

Judges 6-8 • Chapter Study

INTRO

Vs. 1-16 of ch6 are our text for Sunday, so my commentary will be way more summary tonight.

Ch 6

¹ Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. So the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian for 7 yrs, ² and the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of the Midianites, the children of Israel made for themselves the dens, the caves, and the strongholds which *are* in the mountains.

We're in the **judgment** phase of the repeating cycle of blessing & discipline that rolls thru Judges.

This time it's the Midianites God uses to chasten His erring people.

After Sarah died, Abe re-married w woman named Keturah.

She bore him 6 sons; 1 of them was Midian // So the Midianites were distant relatives of the Israelites.

They were nomadic shepherds living E of Israel, at the Wn edge of the Saudi peninsula.

While they were usually small autonomous groups wandering around looking for pasture,

Every once in a while, a powerful chief united them // They then became a terror to their neighbors.

³ So it was, whenever Israel had sown, Midianites would come up; also Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them. ⁴ Then they would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, [**they cut a swath, right across Israel all the way to the Med**] and leave no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep nor ox nor donkey. ⁵ For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, coming in as numerous as locusts; both they and their camels were without number; and they would enter the land to destroy it.

⁶ So Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord. Like the Midianites, Amalekites were relatives of Isrl; descendants of Esau, Jacob's twin brother.

They too were nomadic shepherds occupying the region E of Isrl.

They saw what Midian was doing and decided to join in. [Looting]

Any time Israel planted, these nomads swept in to steal the harvest.

They confiscated their herds & flocks leaving Israel impoverished.

On the verge of starvation, they cried out to God.

⁷ And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried out to the Lord because of the Midianites, ⁸ that the Lord sent a prophet to the children of Israel, who said to them, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'I brought you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of bondage; ⁹ and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you and gave you their land. ¹⁰ Also I said to you, "I *am* the Lord your God; do not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell." But you have not obeyed My voice.' "

Before God sent help, they had to know **WHY** they needed it.

They'd **invited** their distress. // They'd **made** the bed they were lying in.

It was their **rebellion** against God that opened the door to trouble they now knew.

Temptation makes sin look good but it always sours the belly.

¹¹ Now the Angel of the Lord came and sat under the terebinth tree which *was* in Ophrah, which *belonged* to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress, in order to hide *it* from the Midianites.

¹² And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him, and said to him, "The Lord *is* with you, you mighty man of valor!"

Gideon, the 5th judge, lived in the village of Ophrah in the territory of the tribe of Manasseh.

One day as he's working, an angel appears & calls him a stud.

I want to say more, but have to leave it till Sunday. There's some rich stuff here.

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

Most people, when confronted with an angel are terror stricken.

Gideon is feisty. He pushes back on the idea God is with him.

If God's with him, why's he have to hide just to get enough grain to bake a loaf of bread?

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

This Angel turns out to be none other than God Himself.

¹⁵ So he said to Him, “O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan *is* the weakest in Manasseh, and I *am* the least in my father’s house.” ¹⁶ And the Lord said to him, “Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man.”

When Gideon tried to beg off because he didn’t see himself as qualified, God promised His blessing and foretold his success.

Lots more on all this Sunday.

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

Gideon’s request for a sign is curious.

What does that even mean: “Show me a sign you’re really talking to me.”

What Gid’s saying is: “How do I know you’re really the Lord and not an imposter?”

Well, if this really IS Yahweh, Gid’s proper response is to make an offering.

So he sets out to do so. But prepping a sacrifice isn’t quick or easy so he asks for time.

Look at all he has to do . . .

¹⁹ So Gideon went in and prepared a young goat,
Which wasn’t cheap or easy since the Midianites had ravaged the flocks.
and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour.

That’s a LOT of bread!

The meat he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot; and he brought *them* out to Him under the terebinth tree and presented *them*.

We get the meat & bread; they were standard parts of an offering.

Why the broth; what’s that for?

Gideon decided to make this more than an offering. He preps a meal.

Broth made from meat and veggies was a standard part of a full meal.

²⁰ The Angel of God said to him, “Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay *them* on this rock, and pour out the broth.” And he did so. ²¹ Then the Angel of the Lord put out the end of the staff that *was* in His hand, and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire rose out of the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. And the Angel of the Lord departed out of his sight.

When Gideon arrived back at the winepress, he found the Lord waiting for him.

He tells Gideon to set his offering on a rock.

When it’s laid out, he points His staff at it and it’s instantly consumed.

The Angel vanishes with it.

²² Now Gideon perceived that He *was* the Angel of the Lord.

Brilliant deduction Watson! But then he follows it up with a bit of silly confusion.

So Gideon said, “Alas, O Lord God! For I have seen the Angel of the Lord face to face.” ²³ Then the Lord said to him, “Peace *be* with you; do not fear, you shall not die.”

Gideon, if God intended to ace you, he wouldn’t have gone to all this trouble of appearing to you and calling you a stud and assigning you the task of delivering Israel.

He wouldn’t have hung around for a couple hours while you got your offering together,

You’d be too dead to be commenting on how dead you are.

After uttering this bit of foolishness, God settles Him down.

Yeah: God’s invisible, but still there.

Though God was not **visibly** present, Gideon could still hear His voice, which told him he wouldn’t die.

I like Gid because he’s so like us.

Riding that roller coaster of highs and lows.

He’s brilliant one second and an idiot the next.

Full of faith, then crippled by doubt.

Gideon is Everyman.

²⁴ So Gideon built an altar there to the Lord, and called it The-Lord-*Is*-Peace. To this day it *is* still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

Round that rock where he'd placed the offering, Gideon constructed an altar. He named it, "Yahweh-Shalom."

It was a **memorial to God** promise.

Gideon becomes a different man now.

There will be moments when the old Gid resurfaces, but his default shifts from the negativity expressed earlier in ch6 to a consistent hope in God.

We get some background now on the altar Gideon built.

²⁵ Now it came to pass the same night that the Lord said to him, "Take your father's young bull, the 2nd bull of 7 yrs old, and tear down the altar of Baal that your father has, and cut down the wooden image that *is* beside it; That wooden totem was a ultra-profane image to the fertility goddess, Asherah.

²⁶ and build an altar to the Lord your God on top of this rock in the proper arrangement, and take the 2nd bull and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the image which you shall cut down." ²⁷ So Gideon took 10 men from among his servants and did as the Lord had said to him. But because he feared his father's household and the men of the city too much to do *it* by day, he did *it* by night.

Before Gideon could deliver a nation, he had to deliver his family.

The reforms Israel needed had to start at home.

In 1 Time 3 the Ap Paul says an elder must lead his own home well.

How can he govern the house of God when his is a mess?

Before Gideon could stand as a judge of Israel, he had to do so at home.

Israel opened the door to the Midianites by worshipping idols.

To close that door meant taking those idols down.

And the best place to start is at home.

But, Gideon's learning to be bold.

He does the right thing, but isn't certain how his pops and the men of Ophrah are going to react.

So he tears down Baal's altar and builds a new one at night.

Note that God doesn't rebuke Gideon's fear.

Gideon doesn't **need** to fear; He has the promise of God's presence and protection.

But God knows spiritual growth **is a process**.

Faith grows as it first hears, then heeds, and finally heels to God's promises.

Gideon's faith in God will deepen, & as it does **his courage grows**.

So God is **patient** with him & lets him learn without heaping criticism.

Folks: Let's be patient with people as they learn to trust in & obey God.

²⁸ And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, there was the altar of Baal, torn down; and the wooden image that *was* beside it was cut down, and the 2nd bull was being offered on the altar *which had been* built. ²⁹ So they said to one another, "Who has done this thing?" And when they had inquired and asked, they said, "Gideon the son of Joash has done this thing."

You drive to church this evening but when you get here, this building lies in rubble,

While next door stands a mosque, with Arabic prayers blaring from a hastily constructed minaret.

You'd be outraged; itching to find those responsible.

That's what happened in Ophrah The people rose to find Baal's altar in ruins.

A new altar to Yahweh had the smoke of a fresh offering still ascending.

It didn't take long till the word was out Gideon was the culprit.

³⁰ Then the men of the city said to Joash, "Bring out your son, that he may die, because he has torn down the altar of Baal, and because he has cut down the wooden image that *was* beside it." ³¹ But Joash said to all who stood against him, "Would you plead for Baal? Would you save him? Let the one who would plead for him be put to death by morning! If he *is* a god, let him plead for himself, because his altar has been torn down!"

We might expect Joash to hand Gideon over since he'd built Baal's altar.

But that's not his response. He says, "Hey; let Baal defend himself!"

"If he's worthy of devotion & your outrage at this attack on his altar, he can take care of himself."

It seems Joash was the Ophrah's lead resident; its chief.

When Baal-worship became popular, he built an altar.

As people became increasingly immoral, he opened a pot shop - I mean he erected an Asherah pole.

He led by wetting his finger and sticking it into the air to see which way the wind of popular mood blew.

But when his son took a stand for righteousness, Joash came to his senses.

Things had become a matter of life & death.

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

Joash nick-named Gideon, Jerubbaal = "Let Baal deal with it!"

³³ Then all the Midianites and Amalekites, the people of the East, gathered together; and they crossed over and encamped in the Valley of Jezreel.

They're near Gideon's village now.

³⁴ But the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon; then he blew the trumpet, and the Abiezrites gathered behind him.

The Abiezrites were Gideon's clan in the tribe of Manasseh. The village of Ophrah was their HQs.

Trumpets were used in the ancient world to summon people. Gideon **sounded** a call to battle.

³⁵ And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, who also gathered behind him. He also sent messengers to **[the tribes of]** Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali; and they came up to meet them.

Israel realized the moment had come to unite in repelling these raiders.

Though Gideon's call to arms was a rousing success, he wasn't sure he was going about things the right way.

So he asked for another sign . . .

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."

Gideon conducted this test on a threshing floor.

The place he'd **avoided** when threshing wheat for fear of the Midianites.

Now he's embraced his call, he does this out in the open where all can see.

Gideon's reverence for God has banished the fear of man.

The test to discern God's will was this –

One evening He laid out an animal hide on the stone surface of a threshing floor.

If the next morning the fleece was **wet**, he'd take it to mean the time was right to attack.

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.

Then it dawned on him; "What if this was just coincidence? What if the fleece CAUSED the moisture in the air to condense on it?"

He needed to add a **control** to his experiment.

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.

The 1st night's test was no coincidence. He has his answer. It's time to attack.

Not a few Bible teachers **fault** Gideon for what they judge as a lack of faith.

But God **never rebukes** Gideon.

He patiently goes along & confirms His will thru these things.

God knew Gideon's **concern** was to perform His will.

Maybe the way he went about **discovering** that will wasn't the best, but God doesn't correct him.

V34 makes it clear that Gideon was **called & anointed** by God.

But his concern to perform God's will got snagged on over-analysis & THAT 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 & 32,000 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.

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.

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's that revelation that changes us into the men & women we need to be so that we can take **the next step**.

If God showed us His whole plan for our lives from the beginning, we'd dash off without waiting for Him, trying to make it happen thru our own resources.

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.

¹ Then Jerubbaal (that *is*, Gideon) and all the people who *were* with him rose early and encamped beside the well of Harod, so that the camp of the Midianites was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley. ² And the Lord said to Gideon, "The people who *are* with you *are* too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.' ³ Now therefore, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, 'Whoever *is* fearful and afraid, let him turn and depart at once from Mount Gilead.'" And 22,000 of the people returned, and 10,000 remained. 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."

Later we read the Midianites numbered 135,000!

Gideon starts with 32,000. He's outnumbered 4:1.

But God says Gideon has too many!

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

So Gideon needed to thin his ranks.

God told him to tell anyone who was tremulous to go home. 2/3's took off.

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

But when they arrived and compared their side to the host of Midianites, they panicked and split.

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 military leaders know is **ruinous** to an army.

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

Now: Left with 10,000, a 13:1 ratio in favor of Midian, God tells Gid he **still** has 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."

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 300 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 300 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 idea was this, when they got to the spring, 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.

There’ no need to read any special meaning into which way the men drank.

One way isn’t inherently better than another.

God’s purpose is simply to give Gideon a means by which to pare down his force.

He does –to 300; from 32,000!

Israel is about to learn a lesson that will be spelled out by one of the later prophets – Zech. 4:6 says,

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

Psa 20:7

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

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 300 men. Now the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.

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

What few bronze weapons they had were 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 study sword?

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.

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.

¹⁰ But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant, ¹¹ and you shall hear what they say; and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp.” Then he went down with

Purah his servant to the outpost of the armed men who *were* in the camp. ¹² Now the Midianites and Amalekites, all the people of the East, were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts; and their camels *were* without number, as the sand by the seashore in multitude.

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

A couple of powerful chieftains we’ll meet later rallied them behind a common objective of laying siege to Israel, but there was no real plan 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 cheap 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.”

We’re told nothing of these guys. But I wonder if the one who interpreted the dream was an angel.

God caused one guy to have this dream, then sent an angel to interpret it for him, all so Gideon could hear

it and be encouraged.

The ancient world put a lot of stock in dreams.

They believed when you slept, your spirit entered 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.

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.” **THAT**’s faith! This is where Gideon finally breaks thru into full-faith in God.

The battle hasn’t even been joined yet, but he’s 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. His anticipation of victory is so solid, he begins to worship.

Rom 8:37 When facing a battle, remember we’re more than conquerors thru Him who loves us.

Instead of fear, **worship** in the confidence of God’s presence & power.

¹⁶ Then he divided the 300 men *into* 3 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’re just 300, their courage grows as Gideon’s faith stimulates theirs.

This is one of the reasons why regular fellowship with other believers is crucial.

We stimulate and encourage each other’s faith.

Gideon’s divided his force into 3 equal groups of a hundred each.

They positioned themselves around a section of the enemy camp.

At Gideon command, 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-promotion; it’s wisdom.

Gid knew God had softened up the Midianites with a little psychological warfare.

“Gideon” was a name they feared.

When they rise from a dead sleep to hear it shouted it would trigger their panic.

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 3 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 300 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 band 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.

²³ And the men of Israel gathered together from Naphtali, Asher, and all Manasseh, and pursued the Midianites. These are the same guys who’d gone home, tails tucked between their quivering lil’ leggies before.

Now that the Midianites are running away, they’re emboldened and come charging into 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 on something, **THEN** they get involved.

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

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 2 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 2 of the Midianites leaders.

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

You’d think after this amazing victory, they’d be super-stoked, carrying Gid around on their shoulders.

Not so

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 berate Gideon, demanding to know why he hadn’t called them earlier.

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

These guys hid their cowardice behind bluster.

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 balloons.

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 you! You’re the mighty tribe of Ephraim!”

“Why, even the **leftovers** of your vines are superior to the prime of mine. Dude: You guys rock!!!”

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

Gideon doesn’t have time to get into a tiff with them, so he tells them what they want to hear.

[Time?]

Now the story backtracks a bit . . .

⁴ When Gideon came to the Jordan, he and the 300 men who *were* with him crossed over, exhausted but still in pursuit.

He’s not lost a single man! And by this time, they’ve grabbed weapons.

⁵ Then he said to the men of Succoth,

Lying just E 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.” ⁶ And the leaders of Succoth said, “*Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in*

your hand, that we should give bread to your army?” ⁷ So Gideon said, “For this cause, when the Lord has delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briars!”

It’s been a long, tiring battle & Gideon’s men need some grub so they can keep fighting.

When they ask the people of Succoth for eats, the leaders refuse.

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

Zebah & Zalmunna, on the other hand, are Midianite rulers & sure to be back once Gideon’s little foray has been quashed.

They’ll crush anyone who helped Gideon.

Gideon said, “Okay! Fine. **I’ll** be back, not Z&Z. When I come, you guys are gonna’ hurt.”

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!”

Succoth & Penuel were *Israelite* cities, but they’d known the oppression for so long 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, they wouldn’t even assist.

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’re 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, [E of the Dead Sea] and their armies with them, about 15,000, all who were left of all the army of the people of the East; for 120,000 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 135K they’d started with, only 15K 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 2 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, 77 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 snagged one of the men of the city and had the guy give him a list of Succoth’s leaders.

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 taunted 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.

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 first invaded, they’d put many of the men of fighting age to death.

Gideon’s brothers were some of those these 2 Midianite rulers killed.

He told his eldest son to execute them; 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 youthful timidity, the 2 Midianites provoked Gideon to do it.

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.

There's more in the ch, but we'll stop there.