, and each one threw in a gold earring he had gathered from the plunder. **26** The weight of the gold earrings was forty-three pounds, not including the royal ornaments and pendants, the purple clothing worn by the kings of Midian, or the chains around the necks of their camels.

27 Gideon made a sacred ephod from the gold and put it in Ophrah, his hometown. But soon all the Israelites prostituted themselves by worshiping it, and it became a trap for Gideon and his family.

Judges 8:28 That is the story of how the people of Israel defeated Midian, which never recovered. Throughout the rest of Gideon's lifetime—about forty years—there was peace in the land.

It was not wise for Gideon to ask for the treasure - which amounted to 50 pounds of gold - quite a fortune. Gideon made an ephod from it as a memorial (a sacred garment for determining the will of God), but the people ended up worshiping it, and the ephod became a trap for Gideon and his family as well.

As we read the book of Judges, we find that the tabernacle at Shiloh is rarely mentioned. Instead, we read over and over again how the Israelites worshiped idol gods. Here, they worshiped the gold ephod.

29 Then Gideon son of Joash returned home. **30** He had seventy sons born to him, for he had many wives. **31** He also had a concubine in Shechem, who gave birth to a son, whom he named Abimelech. **32** Gideon died when he was very old, and he was buried in the grave of his father, Joash, at Ophrah in the land of the clan of Abiezer.

33 As soon as Gideon died, the Israelites prostituted themselves by worshiping the images of Baal, making Baal-berith their god. **34** They forgot the Lord their God, who had rescued them from all their enemies surrounding them. **35** Nor did they show any loyalty to the family of Jerub-baal (that is, Gideon), despite all the good he had done for Israel.

And so . . . the cycle continues.

