

Judges 7-8

Good evening and thank you for joining us. Would you please turn in your bibles to Judges chapter 7? We're picking up our study in the incredible account of Gideon, and how the Lord uses the most unlikely of people to accomplish His will, for His glory alone. But the story of Gideon isn't just that of miraculous triumph, it's also a dramatic warning to each of us not to touch God's glory.

The title of tonight's message HANDLE WITH CARE

Let's pray

In our study of Judges 6, we saw Gideon lay out the fleece on 2 occasions, you'll recall he was trying to get God to confirm His will. God told Gideon in chapter 6 that the Hebrews would be freed from the Midianite oppression.

We pick up our study in chapter 7 by looking at the miraculous battle plans of God.

1 Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the well of Harod, so that the camp of the Midianites was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley. 2 And the LORD said to Gideon, "The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.' God prepares Gideon by telling him that He will create such ludicrous odds in the battle that there's no way the Israelites can take credit for this victory.

3 Now therefore, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, 'Whoever is fearful and afraid, let him turn and depart at once from Mount Gilead.' " And twenty-two thousand of the people returned, and ten thousand remained." In the Mosaic Law, God

had commanded that the Israelites should not force the fearful to go into battle **Deuteronomy 20:8** **The officers shall speak further to the people, and say, 'What man is there who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house, lest the heart of his brethren faint[fn] like his heart.'**

So God reminded Gideon to give any who were afraid the opportunity to go home, which he did.

Later on we'll be told there were 135,000 Midianites. Gideon starts out with a rag tag group of so called soldiers that only numbers 32,000 troops. Do the math and you realize Gideon was initially outnumbered 4 to 1... But when the army shrinks down now to 10,000, Israel is now outnumbered 13 to 1.

But God isn't finished thinning out His army

4-7

4 But the LORD said to Gideon, “The people are still too many; bring them down to the water, and I will test them for you there. Then it will be, that of whom I say to you, ‘This one shall go with you,’ the same shall go with you; and of whomever I say to you, ‘This one shall not go with you,’ the same shall not go.” **5** So he brought the people down to the water. And the LORD said to Gideon, “Everyone who laps from the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set apart by himself; likewise everyone who gets down on his knees to drink.” **6** And the number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, was three hundred men; but all the rest of the people got down on their knees to drink water. **7** Then the LORD said to Gideon, “By the three hundred men who lapped I will save you, and deliver the Midianites into your hand. Let all the other people go, every man to his place.”

SHOW PIC This is one of my favorite spots when we go to Israel. The springs are crystal clear. And the men who knelt down to

drink and remained attentive are the ones that God says will be the ones to fight. **CLOSE PIC**

God sends away the 9,700 and leaves Gideon just 300 soldiers. Now Gideon is outnumbered 450 to 1. God has created a scenario where there will not even be an opportunity to deny God the credit and glory for the win. This is STILL how God works. He uses the foolish and weak to do mighty deeds.

He puts His treasure in these earthen vessels... **2 Corinthians 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.**

God is very serious about His glory. **Isaiah 42:8 I am the LORD, that is My name;**

And My glory I will not give to another,

Nor My praise to carved images.

8 So the people took provisions and their trumpets in their hands. And he sent away all the rest of Israel, every man to his tent, and retained those three hundred men. Now the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.

Remember Gideon is now a farmer turned general – outnumbered 450 to 1 - going into battle for the first time with a mere 300 soldiers who are all just farmers themselves!

I want you to pause for a moment and think of the battles in Gideons mind. It wasn't just doubt-you know the devil was just assaulting Gideon with lie after lie, question after question.

Tonight, you and I find ourselves in a similar position as Gideon! But our weaponry is heavenly... **2 Corinthians 10:4 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, 5 casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing**

every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, 6 and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.

Our weaponry to defeat the enemy is described in Ephesians...

Ephesians 6:10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age,[fn] against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

The days we find ourselves in are more wicked now than at any point in our lives. How do we stand? Taking up the armor of God.

9-11

9 It happened on the same night that the LORD said to him, "Arise, go down against the camp, for I have delivered it into your hand. 10 But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant, 11 and you shall hear what they say; and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp." Then he went down with Purah his servant to the outpost of the armed men who were in the camp. God wanted Gideon to find encouragement in this visit to the enemy's camp. This reminds us that when God asks us to do hard things for Him, He doesn't fold His arms and sit back and expect us to do it on our own. God is there to guide us and keep us and encourage us all the way.

That's one of the reasons I just love the Word. I mentioned in January that 2021 was the hardest year Kim and I ever endured,

and now 2022 is even harder than last year was. The challenges are bigger, the pain is deeper, but the Lord is there to comfort us.

Isn't He wonderful?

12-13

12 Now the Midianites and Amalekites, all the people of the East, were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the seashore in multitude.

13 And when Gideon had come, there was a man telling a dream to his companion. He said, "I have had a dream: To my surprise, a loaf of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian; it came to a tent and struck it so that it fell and overturned, and the tent collapsed." **SHOW PIC OF A BAGEL?** This is a strange dream – a bouncing bagel knocks over a tent! **CLOSE PIC**

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's army is compared to a tumbling loaf of barley.

15 And so it was, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, that he worshiped. He returned to the camp of Israel, and said, "**Arise, for the LORD has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand.**" Far too often when we see the Lord answer our desperate pleas, we forge ahead without worshipping God. Worship should be on our hearts!

But notice the sad irony. Hearing the promise directly from the Lord did not convince Gideon (the fleece), but hearing it from the Midianite soldier convinced him!

This is so like us isn't it?

Story of Pastor Chuck and letter...

16-18

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!'" Back in chapter 6 Gideon had earlier felt that he was nothing. In verse 15 we just read Gideon said the Lord has delivered the midianites. So why have everyone shout the sword of the Lord and of Gideon?

Gideon claims a piece of the spotlight.

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, about 10:00 PM) 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!" These torches probably consisted of smoldering rags on the end of a stick. The torch was turned upside down, and stuck down the neck of the ceramic jar. When the jars were broken the rush of oxygen into the jar fueled the smoldering rags, and set the torch ablaze. It was as close as you could get to a fireworks show.

In ancient times, a battalion of 1000 men marched behind one torch. When the sleepy, groggy Midianites saw the mountains ablaze with torches, and the surround sound of the trumpets of the 300 that surrounded them, the Midianites panicked.

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,[fn] toward Zererah, as far as the border of Abel Meholah, by Tabbath. Thousands of Midianites died from friendly fire. The rest of the Midianites scatter into the night.

23-25

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

Many other Israelites responded and helped Gideon and his band round up and execute as many of the enemy as they could capture

Chapter 8

1 Now the men of Ephraim said to him, "Why have you done this to us by not calling us when you went to fight with the Midianites?" And they reprimanded him sharply. Gideon didn't invite the tribe of Ephraim to join him initially when he recruited the tribes of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulon, and Naphtali, and they're mad about it.

It's amazing how jealous we can become of another person's spiritual successes. Rather than rejoice in the victory, we get angry that we were left out.

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. He quiets the jealous Ephraimites with diplomacy. He compliments them on their catch of Oreb and Zeeb.

4-6

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

6 And the leaders of Succoth said, "Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in your hand, that we should give bread to your army?" Succoth and Penuel were towns that stood on the east side of the Jordan, beside the Jabbok River. The residents of these villages lived closer to the Midianites than most of the Israelites did, and they may have made an alliance with them. They refuse to help the Israelites.

7-10

7 So Gideon said, "For this cause, when the LORD has delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briars!" 8 Then he went up from there to Penuel and spoke to them in the same way. And the

men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered. 9 So he also spoke to the men of Penuel, saying, "When I come back in peace, I will tear down this tower!"

10 Now Zebah and Zalmunna were at Karkor, and their armies with them, about fifteen thousand, all who were left of all the army of the people of the East; for one hundred and twenty thousand men who drew the sword had fallen. Of the 135,000 Midianites only 15,000 remained.

11 Then Gideon went up by the road of those who dwell in tents on the east of Nobah and Joghbehah; and he attacked the army while the camp felt secure. 12 When Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued them; and he took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and routed the whole army. This shows the persistence of Gideon. He fought until the battle was won, and he went after the leaders of the opposition.

Persistence for the kingdom of God is missing in the lives of many Christians today.

13-16

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

17 Then he tore down the tower of Penuel and killed the men of the city.

We don't know any more regarding this tower of Penuel, but clearly it must've been large.

18 And he said to Zebah and Zalmunna, "What kind of men were they whom you killed at Tabor?" these guys were the 2 Midianite kings that had been captured.

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."

The plot thickens!!

Apparently these two Midianite kings were responsible for the death of Gideon's brothers. Gideon wanted this known before he executed these kings.

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. In those days it was a great disgrace to die at the hand of a woman or a youth, because it implied that the person who was killed could not overcome his enemy. Gideon's intent was to punish the kings with humiliation, as well as death, by having his boy Jether execute them

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. The crescent-shaped ornaments that Gideon took from the kings' camels were probably made of gold and silver.

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.” They wanted to make Gideon a king as a result of his courage and victory over the Midianites. It’s understandable from a human perspective, but the problem is the people forgot who won the battle!

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.” Often after we’ve been used by God people will try to put us on a pedestal. And it’s our responsibility to turn it down. We’re to give God the glory!

24-26

24 Then Gideon said to them, “I would like to make a request of you, that each of you would give me the earrings from his plunder.” For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.

25 So they answered, “We will gladly give them.” And they spread out a garment, and each man threw into it the earrings from his plunder. 26 Now the weight of the gold earrings that he requested was one thousand seven hundred shekels of gold, besides the crescent ornaments, pendants, and purple robes which were on the kings of Midian, and besides the chains that were around their camels’ necks. This turned out to be approx. 42 pounds of gold. In today’s value that would be worth nearly \$1m, and doesn’t include the other spoils that he took from the midianites. Gideon was now a very wealthy man.

Gideon refuses a crown, but molds an ephod - a priestly garment. Some scholars speculate that although Gideon turned down the throne, he did desire priestly influence. In the book of Judges the

priests are conspicuously absent – and perhaps Gideon sensed a need for a priestly presence.

Remember the ephod held the Urim and Thummim – the two stones by which the priest discerned God's will. Perhaps Gideon's golden ephod was intended to be a permanent fleece – some kind of mechanical means of deciphering God's will.

Hey walk up to the ephod, ask your question, and presto... an instant answer. Wouldn't that be nice! You wouldn't have to walk with God - or draw near to Him - or quiet your soul – just visit the golden ephod.

Obviously I'm speculating, but whatever Gideon's motive it proved to be a terrible idea as we'll see in a few verses.

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. The ephod became an idol - which always happens when we substitute a program for a personal relationship with God.

Be careful when people start trusting the 7 keys of healing, or the 12 steps to victory, or the 40 days of purpose. When people look to a program for God's guidance rather than pray, and seek the Lord, and trust in His Word, DANGER IS COMING!!!

Whatever the motivation for the Ephod, it became an object of worship and a spiritual stumbling block to the Israelites. Gideon has now became the second official sponsor of idolatry in Israel, Aaron being the first.

If we're not on guard it can happen to any of us.

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. 29 Then Jerubbaal the son of Joash

went and dwelt in his own house. 30 Gideon had seventy sons who were his own offspring, for he had many wives. 31 And his concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, whose name he called Abimelech. Even though Gideon refused the title of king, he sure lived like one. His many wives produced him 70 sons. And he named a son, "Abimelech". The word means "my father is king" - a strange name for a father to give to a son if he had no visions of grandeur. We'll see the wickedness of Abimelech next week.

Let's finish the chapter...

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 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 didn't exactly finish well did he?

Gideon—this one who needed sign after sign when God had made it so clear from the very beginning that He was calling him; this one who vacillated, whose heart was filled with doubts, whose mind was flooded with confusion—is one of only a handful of men who made it into God's "Hall of Faith," found in Hebrews 11. Moses isn't there. David isn't there. Elisha, Elijah, and Ezekiel aren't there. Why is Gideon there?

Barak, Samson, Gideon, guys that are listed in Hebrews 11 cause us to scratch our heads—but it puts God's grace front and center. God uses ordinary people in extraordinary ways.

It's pure grace that Gideon was used like he was. It's pure grace that he is listed in the hall of faith. And it's even greater grace that God chooses to call and to use people like us.