

Judges 7:23-

Judges 7:23–8:3 (ESV)

²³ And the men of Israel were called out from Naphtali and from Asher and from all Manasseh, and they pursued after Midian.

²⁴ Gideon sent messengers throughout all the hill country of Ephraim, saying, “Come down against the Midianites and capture the waters against them, as far as Beth-barah, and also the Jordan.” So all the men of Ephraim were called out, and they captured the waters as far as Beth-barah, and also the Jordan. ²⁵ And they captured the two princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb they killed at the winepress of Zeeb. Then they pursued Midian, and they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon across the Jordan.

8 Then the men of Ephraim said to him, “What is this that you have done to us, not to call us when you went to fight against Midian?” And they accused him fiercely. ² And 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 grape harvest of Abiezer? ³ God has given into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. What have I been able to do in comparison with you?” Then their anger against him subsided when he said this.

I. Intro:

A. *Some people say, that Gideon changed...*

1. He started out as a quiet, humble, unassuming man hesitantly responding to the calling of the Lord...

a) He obviously struggled to believe...

(1) **-not so much doubting the ability of the Lord...**

(a) **-but rather, doubting his own ability.**

b) His story begins in hiding...
and in darkness...

(1) **The Lord met him, while he hid in fear from his enemies, processing his crops...**

(2) **And -The very first thing that he did for God... he did in secrecy, and in darkness.**

2. But his faith grew, and God proved Himself time and time again...

a) And Gideon willingly stripped his army down to 300 men...

(1) **And willingly took those 300 men to the edge of the Midianite camp.**

B. *When the fighting started... a different Gideon appeared.*

1. And, he's not the kind of guy who would be embraced in today's culture...

a) Yes, He shows that he has wisdom and tact in dealing with the Ephraimites...

(1) And yes, he displayed humility when he turned down the offer of his people to make him their king...

b) But he also shows us that he's a hard, violent and murderous person... even to his fellow Israelites...

(1) Who, because of fear, did not give his troops bread.

2. He also shows us that he is still misguided... both spiritually and morally...

a) He gathered gold from his people, and made an ephod...

(1) Which was breastplate like garment worn by the high priest...

(2) It was an implement of worship, to be used by one person, in a very specific way...

(a) But Gideon made a counterfeit ephod... and put it on display...

b) Remember Nadab and Abihu?

(1) They made counterfeit incense, and the Lord consumed them with fire...

(2) This is not the kind of stuff the God thinks kindly upon...

(a) This ephod hung in his home town... and the people of Israel turned it into an idol and worshipped it.

c) Not only that, but Gideon was not content with one wife...

(1) **But he too, embraced the traditions of the people who continued to oppress Israel...**

(a) And he had several wives, and at least one concubine.

C . *I've read, time and time again... how the commentators say, that Gideon changed...*

1. He started out so good... but the power went to his head, and he stumbled in his own age...

D . *But I don't see it that way...*

1. I see a man who was stumbling each step of the way...

a) He stumbled in fear... in
stumbled in doubt... he stumbled
in anger... he stumbled in wisdom...
and he stumbled in morality...

(1) **He was a flawed human... and God chose him.**

(2) **He was afraid... and God chose him.**

(3) **He was harsh and violent with his own countrymen... and God chose him.**

(4) **He was not theologically correct... and God chose him..**

(5) **He had different views on marriage... and God chose him.**

b) He had good moments... he did good things...

(1) **But he was also... in a very consistent manner... a flawed man.**

(a) And God chose him.

E . *Last week we read about the initial defeat of the Midianites...*

1. It was totally a work of God..

a) He put dread in the midst of the camp..

b) And as the people turned on each other in panic, and began to flee..

(1) **Gideon and his 300... stood still.**

(a) They broke their pots, they raised their torches, they blew their trumpets and they shouted...

(i) But, they did not have to fight.

c) In this instance, God fought for them.

2. And I believe, that is a message of God for us...

a) Just as Israel stood still and watched God deliver them from Pharaoh..

(1) **Just as the people of Israel saw God defeat their enemies...**

(a) We too need to remember...

(b) The work... is His.

(i) He is the one who guides... who gives vision... who instructs... who empowers... and who makes things happen.

b) Sometimes... our job, is to just stand aside... and watch.

F. *This is where we pick up this week.*

II. **Judges 7:23-8:3**

A. *Starting in 7:23, we see that the enemy is on the run.*

1. They are heading south, on the western side of the Jordan...

a) The men of Naphtali, Asher and Manasseh were called out to pursue..

(1) **They were close by... these were most likely the men who were sent away because they were fearful, and because they drank water a particular way...**

b) When they received the news that the Midianites were on the run...

(1) **...surely, their faith was bolstered, and they were quick to join in on the pursuit.**

2. To the south of them... messengers brought the information to Ephraim...

a) ...head North and block the Midianites from crossing back over to the Eastern side of the Jordan...

(1) **They came out to battle... and they didn't stop them... but they hindered them greatly, and took the lives of two significant princes.**

B. *And then, in verse 1, chapter 8... there is a conflict... a distraction of sorts..*

1. Instead of remaining united against the enemy...

a) Ephraim wanted to raise a stink with Gideon...

b) We'll see later, in chapter 12...

(1) **They do it again with Jephthah... but in that case, they are not calmed. Gideon gets them to calm down...**

(a) But that doesn't happen with Jephthah...

(b) In chapter 12, Ephraim responds with words of threat...

(i) And Jephthah responded to that, by attacking them.

c) Obviously, the odds of things escalating with Ephraim.. were pretty good.

(1) **The tribes in Israel, were not all on good terms with each other.**

2. In chapter 8:1 they are upset that they weren't invited to the attack.

a) They were clueless to the way that God had orchestrated the initial battle...

- (1) **But Gideon spoke wisely to them...**
 - (a) In verse 2... he let them know..
 - (i) We have hardly done anything yet...
 - (ii) It was our battle... our harvest...
 - (b) But your gleaning has reaped a much greater reward than our harvest.
 - (i) you have captured and killed two of their big guns!
 - (2) **What I have done... so far, is nothing compared to you.**
3. You see... for this culture, war was money.
- a) Men gained great wealth by going to war..
 - (1) **They gathered the spoils of those they defeated, and often times, returned from one battle as rich men.**
 - (a) Ephraim wasn't complaining that they missed out on a noble battle.
 - (2) **No way... this was a huge business opportunity, and they were being left out.**

(a) But such, wasn't the case. And when they found out that they were doing better in spoils than Gideon...

(i) They grew content.

C. *But apparently... they could not completely stop the Midianites...*

1. They still made it across the river and were fleeing to the east..

a) Beginning in vs. 4, we see Gideon on the pursuit.

III. Judges 8:4-9

Judges 8:4–9 (ESV)

⁴ And Gideon came to the Jordan and crossed over, he and the 300 men who were with him, exhausted yet pursuing. ⁵ So 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 after Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian." ⁶ And the officials of Succoth said, "Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hand, that we should give bread to your army?" ⁷ So Gideon said, "Well then, when the LORD has given Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, I will flail your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers." ⁸ And from there he went up 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 And he said to the men of Penuel, "When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower."

A. *Now remember, when the land was divided in Israel, two and ½ tribes decided that they wanted to remain on the eastern side of the Jordan...*

1. Manasseh was huge... ½ of it was on the Eastern side, and one half of it was on the western side...

a) To the south of Manasseh was Gad

(1) **And to the south of Gad was Reuben.**

2. These two cities that Gideon passed through.... Succoth and Penuel... were in Gad.

a) This is modern day Jordan...

(1) **About 10 to 15 miles north of Amman...**

b) They were Israelites..

(1) **And they were afraid of the Midianites...**

B. *They refused to provide hospitality to Gideon's men...*

1. Which, in this culture, is a major offense...

a) But they knew how great the Midianites were ...

(1) **And behold, Gideon was standing before them with only 300 men.**

2. They were in a difficult spot..

a) If they provided support to Gideon..

(1) Then surely, Zehah and Zalmunna would follow through on some pending threat.

C . *In all my reading on this event, I can't find any sympathy for these cities...*

1. We automatically think that Gideon is the good guy, and everyone who opposes him is wrong..

a) But wait a minute...

(1) Where did we find Gideon when we began his story?

b) He was hiding..

(1) He was living in fear of the Midianites..

(a) And it took one successful act of faith and four separate miracles to convince him that he could do what God had called him to do.

2. Just a short time ago...

a) Gideon was no different than the people of these two cities.

(1) He wasn't offering these people miracles... He wasn't sharing with them, the miraculous testimonies of God..

(a) He is just walking in... and demanding that an oppressed people defy the massive force that threatened them...

3. If anything, Gideon missed an opportunity...

a) And unfortunately, he will follow up on his threats... and then some..

D. *Here's one thing I often need to remind myself of.... - The book of Judges is merely recording for us... 'what happened'...*

1. And we cannot naturally assume... that the actions of the good guy are always right...

a) Gideon is a flawed man, who was chosen, and used by God.

2. But God's calling, does not guarantee... that the called will not be flawed...

IV. Judges 8:10-17

A. *Continuing on... in verses 10-12, we are given the account of Gideon chasing down Zebah and Zalmunna,*

1. ...capturing them, and leaving the remaining army in a panic.

a) This great enemy that oppressed Israel, was defeated...

2. Those who were made helpless by their fear... could now... relax, and rejoice...

a) Well, except for the people of Succoth and Penuel.

Judges 8:13–17 (ESV)

¹³ Then Gideon the son of Joash returned from the battle by the ascent of Heres. ¹⁴ And he captured a young man of Succoth and questioned him. And he wrote down for him the officials and elders of Succoth, seventy-seven men. ¹⁵ And he came to the men of Succoth and said, “Behold Zebah and Zalmunna, about whom you taunted me, saying, ‘Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hand, that we should give bread to your men who are exhausted?’ ” ¹⁶ And he took the elders of the city, and he took thorns of the wilderness and briers and with them taught the men of Succoth a lesson. ¹⁷ And he broke down the tower of Penuel and killed the men of the city.

B. *He followed through on his oath with the people of Succoth...*

1. They were beat with thorns and briars... it’s uncertain whether they lived or not...

a) He followed through on his oath to Penuel also...

(1) **He broke down their tower...**

(a) But, there’s something else in verse 17... that I find disturbing.

b) This wasn’t part of the threat...

(1) **It says, he killed the men of the city.**

2. His own countrymen, whom he had just liberated from the oppression of the Midianites...

a) He killed, because they refused him hospitality.

C. *It's easy to read through these events and say...*

1. "Oh, they're justified, because Gideon is the good guy."

a) But this book isn't affirming all of the actions of it's characters...

(1) **It is just telling us what they did.**

2. Gideon was a flawed man... chosen and empowered by God, to do an amazing thing...

a) But... along the way, we still see... that God's calling is not a guarantee...

(1) **That the called... will not be flawed.**

V. **Judges 8:18-21 (summarize)**

A. *In verses 18-21, something happens that reveals to us, that we don't know the entire story...*

1. There is more going on here than what meets the eye.

a) Gideon interrogates these two kings about some men they killed in Tabor.

(1) **They men they killed... were either Gideon's brothers, or simply his countrymen...**

(a) The language could suggest both...

b) Gideon gives his son the opportunity to kill these kings...

(1) **But he was afraid to do it... - the passage says that he was still a young man...**

(a) He was probably just a kid in his early teens...

(b) He grew up farming... not killing..

(i) And now, his dad wants him to kill two kings...

2. When his son hesitated, Gideon did the deed himself...

VI. Judges 8:22-32

Judges 8:22–32 (ESV)

²² Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, “Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also, for you have saved us from the hand of Midian.” ²³ Gideon said to them, “I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the LORD will rule over you.” ²⁴ And Gideon said to them, “Let me make a request of you: every one of you give me the earrings from his spoil.” (For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.) ²⁵ And they answered, “We will willingly give

them.” And they spread a cloak, and every man threw in it the earrings of his spoil. ²⁶ And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was 1,700 shekels of gold, besides the crescent ornaments and the pendants and the purple garments worn by the kings of Midian, and besides the collars that were around the necks of their camels. ²⁷ And Gideon made an ephod of it and put it in his city, in Ophrah. And all Israel whored after it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family. ²⁸ So Midian was subdued before the people of Israel, and they raised their heads no more. And the land had rest forty years in the days of Gideon.

²⁹ Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and lived in his own house. ³⁰ Now Gideon had seventy sons, his own offspring, for he had many wives. ³¹ And his concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, and he called his name Abimelech. ³² And Gideon the son of Joash died in a good old age and was buried in the tomb of Joash his father, at Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

A. *Verses 22 and 23 are golden...*

1. Gideon denied the monarchy.

a) Israel did not have a king...
and had never had a king.

(1) **They had Moses... they had Joshua... and they have had several random judges...**

2. The nations around them had kings...

a) Cities had kings...

(1) **Small roaming clans had kings.**

(a) It seemed like the normal thing to do...

(b) Everyone else had one... we should get one too.

b) But this wasn't God's plan for Israel...

(1) **Not yet.**

3. This, in fact, was the kind of behavior that kept on getting them in trouble.

a) They imitated the people they were supposed to drive out...

(1) **They people they were supposed to oppose...**

(a) The people that they were supposed to stand in stark contrast to.

B. *They kept on wanting to be like them.*

1. So they called for Gideon to be their king...

a) And he shows us his humble and gentle side again...

(1) **And he says no. Yahweh will rule over you.**

2. Great words of wisdom...

a) Followed immediately, by something very bizarre... and, unwise.

(1) **I won't be your king...**

(a) But help me do an expensive misguided religious thing which will lead to idolatry.

(i) No, we will not imitate our enemies by having a king..

(a) *But let's make an idol.*

(2) **Let me make a religious image, and I will set it up in a public place... so that a people who only know idolatry...**

(a) ...can worship it as an idol.

b) Is this what Gideon intended?

(1) **Probably not.**

(a) But apparently, Gideon was clueless to God's design for worship.

(i) He had... what we would call... bad doctrine.

C. *He took the gold that the people gave him..*

1. Made an ephod... an implement of worship, only to be worn by the high priest...

a) And he hung it up in his home town.

(1) **The search for reasoning in this account will only leave you baffled.**

(a) Then end result... vs. 27 – all Israel whored after it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family.

D. *We also see that Gideon was a polygamist...*

1. Another characteristic taken from the nations they were supposed to be different from.

VII. Conclusion...

A. *But he was God's man.*

1. And God did amazing things through him...

2. Which should stand as a reminder to us..

a) This isn't Gideon's story...

(1) **This is God's story.**

3. This isn't about what Gideon did..

a) Its about what God did.

B. *And I'm encouraged by that ...*

1. Because we are all called and chosen by God..

a) Every one of us here... If we have declared Him as Lord and embraced his forgiveness...

(1) **We are called...**

(a) But being called by God... is not guarantee, that we won't also be flawed.

2. I was reading this past week about the question...

a) "What is God's will for my life?"

(1) **And the author suggested that we stop asking that question, and simply ask:**

(a) "What is God's will?"

b) When our concern is so focused on God's will for our life..

(1) **The whole pursuit becomes so, self centered...**

(a) And we play into that whole theme of American Christianity... which in itself, is so self centered...

3. We find more and more ways, to ask, "What's in it for me" with spiritual wording...

- a) What programs does your church have for me?
- b) That time of worship made me feel so good.
- c) That message uplifted me.
- d) I want to feel affirmed, encouraged, validated...

(1) **And I want church and ministry to provide this stuff...**

4. I want my best life NOW... I want to confess positive things for ME. I want the validation of God's love for me to RICHES, HEALTH, AND A GREAT PROMOTION...

a) And this is a continuing underlying theme in American Christianity...

(1) **I would encourage you... stop asking what God's will for your life is...**

(a) If you are not first and foremost...

(i) Simply asking... What is God's will?

C. *He has revealed it to us... perfectly in His word...*

1. If we concern ourselves with the stuff that God calls us to, scripturally...

a) And live for His glory..

(1) **And pour our lives out as imitators of Jesus**

b) If we crucify our flesh and the desires there in...

(1) **The desires to have stuff**

(2) **The desires to complain**

(3) **The desires to have our pride affirmed**

(4) **The desires to be comfortable and important feeling...**

c) If we reckon those desires as dead...

(1) **And simply live every day for Jesus..**

(a) Something cool will happen.

(i) If you are concerning yourself with God's will..

(a) *His will for you, will become evident.*

D. *We are all called... but there's no guarantee, that we won't be flawed...*

1. So, just as this isn't Gideon's story... this is God's story..

a) Our story...

(1) **Your story... my story..**

(a) They should be God's story.

E. *God pulled Gideon off the bench and put him in the game...*

1. When he doubted... God kept him in the game.

a) When he doubted the next day... God didn't put him back on the bench.

2. When he was fearful...

a) God simply gave him the next play...

(1) **When he did erratic and bizarre things...**

(a) Like kill his own countrymen... and make an idol...

(i) God didn't squash his story.

F. *I think this is a common thing for many Christians... and probably a common thing for some of you here today...*

1. You doubted... you were fearful... you did something erratic and bizarre...

a) And you think that God has squashed your story.

(1) **As a result... Christians drop out.**

(a) They drop out of fellowship... they drop out of ministry... they drop out of worship... they drop out of prayer.. they drop out of the Scriptures...

(i) They think God has squashed their story..

2. I have a word of encouragement for you.

a) Build a bridge, and get over your story.

(1) **Your life is God's story... Be where His will is happening... stop thinking like a consumer... and start thinking like a worshipper.**

(a) It's not all about you.

(i) It is, all about Jesus.