

BAND OF BROTHERS
WHEN
JUDGES RULED
AND
SIN REIGNED
LIFE LESSONS FROM
THE BOOK OF JUDGES

WEEK 6 HOMEWORK

- Read Judges 8:22-9:57
Gideon is dead and gone, but don't forget how the story of his life ended. He had fathered 70 sons by his many wives and his concubine had given birth to a son named Abimelech. On top of that, the nation of Israel had reverted to their old way, turning their backs on God, and refusing to honor Gideon and his family for all he had done for them.
 - According to verses 1-6 of chapter 9, what does Abimelech do and what does this tell you about the state of affairs in Israel?
 - Read verses 7-15. What do you think the point is that Jotham, the only surviving son of Gideon, is trying to make?
 - In verses 16-21, Jotham issues a curse on the people of Shechem. What is the basis for his accusations against them and his anger with them?
- According to verses 22-25, how does God intervene in the sordid situation?
 - Can you think of any times when it appeared as if the godly were suffering while the wicked got away with murder? How did that make you feel? What did it seem to say about God?
 - What happens next, as described in verses 26-29?

- Read the rest of chapter nine and summarize what happens.
 - What eventually happens to Abimelech and how is this described by the author as an act of God?
 - From what you have read in these two chapters, did God ever command the people of Israel to seek a king for themselves?
 - What kind of king did Abimelech turn out to be?
- Read 1 Samuel 8:4-9. What similarities do you see between this story and that found in Judges 7-8?
 - Read 1 Samuel 8:10-19. What does God warn will happen when the people reject Him as their King? What will their human king do for them?

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WEEK 6: Judges 7-8:21

The God Behind Gideon: When the Almighty uses the altogether unworthy

- **The Almighty**

*“Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: **I led you up** from Egypt and **[I] brought you out** of the house of slavery. And **I delivered you** from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all who oppressed you, and **[I] drove them out** before you and **[I] gave you their land**. And **I said to you, ‘I am the Lord your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell.’ But you have not obeyed my voice.**” – Judges 6:8-10 ESV*

- **The Unworthy**

*“Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, **my clan is the weakest** in Manasseh, and **I am the least** in my father’s house.” – Judges 6:15 ESV*

*So Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the Lord had told him. But because **he was too afraid** of his family and the men of the town to do it by day, he did it by night. – Judges 6:27 ESV*

- Gideon is a complex character
- He displays a wide range of attributes (good and bad)
- He is a byproduct of his environment
 - His kinsmen had **refused to obey** God’s commands
***Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants...for the Canaanites persisted in dwelling in that land.** – Judges 1:27 ESV*
 - His countrymen had a **track record of unfaithfulness**
The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord gave them into the hand of Midian seven years. – Judges 6:1 ESV
 - His own father was **guilty of idolatry**
*“...pull down the altar of Baal **that your father has**, and cut down the Asherah that is beside it. – Judges 6:25 ESV*

He exhibited faith

the altar of Baal was broken down – 6:28

“Gideon the son of Joash has done this thing.” – 6:29

he sounded the trumpet – 6:34

he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh – 6:35

he sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali – 6:35

He displayed doubt

“...if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us?” – 6:13

“where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us?” – 6:13

“the Lord has forsaken us!” – 6:13

“how can I save Israel?” – 6:15

...because he was too afraid of his family...he did it by night – 6:27

“Please let me test just once more...” – 6:39

- The extent of Gideon’s **faith** or **fear** is not the point
- It’s not his **exploits** or **excuses** that matter

“God’s glory and kingship must trump our doubts, fears, and desires to control or take credit.” – Kenneth C. Way, *Teach the Text Commentary Series: Judges and Ruth*

• **When We Last Left Gideon**

*But **the Spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon**, and **he sounded the trumpet**, and the Abiezrites were called out to follow him. And **he sent messengers** throughout all Manasseh, and they too were called out to follow him. And **he sent messengers** to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they went up to meet them. – Judges 6:34-35 ESV*

Now fast-forward:

*Then **Jerubbaal** (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the spring of Harod. And the camp of Midian was north of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley. – Judges 7:1 ESV*

- What is going here?
- This goes back to Judges 6

*Therefore on that day Gideon was called **Jerubbaal**, that is to say, “**Let Baal contend against him**,” because he broke down his altar. – Judges 6:32 ESV*

Jerubbaal – literally: “contend with Baal”

- Why did Gideon’s father give him this strange new name?
- And why is it used to open chapter 7?

*But Joash said to all who stood against him, “**Will you contend for Baal? Or will you save him? Whoever contends for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because his altar has been broken down.**” – Judges 6:31 ESV*

- This entire book concerns the idolatry of Israel
- They had done what was evil in the sight of God

*...**they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the Lord to anger. They abandoned the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth.** – Judges 2:12-13 ESV*

- They had given credibility and credit to non-existent gods

How foolish are those who manufacture idols.

These prized objects are really worthless.

*The people who worship idols don't know this,
so they are all put to shame.*

*Who but a fool would make his own god—
an idol that cannot help him one bit?*

*All who worship idols will be disgraced
along with all these craftsmen—mere humans—
who claim they can make a god. – Isaiah 44:9-11 ESV*

- **It's All in the Numbers** – Judges 7:2-8

- What's going on here?
 - This is all the **work** and **will** of God
*The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and **the Lord gave them into the hand of Midian** seven years. – 6:1*
 - The Midianites were the **instruments** of God
*...whenever the Israelites planted crops, the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the East **would come up against them.** – 6:3*
 - The size of the problem was **God-ordained**
...they would come like locusts in number—both they and their camels could not be counted—so that they laid waste the land... – 6:5

- These two chapters are filled with references to numbers
*...the **camp** of Midian was north of them – 7:1*
machaneh – (Hebrew) armed host, body of people (11x in 20 verses)

*The people with you are **too many**... – 7:2*

*Then **22,000** of the people returned, and **10,000** remained... – 7:3*

The people are **still too many**... – 7:4

“With **the 300** men who lapped I will save you...” – 7:7

...the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the people of the East lay along the valley like locusts **in abundance**, and their camels were **without number**, as the sand that is on the seashore **in abundance**. – 7:12

- This is all about **odds** and **opposition**
- God had Israel right where He wanted them
- Their unsatisfactory situation was God’s doing

*Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for **he who is in you is greater** than he who is in the world.* – 1 John 4:4 ESV

How bad is it?

Midianites	Israelites	Odds
135,000	32,000	4 to 1

God has Gideon send 22,000 **fearful** soldiers home (vs. 2-3)

135,000	10,000	14 to 1
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God has Gideon send 9,700 **kneelers** home (vs. 4-7)

135,000	300	450 to 1
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- **The 300**

*Every one who **laps** the water with his tongue, **as a dog laps**...* – 7:5

laqaq (Hebrew) – to lick or lap
onomatopoeia – sounds like what it describes

- God compares these men to dogs
- This was not a compliment

Because dogs were considered treacherous and filthy by Jews, the term was used as a form of reproach and self-humiliation

“It is not by force, nor by strength, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of Heaven’s armies.” – Zechariah 4:6 ESV

- **The Camp** – Judges 7:8-9

- The “host” (135,000 strong) lay camped in the valley below him
- And he’s surrounded by 300 men who “lap like dogs”

- The odds are not in his favor
- His chances of victory are slim to none
- From a human perspective – all is lost
- But despite the odds, God promises to give the camp into Gideon’s hands

- **The Dream** – Judges 7:10-14

- Are you kidding me?
 - Gideon and his servant sneak into the enemy camp
 - They happen to overhear a conversation between two Midianites
 - One is describing a bizarre dream he had – just that night
 - His companion just happens to have the interpretation

A loaf of barley bread rolls into camp and destroys a tent

“This is no other than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; God has given into his hand Midian and all the camp.” – 7:14

THIS WHOLE SCENE SCREAMS “GOD IS SOVEREIGN!”

- **The Battle** – Judges 7:15-22

- This was a divine deliverance
 - Designed to reignite the Israelites’ faith in God
 - Intended to restore their allegiance to Him and Him alone
 - God had contended with Baal (Jerubbaal) and won
 - Despite...overwhelming odds and limited resources
 - But Gideon would soon make the victory all about him

God’s victory went to **Gideon’s** head
Gideon wanted to share in the glory

- **The Watershed Moment** – Judges 7:23-25

- God had sent Midianites and now He had routed them
- Don’t forget what God had told Gideon:
*“Arise, go down against **the camp**, for I have given **it** into your hand.” – 7:9*
- But Gideon is not satisfied with God’s victory

And the men of Israel were called out from Naphtali and from Asher and from all Manasseh, and they pursued after Midian. 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.” – Judges 7:23-24 ESV

- Gideon calls back the 31,700 men God had sent home
- He was replacing God’s plan with his own
- Nowhere do we see God advocating Gideon’s action
- And his subsequent victories do NOT indicate God’s blessing

- This was quickly becoming about Gideon and his agenda
 - Gideon is seeking revenge on the Midianites
 - He is looking for payback
 - And he will do anything to get it
- **The Foreshadowing** – Judges 8:1-21
 - Gideon has taken matters into his own hands
 - He has given chase to the enemy
 - Zebba and Zalmunna are two Midianite “lords” or “kings”
 - Gideon’s brothers had been killed by the Midianites
 - Now he was exacting his revenge
 - But to do so, he would kill his brother Israelites
 - In his zeal to capture these two men, he makes two unwise oaths

*“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.” – Judges 8:7 ESV*

*“When I come again in peace, **I will** break down this tower.” – Judges 8:9 ESV*

Penuel

- This is where Jacob wrestled with God and lived to tell about it
- It means “face of God”
- It is also where God changed Jacob’s name to Israel
- But here, at Penuel, Gideon would kill the people of Israel
- Saving face became more important than the face of God
- And so, Gideon’s downward spiral begins

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Spend some time wresting with this:
God had sent the Midianites to punish the Israelites for their idolatry. Gideon’s family had an idol to Baal in their own backyard. His brothers, who were most likely idolatrous, were killed by the Midianites, who had been sent by God. But in avenging his brothers’ deaths, Gideon ended up contending with God. How?
- What lessons can we learn and apply from this?