

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
2-28-24

Judges 8

Ephraim's Complaint And Gideon's Answer – Verses 1-3

¹ Now the Ephraimites asked Gideon, “Why have you treated us like this? Why didn't you call us when you went to fight Midian?” And they challenged him vigorously. ² But he answered them, “What have I accomplished compared to you? Aren't the gleanings of Ephraim's grapes better than the full grape harvest of Abiezer? ³ God gave Oreb and Zeeb, the Midianite leaders, into your hands. What was I able to do compared to you?” At this, their resentment against him subsided.

8:1-3 Ephraim's leaders felt left out because Gideon had not called them to join the battle, but had left them in place to “clean up” the escaping Midianites (“the gleanings”), and so they angrily confronted him. Gideon assured the leaders of Ephraim that their accomplishment was even greater than his own clan's (Abiezer). His diplomatic explanation pointed out that this rear guard had managed to capture the enemy's generals, thus cutting off the leaders from their army. Not every necessary job is a highly visible leadership role. Much of the necessary labor of any effective enterprise is considered by many to be dirty work. But such work is vital to getting any big task done. Engineers and millionaires may design and finance an elegant building, but it is the bricklayers who get the work done. Pride causes us to want recognition. Are you content to be God's bricklayer, or do you resent the work God has given you?

The Sins Of Succoth And Peniel – Verses 4-9

⁴ Gideon and his three hundred men, exhausted yet keeping up the pursuit, came to the Jordan and crossed it. ⁵ He said to the men of Sukkoth, “Give my troops some bread; they are worn out, and I am still pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian.” ⁶ But the officials of Sukkoth said, “Do you already have the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna in your possession? Why should we give bread to your troops?” ⁷ Then Gideon replied, “Just for that, when the LORD has given Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, I will tear your flesh with desert thorns and briars.” ⁸ From there he went up to Peniel and made the same request of them, but they answered as the men of Sukkoth had. ⁹ So he said to the men of Peniel, “When I return in triumph, I will tear down this tower.”

8:5-6 The leaders of Sukkoth and Peniel refused to help Gideon, probably fearing Midian's revenge should he fail (Gideon's army was 300 men chasing 15,000). They should have realized that victory was certain because God was with Gideon. But they were so worried about saving themselves that they never thought about God's power to save.

8:7-9 Because of fear for ourselves, we may not recognize God's presence in other people and therefore miss God's victory. Then we must face the often bitter consequences of failing to join forces with those God has chosen to do his work. Because God will prevail with or without you, be quick to join others who are engaged in his work. Lend support with your time, money, talents, and prayer.

Two Midianite Kings And Their Armies Are Routed – Verses 10-12

¹⁰ Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor with a force of about fifteen thousand men, all that were left of the armies of the eastern peoples; a hundred and twenty thousand swordsmen had fallen. ¹¹ Gideon went up by the route of the nomads east of Nobah and Jogbehah and attacked the unsuspecting army. ¹² Zebah and Zalmunna, the two kings of Midian, fled, but he pursued them and captured them, routing their entire army.

8:10-11 He attacked the army while the camp felt secure: Gideon, continuing in the boldness of the LORD, led a courageous surprise attack. This wasn't the same as 300 attacking the vast army described in Judges 7:12, but it was still a small army against a much larger army. We can suppose that Gideon was bold enough to do this because he saw God do great things in similar circumstances before. The previous work of God encouraged him to trust God for great things in the present.

8:11 The Midianites were escaping into the desert area, where the tent-dwelling nomads lived. They didn't expect Gideon to follow them that far. He pursued them... 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.

Gideon Repays Succoth And Peniel – Verses 13-17

¹³ Gideon son of Joash then returned from the battle by the Pass of Heres. ¹⁴ He caught a young man of Sukkoth and questioned him, and the young man wrote down for him the names of the seventy-seven officials of Sukkoth, the elders of the town. ¹⁵ Then Gideon came and said to the men of Sukkoth, "Here are Zebah and Zalmunna, about whom you taunted me by saying, 'Do you already have the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna in your possession? Why should we give bread to your exhausted men?'" ¹⁶ He took the elders of the town and taught the men of Sukkoth a lesson by punishing them with desert thorns and briers. ¹⁷ He also pulled down the tower of Peniel and killed the men of the town.

8:15-17 Gideon carried out the threat he had made in 8: 7-9. It is difficult to determine whether this act of revenge was justified or whether he should have left the punishment up to God. Gideon was God's appointed leader, but the officials of Sukkoth and Peniel refused to help him in any way because they feared the enemy. They showed neither faith nor respect for God or the man God had chosen to save them. We should help others because it is right, regardless of whether we will benefit personally.

Gideon Repays The Two Midianite Kings – Verses 18-21

¹⁸ Then he asked Zebah and Zalmunna, "What kind of men did you kill at Tabor?" "Men like you," they answered, "each one with the bearing of a prince." ¹⁹ Gideon replied, "Those were my brothers, the sons of my own mother. As surely as the LORD lives, if you had spared their lives, I would not kill you." ²⁰ Turning to Jether, his oldest son, he said, "Kill them!" But Jether did not draw his sword, because he was only a boy and was afraid. ²¹ Zebah and Zalmunna said, "Come, do it yourself. 'As is the man, so is his strength.'" So Gideon stepped forward and killed them, and took the ornaments off their camels' necks.

8:20-21 For the kings to be killed by a boy would have been humiliating because it would have looked as though they were no match for a boy. The two kings wanted to avoid that disgrace, as well as the slower and more painful death that an inexperienced swordsman might inflict.

Gideon Refuses To Be Made King – Verses 22-23

22 The Israelites said to Gideon, “Rule over us—you, your son and your grandson—because you have saved us from the hand of Midian.” **23** But Gideon told them, “I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The LORD will rule over you.”

8:22-23 The people wanted to make Gideon their king, but Gideon stressed that the Lord was to rule over them. Despite his inconsistencies, Gideon never lost sight of the importance, for both a nation and an individual, of putting God first. Is God first in your life? If he is, he must affect every dimension of your life, not just what you do in church.

Gideon Gathers A Fortune – Verses 24-27

24 And he said, “I do have one request, that each of you give me an earring from your share of the plunder.” (It was the custom of the Ishmaelites to wear gold earrings.) **25** They answered, “We’ll be glad to give them.” So they spread out a garment, and each of them threw a ring from his plunder onto it. **26** The weight of the gold rings he asked for came to seventeen hundred shekels, not counting the ornaments, the pendants and the purple garments worn by the kings of Midian or the chains that were on their camels’ necks. **27** Gideon made the gold into an ephod, which he placed in Ophrah, his town. All Israel prostituted themselves by worshiping it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and his family.

8:24-26 Those who were very wealthy put ornaments on their camels as a way of displaying their riches. Women wore vast amounts of jewelry as well, often up to 15 pairs of earrings. Jewelry was also worn for good luck. After Gideon’s rise to power, he seems to have become carried away with this accumulation of wealth. Eventually it led the Israelites to idolatry.

8:27 An ephod was a linen garment worn by priests over their chests. It was considered holy (Exodus 28: 5-35; 39: 2-24; Leviticus 8: 7-8). Gideon probably had good motives for making the ephod (a visible remembrance commemorating the victory). Unfortunately, the people began to worship the ephod as an idol. Sadly, many decisions that stem from good motives produce negative results. Perhaps no one stops to ask, “What might go wrong?” or “Is there a possibility of negative consequences?” In your plans and decisions, take time to anticipate how a good idea might lead to a potential problem.

Gideon Assumes A Kingly Harem – Verses 28-30

28 Thus Midian was subdued before the Israelites and did not raise its head again. During Gideon’s lifetime, the land had peace forty years. **29** Jerub-Baal son of Joash went back home to live. **30** He had seventy sons of his own, for he had many wives.

8:28 Thus Midian was subdued: Regarding the security of the nation, Gideon’s rule as a judge over Israel was a success. Yet in many ways he was a spiritual failure. For he had many wives: A harem was not only a reflection of a man’s inability to control his sexual lust, it was also a way for him to proudly express his wealth, by saying “Look at all the wives and children I can support.”

8:28-30 The Old Testament never directly condemns polygamy (though the New Testament does in Matthew 19:4-6 and 1 Timothy 3:2). Yet the Old Testament shows the bitter fruit of polygamy. The stories of polygamous families in the Old Testament (such as with Jacob or David) are the stories of conflict and crisis.

Gideon Assumes - Or Hopes For - A Hereditary Rule - Verses 31-32

³¹ His concubine, who lived in Shechem, also bore him a son, whom he named Abimelek. ³² Gideon son of Joash died at a good old age and was buried in the tomb of his father Joash in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

8:31-32 This relationship between Gideon and a concubine produced a son who tore apart Gideon's family and caused tragedy for the nation. Gideon's story illustrates the fact that heroes in battle are not always heroes in daily life. Gideon led the nation but could not lead his family. No matter who you are, moral laxness will cause problems. Just because you have won a single battle with temptation does not mean you will automatically win the next one. We need to be constantly watchful against temptation. Sometimes Satan's strongest attacks come after a victory.

After Gideon, Israel Rebels And Makes A Covenant With Baal – Verses 33-35

³³ No sooner had Gideon died than the Israelites again prostituted themselves to the Baals. They set up Baal-Berith as their god ³⁴ and did not remember the LORD their God, who had rescued them from the hands of all their enemies on every side. ³⁵ They also failed to show any loyalty to the family of Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) in spite of all the good things he had done for them.

8:33 As soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals: In a sense, Israel served the memory of Gideon well, especially the Gideon of his later years. By serving Baal, Israel said, "What really matters is money and success," and in this they followed the example of Gideon in his later years. And made Baal-Berith their god: The name Baal-Berith means "Baal of the Covenant." The Israelites sadly regarded Baal as their covenant god.