



09 Judges Chapter 8 – “The Trap of Self”

We have just spent two weeks looking at a fearful man named Gideon and how he overcame that fear and became a great judge or deliverer in Israel. Wednesday night we looked at his caving to the flesh in dealing with people who had slighted him. He gave in to vengeance. Most of us can at times be riddled with doubt and fear, but we can overcome those things when we realize that they don't come from the Lord. They are born in our flesh, in the world, or in Satan himself. This morning, we will see Gideon's move from being a person used mightily by God to a sad picture of the fall of one of God's greats.



This is where we see Gideon becoming progressively unhinged. It is so different from the way that he had spoken to the Tribe of Ephraim there in the beginning of the chapter. It is sad, but it is a reminder that the flesh is ever present within us. It is crouched down and ready to pounce like a lion. There are so many things and so many instances that can arouse anger within us. We naturally and sinfully respond in the flesh. Pastor Larry does a great job of teaching about things that push the buttons of our emotions. Usually, our immediate reaction is some “deed of the flesh” which we read about in Galatians 5:20. One of the biggies is anger. Someone offends us and instead of waiting on the Lord and turning it over to him, we react in anger. Instead of our natural behavior, we must respond with our “Holy Spirit behavior” which is what we find in the fruits of the Spirit. My mom used to counsel me to count to ten if I felt angry about something before I responded. That's a good idea, but sometimes you have to count to ten thousand until you let God get a hold of your emotions and you stop yourself from reacting. As we read through the beginning of chapter 8, Gideon's vengeance on his own people is astonishing.

“¹⁶ And he took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth. ¹⁷ Then he tore down the tower of Penuel and killed the men of the city. (Judges 8:16-17, NKJV).

In this verse he is taking 77 elders of the city of Succoth and is dragging them through the briars and the brambles. Why? To “teach them a lesson.” He then tore down the city tower in Penuel and likewise killed “the men of the city.” Do you remember what happened in Penuel (sometimes called “Peniel”)? That is the very place where Jacob wrestled with the angel of the Lord and where he was given a new name, Israel. You could argue that this is the very place where “Israel” was born, and now Gideon is ripping Israel apart. It's unbelievable.

Gideon enjoyed a great victory. He routed the whole army and took the enemy kings of Midian as his captives. And now he has moved from being a good judge to being a tyrant. Gideon did

something that we are all sometimes guilty of doing. He took a gift from the Lord and turned it into an idol. And as we will see, he did it all while his kids were watching.



Idolatry happens when
God's gifts turn into
God's greatest
competition

On Wednesday we talked about the business of turning the gifts of God into idols. I spoke about Nebuchadnezzar's vision and how he turned that gift into an idol. Many times in scripture we see God give a wonderful gift to someone and they turn it into an idol.

We do the same thing with the other gifts God gives us. God gives men and women sexual pleasure to be enjoyed in the

confines of a committed marriage. What do people do? They create pornography which enslaves both men and women. It leads to alienation and detachment, and it is all artificial.

We take the pleasures of natural substances like alcohol and food, and we abuse ourselves with them. Our abuse ends in disease and illness. It is all from making idols out of the gifts of God. Someone mentioned on Wednesday that Gideon at least had told them what he was going to do. He may have, but what he did was directly contrary to the heart of God.



Many times, people wonder what God's will is for their lives. I think a good place to start discovering that is to read the words of the Prophet Micah. ¹⁸ *He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8, NKJV).* Gideon failed all three mandates. He did not do right by his countrymen, he showed no mercy, and

he wasn't walking humbly in any way. The flesh had taken hold of this great man of valor.

¹⁸ **And he said to Zebah and Zalmunna [the Midianite Kings] , "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. (Judges 8:18-21, NKJV).**

This is a weird passage. Gideon chased the kings down and then questioned them about whom they had killed in battle. When they answered that they had killed guys that looked just like Gideon, he ordered his son Jether to get up and kill them. Jether refused to do it because the text tells us that he was "still a youth." This is a reminder that what we do in front of our

children is way more important than what we say. In the Irish language we have a saying that is so appropriate here. ***Cad a dhéanfadh mac an cait ach luch a mharú*** (It literally means “what would the son of a cat do but kill a mouse”). We express that in English with such phrases as “like father like son” or “the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.”¹

Gideon killed the kings in front of his son, and the text tells us he took their “crescent ornaments” from their camels. These were their Canaanite royal symbols. Gideon was turning into a king in his own mind.

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.” 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.”

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. (Judges:22-24, NKJV).

He is approached about being made king, but the text tells us he rejected that summarily. I don’t know if he said this in false humility. I don’t know if he said this in sincerity. But I do know that what follows is a desire for gold, for power, for women, for status, and for all the trappings of a king. We are not talking about a little bit of gold, but a whole lot of gold.

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. 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. (Judges 8:25-27, NKJV).

So the men threw down their garments and they began to put the earrings they had taken from 135,000 soldiers who were the men of Midian (Ismaelites). Interestingly also, he took their “crescent ornaments, pendants, and purple robes” because they were kings of Midian. It is as though Gideon was saying to Israel, “I don’t want to be your king, but I’m sure going to live like a king.” It is as though he wanted all the privileges of being a king without any of the duties or responsibilities.



As most are aware, the crescent moon is the symbol of Islam even today. Most scholars believe the crescent symbol was taken from the ancient pagan Canaanite religions which were based in worship of the celestial bodies. Specifically, the moon god was worshipped in the Arabian peninsula and the near

¹ Great Irish Gaelic Proverb basically meaning “like father like son”.

middle east. To the left is an ancient Assyrian symbol of Baal.² These “crescent ornaments” were royal symbols and Gideon wanted them.

Then Gideon took these gold earrings and melted them down and made an ephod out of them. He set it up in his city and the text tells us that “all Israel played the harlot with it there and it became a snare to Gideon and to his house.” That means they were ALL TIED UP IN IT. You might remember that the “ephod” was a cloak that was worn primarily by the priests. It was an adornment worn by a person who was in communication with God. That person then communicated the messages received by God to the people. I don’t know exactly what Gideon’s motivation was here, but he was playing with fire.

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. 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. (Judges 8:28-32, NKJV).

We see further moral decline in the life of Gideon as he had “many wives” and “a concubine in Shechem.” That means she was his girlfriend on the side. Gideon produced 70 sons from these wives and he produced a son named Abimelech (means ‘my father is king’) who would end up killing ALL of Gideon’s seventy sons except for one. Gideon’s life ended in disaster and his life produced disaster.

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. (Judges 8:33-35, NKJV).

Over in 1 Timothy 6, Paul the Apostle warns his young protégé Timothy to be on his guard for those who chase after riches.

6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. 8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. 9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. (1 Timothy 6:6-10, NKJV).

Gideon fell in love with wealth, power, and influence. He overstepped boundaries when he made an ephod of gold. I’m not exactly sure what his motivation was, but he did this obviously when he was pursuing his flesh with all of his might. He made that ephod out of gold just like

² <https://exposingthelieofislam.wordpress.com/islamic-symbols-stolen-from-ancient-paganism-4/>

the golden calf that had been made by Aaron. He moved the center of worship from Shiloh where God had established it, and he put it in his own town of Orphah. He then lived like a pagan king with a harem and riches. He had a son with his mistress in Shechem, that he named "my father is king." That tells us a lot.

Gideon reminds us that power corrupts and he reminds us how easy it is to take the blessings of God and mistake them for our own doing. Without being on our guard, we can quickly take God's blessings for granted and use them for our own benefit and advantage. We all have the capacity to follow the Lord and have Him do great things in and through us, or we have the capacity to follow self and end in destruction.

When we submit to the Holy Spirit in our lives, the fruit can be so beautiful, but when we yield to our flesh with its desires, the outcome quickly becomes ugly. Do you remember how we ended the Book of Joshua? It ended with a covenant pronounced in Shechem. This was the very place where Gideon had his Canaanite mistress. This is where he did EXACTLY opposite of what the covenant required. Here, he got it all mixed up. Here is where Gideon was snared in the trap of self. He forgot who God was and he forgot who he was. This is the place where he bore a son Abimelech who killed all of his sons but one. Back in Joshua 24, Joshua said to the people,

*¹⁴ "Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD! ¹⁵ And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, **choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.**" (Joshua 24:14-15, NKJV).*

At some point, Gideon made a choice to no longer serve God, but to serve self. The outcome was horrific. His life had changed from being a splendor to being a horror. Decisions have consequences. So, choose this day whom you will serve. As for me and my house, and as for me and this church, we will serve the Lord.

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese- Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.