

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

JUDGES 5-8

When you think of musical duos I'm sure certain names come to mind...

Rogers and Hammerstein... Simon and Garfunkel... Ike and Tina... Sonny and Cher... Hall and Oates... Bebe and Cece... Deborah and Barak...

Deborah and Barak? Yep! They sing the only duet recorded in the Bible...

As the old saying goes, “**Behind every good man there's a good woman... and a surprised mother-in-law.**” In Barak's case I don't know about the mother-in-law, but Deborah was definitely a good woman. She was the fourth judge of Israel, and she rallied a reluctant leader named Barak to fight against the armies of Sisera.

Deborah had the backbone Barak lacked. She was the nudge he needed. Because of her courage and Barak's leadership Israel won a great victory.

Chapter 5 records the song that celebrated their triumph! *It's a duet!*

“Then Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang on that day, saying: When leaders lead in Israel, when the people willingly offer themselves, bless the LORD!”

This is true in the Church. God is blessed when leaders lead - and people willingly follow. *Loving leaders and faithful followers* combine to make great churches. Put together *faith-filled leaders and faithful followers* and they'll make beautiful

music for God.

The church today needs leadership... We need leaders with *faith that moves on* – with *backbone that stands up* – with *humility that bows down* – and with *compassion that reaches out*. We need leaders with integrity and character.

The Church needs people who'll take the bull by the horns, yet trust God completely... We need *good leaders*, but we also need *good followers*.

A young coed's heart sank when she read the question on the application. "Are you a leader?" She had too much integrity to lie, so she wrote "No". The girl was sure her honest answer had cost her acceptance into the prestigious university.

But to her surprise, several weeks later, she received a letter, "Dear Applicant. A study of the application forms reveals that this year our college will have 1,452 new leaders... We are accepting you because we need at least one follower."

Leaders can't lead unless they have followers. And it takes more faith to follow than it does to lead. Leaders trust God - but followers trust God to lead the leader.

The ancient Israeli army had an interesting law. Deuteronomy 20:8 tells us if you didn't want to fight you were sent home. A soldier not devoted to the cause would be a drain on the army's morale. And this is true in the church...

We need people who believe in the cause... who sense God's call... people willing to get onboard, rather than

criticize, grumble, and pick-it-all-to-pieces. Church members need to support the course the leader sets. It's been said, "When you can't lead, and won't follow – all you do is make a dandy roadblock."

Hey, it all came together for Barak and Israel... Whenever leaders and people work together – each doing their part... God wins a tremendous victory!

Verse 3 "Hear, O kings! Give ear, O princes! I, even I, will sing to the LORD; I will sing praise to the LORD God of Israel." When God works we need to worship.

"LORD, when You went out from Seir, when You marched from the field of Edom, the earth trembled and the heavens poured, the clouds also poured water; the mountains gushed before the LORD, this Sinai, before the LORD God of Israel."

Deborah is speaking of Israel's wilderness wanderings, and gives a detail we don't get elsewhere. God sent thunderstorms to water the desert floor. Not only did they drink water from the rock - but rare desert rains would've *lowered the temperature, prevented sandstorms, and provided additional drinking water.*

Verse 6 jumps ahead to the days of the Judges, "In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath, in the days of Jael (the gal who drove the tent peg through Sisera's skull), the highways were deserted, and the travelers walked along the byways. Village life ceased, it ceased in Israel, until I, Deborah, arose, arose a mother in Israel."

With the land at war tensions were high. It wasn't safe on the streets.

“They chose new gods; then there was war in the gates; not a shield or spear was seen among 40,000 in Israel.” Because of Israel’s idolatry God raised up Jabin - king of the Canaanites - to enslave Israel. It was God’s judgment.

And because of this period of slavery, when Deborah rallies Israel to battle they have no weapons. They go out armed only with *repentant hearts and faith in God*.

“My heart is with the rulers of Israel who offered themselves willingly with the people. Bless the LORD! Speak, you who ride on white donkeys, who sit in judges' attire, and who walk along the road.” Rich and poor alike should praise the Lord.

“Far from the noise of the archers, among the watering places, there they shall recount the righteous acts of the LORD, the righteous acts for His villagers in Israel; then the people of the LORD shall go down to the gates.

Awake, awake, Deborah! Awake, awake, sing a song! Arise, Barak, and lead your captives away, O son of Abinoam!” I’m sure that’s what God wants to say to us at times. “*Awake, awake out of your laziness and give Me the glory I’m due.*”

Verses 13-18 chart the involvement of the various tribes in the battle...

"Then the survivors came down, the people against the nobles; the LORD came down for me against the mighty. From Ephraim were those whose roots were in Amalek. After you, Benjamin, with your peoples, from Machir (associated with the western part of Manasseh) rulers came down, and from Zebulun those who bear the recruiter's staff. And the

princes of Issachar were with Deborah; as Issachar, so was Barak sent into the valley under his command...”

The tribes of Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir, and Issachar helped in the battle.

But “among the divisions of Reuben there were great resolves of heart. Why did you sit among the sheepfolds, to hear the pipings for the flocks? The divisions of Reuben have great searchings of heart.” Reuben thought a lot about getting involved, but never did. He searched his heart, but never took any action.

I wonder how many Reubenites are here tonight?

People come to church and “sit among the sheepfolds” - they occupy a cushy chair. They hear Josh and the worship team’s “piping for the flocks” ... Each week they leave with “great searchings of heart” – they’re stirred by what they’ve heard.

But they never put to practice a lesson – or take action on what they’ve heard.

Remember “a good serve requires a good follow through”. You can talk a lot about serving God, loving God, and taking a stand for God – but talk is cheap.

God doesn’t reward good intentions - but good deeds and godly acts.

Verse 17 “Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan, and why did Dan remain on ships? Asher continued at the seashore, and stayed by his inlets.” Here’s another three tribes that chickened out – they sat on the sidelines, each for a different

reason...

Gilead moved away. He was too distant – too removed to get involved.

Dan was out to sea. He was too busy with business to serve the Lord.

Asher lived too near the enemy. Rather than fight back he became complacent.

Hey, I'm sorry, but we live too far away... we're just too busy with work... that's just too much trouble, right now... are you familiar with any of these excuses?

On the other hand, verse 18, **“Zebulun is a people who jeopardized their lives to the point of death, Naphtali also, on the heights of the battlefield.”** These two tribes were willing to make serious sacrifices to win battles and advance God's kingdom. *What about you? Will you die to your own self interest to serve God?*

"The kings came and fought, then the kings of Canaan fought in Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo; they took no spoils of silver." They got beat!

“They fought from the heavens; the stars from their courses fought against Sisera.” This is interesting language... *The stars fought against Sisera.* The Hebrew word translated **“star”** can refer to any heavenly body – a comet, an asteroid, a meteor, a planet. The stars and their orbits fought for God.

Remember the tremendous odds stacked against Barak. Sisera had 900 iron chariots with the trained soldiers and weapons that accompanied them. Barak commanded 40,000 slaves who had not a shield or spear among them.

Perhaps God pelted the Canaanites with a huge hailstorm, or even a meteorite shower. I do believe Barak was aided by some celestial artillery. It's possible, the kind of phenomena that caused Joshua's long day, may've been used here.

Also **"The torrent of Kishon swept them away, that ancient torrent, the torrent of Kishon. O my soul, march on in strength!"** Evidently, thunderstorms did play a part in the battle. The Kishon is normally a dry bed. It overflows only during heavy rains.

Imagine being one of Sisera's soldiers sitting in an iron chariot – the equivalent of a lightning rod... You're stuck in the mud. Your chariot can't move, and lightning is flashing all around you. *Hey, you're in the middle of an intense electrical storm, and you sitting in an iron chariot!* Suddenly, this chariot has become more of a liability than an asset. It's time to ditch the chariot and run for your life.

God has ways of turning the tide on the enemy – *turning assets into liabilities.*

Verse 22 puts us in one of the chariots, **"Then the horses' hooves pounded, the galloping, galloping of his steeds. 'Curse Meroz,' said the angel of the LORD, 'Curse its inhabitants bitterly, because they did not come to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty.'** Meroz was another city that refused to fight for God.

Verse 24 **"Most blessed among women is Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite; blessed is she among women in tents."** She's the gal who killed Sisera.

“He asked for water, she gave milk; she brought out cream in a lordly bowl. She stretched her hand to the tent peg, her right hand to the workmen's hammer; she pounded Sisera, she pierced his head, she split and struck through his temple.

At her feet he sank, he fell, he lay still; at her feet he sank, he fell; where he sank, there he fell dead.” In ancient cultures, the fact this great general died at the feet of a woman added to his shame. God completely humbled him.

In the next few verses Deborah sings of Sisera's mother wondering why her son is so late returning from the battle. *Perhaps he's collecting his spoils?*

She'll learn the sad news soon... Deborah finishes her song in verse 31...

"Thus let all Your enemies perish, O LORD! But let those who love Him be like the sun when it comes out in full strength." So the land had rest for 40 years."

Chapters 6-8 recount the amazing story of Gideon. But it begins with another cycle of sin and servitude. This time Israel becomes the slave of the Midianites.

Verse 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 years, 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."

The Midianites were nomadic, Arab tribes - *desert pirates*. And when they went on their marauding binges, the Israelis fled to the mountains and caves for refuge.

“So it was, whenever Israel had sown, Midianites would come up; also Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them.” At harvest time the Midianites and their friends would ride in and steal Israel’s crop.

“Then they would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep nor ox nor donkey.”

“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.” Midian employs a new weapon – the camel.

Camels are called “*the ships of the desert*”. They barely perspire and require little water. A camel has three stomachs - each one holds 5 gallons of water.

A camel’s hump stores the fat it uses when food is scarce. When it draws on its reserve the hump shrinks. A camel can travel for a week, cover 300 miles, carry a load of 600 pounds, and never stop for food or water. Even rain won’t slow it down.

And a camel’s feet are tough. They’re ideal for walking across sharp rocks and hot sand. Compared to Jabin’s iron chariots a herd of camels were a perfect choice for a desert cavalry... *long range, high mobility, quick deployment.*

The Midianites used the camels effectively, “Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried out to the LORD.

And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried out to

the LORD because of the Midianites, that the LORD sent a prophet to the children of Israel (an unnamed prophet), 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; 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. 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."

Verse 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..."

The Angel of the LORD appears to a farmer named Gideon...

Usually a farmer would use oxen to thresh his wheat in an open area called the threshing floor. But notice Gideon is doing it by himself – perhaps even by foot. He is stomping his wheat – not on the threshing floor, *but in a winepress*. Gideon is harvesting his crop in seclusion - because he's so afraid of the Midianites.

Here is one of the most unlikely heroes in the Bible.

When God comes to him he's defeated, frightened, and skeptical. What follows sounds like a joke - verse 12 "And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him, and said to him, "The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor!" God refers to a yellow-belly – a fearful, frightened farmer as "you mighty man

of valor”.

Obviously, God sees Gideon not as he is, but as he can be. And this is the way God sees us...He looks past our sin and sees our potential. He calls the weak *mighty*, and refers to the minion as a *man*, and sees the fearful as *full of valor* - “**you mighty man of valor**”. We talk a lot about having faith in God - but we almost never talk about God’s faith in us. It’s shocking. God talks about Gideon being a great leader long before he starts acting like a one.

Notice the first word out of Gideon’s mouth, verse 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."** Gideon’s first statement is an admission of doubt.

Where is God? Has He forsaken us? Is God asleep on the job?

It’s interesting that God doesn’t argue with Gideon, instead he challenges his faith. “**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?"**”

And that should be enough to dissolve our doubts. If God sends us He’ll see us through... Where God guides He provides... Where He calls He equips... We’re told in 1 Thessalonians 5:24, “**He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.**”

But the fact God called Gideon was not enough to strengthen his faith.

We're told in verse 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." Gideon has such a wobbly faith. He feels so inadequate.

Originally he complains about God not working – now God calls his bluff. He promises to work through Gideon, but Gideon isn't so sure. *He's the least of the weakest.* Isn't it amazing, we want God to work – just not through me?

When our faith gets put to the test we're full of excuses?

Verse 16 "And the LORD said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man." Gideon is about to learn that our part in a work of God is not the *ability* – *God always provides ability* – our part is the *availability*.

God's job is to work the miracle. Our part is to trust God and obey His Word.

Verse 17 "Then (Gideon) 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." Gideon's faith was so weak he was always asking for a sign – something tangible, visible as confirmation.

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." So Gideon went in and prepared a young goat, and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour. 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.

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. 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."

Burger King isn't the first cook to come up with the "*flame broiled burger*".

And it all impresses Gideon. Verse 22 "**Now Gideon perceived that He was the Angel of the LORD.**" And remember, when the Angel of the LORD appears in the Old Testament it's usually a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus. "**So Gideon said, "Alas, O Lord GOD! For I have seen the Angel of the LORD face to face."**

"Then the LORD said to him, "Peace be with you; do not fear, you shall not die." So Gideon built an altar there to the LORD, and called it The-LORD-Is-Peace. (or in Hebrew, *Jehovah-Shalom*) To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites."

Verse 25 "**Now it came to pass the same night that the LORD said to him, "Take your father's young bull, the second bull of 7 years old, and tear down the altar of Baal that your father has, and cut down the wooden image that is beside it..."** Apparently, Gideon's own father was a worshipper of the false god, Baal.

God calls Gideon to disobey his father's wishes – to violate

the tradition of the land - and the faith of his own family - and make a radical statement for God...

“And build an altar to the LORD your God on top of this rock in the proper arrangement, and take the second bull and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the image which you shall cut down.” 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.”

Understand, this was a bold act. He made a statement. It was a declaration of protest – a deed equivalent to *Martin Luther's 95 theses*, or *the Boston Tea Party*.

Gideon's faith is rising – but it's not yet where it needs to be...

Gideon obeys God, but does the deed under the cover of darkness. He tries to remain anonymous. Gideon applies for God's secret service. He just doesn't know there's no such agency. God expects all his servants to go public with their loyalty.

Gideon's night time raid does arouse a reaction from the townspeople.

“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 second bull was being offered on the altar which had been built.

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."

When the men see *Gideon's sacrifice* they want to offer *him as a sacrifice*.

“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." But Gideon has won his first convert...

His father comes to his defense. “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!" Joash sees the folly of his idolatry. What kind of a god allows his altar to be bulled over, and his image used as firewood?

Joash challenges his countrymen to let Baal defend himself... If he's big enough to be worshipped he should be big enough to defend himself...

And out of the ordeal Gideon gets a new name. He's called, “*Jerubbabel*” which means “*Let Baal plead*”. “Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, "Let Baal plead against him, because he has torn down his altar."

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

Gideon's act of faith not only earns him a *new name* - but places *his name* on the *Midianite most wanted list*. The Midianite mounties move to put down the uprising, and their army camps in the valley of Jezreel – *aka Armageddon*...

Imagine how scared an already frightened Gideon is now? He desperately needs some supernatural help from God. And right on cue... verse 34...

“But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon...”

My son is a good roller hockey player, but once Mack played in a league where he was head and shoulders above everyone else. Another parent started calling him **“the difference.”** He was the difference between our team and the others.

That’s a good name for the Holy Spirit... He is **“the difference”**. The Holy Spirit is the difference maker. He always makes up the difference... as we’ll soon see.

“Then (Gideon) blew the trumpet, and the Abiezrites gathered behind him. And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, who also gathered behind him. He also sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali; and they came up to meet them.” He even put Bibles in all the hotel rooms throughout the land. *(No, I’m sorry, that comes later.)* Gideon did rally people from all over the land to fight for God.

The stage is set for another major showdown between Israel and her enemy.

Verse 36 **“So Gideon said to God, “If You will save Israel by my hand as You have said...”** Notice, Gideon’s shallow faith... **“If You will save Israel by my hand as You have said.”** Hey, if God says it that means He’ll do it – no ifs, ands, or buts about it. Gideon has yet to learn that He can take God at His Word.

This is why he’s always wanting for God to confirm His will

with a sign.

He continues, “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. 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.” Guys, here’s the problem with signs – they never produce real faith in God. They only create the desire for more signs.

Which happens in verse 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.” He guards against a fluke, and reverses the previous fleece. “And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, but there was dew on all the ground.

Now here’s the relevant question... *when it comes to discerning God’s will should we employ a fleece?* Hey, it worked for Gideon - why not for us?

First notice God uses the fleece to prop up a weak faith. Gideon’s faith needed a crutch. I’m sure God wants our faith strong enough to stand solely on His Word.

I won’t say God never speaks through a fleece, but be careful. Signs seem to be an Old Testament device. Once the Spirit is poured out at Pentecost, there’s no other biblical mention of a fleece. Believers walk in the Spirit - not follow fleeces.

In fact, just before the Spirit came upon the church the disciples cast lots – a type of fleece - to select a replacement for Judas. There's evidence they got it wrong... I believe Paul was God's replacement for Judas - not Matthias.

It's also enlightening that even after God responds to Gideon's first fleece it still doesn't settle the issue. He wants to rule out a freakish occurrence. And this is the problem with a fleece – *it may or may not be God*. For me, it's always better to trust in God's Word, and wait for the clear leading of the Holy Spirit.

Gideon's fleece reminds me of a friend who was struggling with an issue in her life. She decided she needed a sign from God, and that's how she prayed – until one day she was driving home in a thunderstorm when a huge gust of wind blew a medal sign off the front of a building. The sign flew across the street, and rammed into her car. It was as if the Lord was saying, *“You want a sign. I'll give you a sign.”*

From that moment on she decided to trust God and take Him at His Word.

Chapter 7, **“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.”** The battle will play out just south of the Sea of Galilee – near the Jordan River.

On our trip to Israel we'll visit Harod Springs where God thins out His army.

In verse 2 God reveals how well He knows human nature, “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.’” We’re all glory snatchers. We like to grab the glory. Thus, God will create such ludicrous odds there’s no way Gideon can take credit for this victory.

God continues, “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.” Later we’re told there were 135,000 Midianites. If Gideon sent nobody home he would’ve had 32,000 troops. Do the math and you realize Gideon was initially outnumbered 4 to 1...

But when the army shrinks to 10,000 the odds decrease to 13 to 1.

But God isn’t finished thinning out His army. “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.” 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.” 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.” A good,

vigilant soldier would drop to his knees, cup his hands, and raise the water to his mouth. He stayed alert to what's around him.

Only a sloppy soldier would fall to his face, stick his head in the stream, and start lapping water like a dog... Gideon must've breathed a sigh of relief when he saw just 300 of the 10,000 remaining troops drop their guard to get a drink.

If he has to march with a small army, at least he'll have smart soldiers.

But to his surprise **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."** God sends away the 9700, and leaves Gideon just 300 sloppy soldiers. Now he's outnumbered 450 to 1 – with untrained troops.

God finally has the odds about right. He's created a scenario where not even the glory-hogging Hebrews are arrogant enough to deny Him credit for the win.

"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."

This is how God works. He uses the foolish and weak to do mighty deeds. He puts His treasure in clay jars. He chooses containers that don't distract from the contents. He overthrows armies with 300 ragamuffin foot-soldiers.

God backs our glory-grabbing hearts into a corner. He creates impossible scenarios so when He comes through it's obvious that He deserves the glory.

Imagine, a farmer turned general – outnumbered 450 to 1 - going into battle for the first time with a mere 300 soldiers – all of whom are a discredit to the uniform.

“Now the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.

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. But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant, and you shall hear what they say; and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp." Once again, Gideon's weak faith needs a sign and God provides one.

“Then he went down with Purah his servant to the outpost of the armed men who were in the camp. 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.

“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." This is a strange dream – a bagel knocks over a tent.

“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's army is compared to a tumbling loaf of barley.

“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."

You could call Gideon's army "*the fighting doughnuts*" or "*the rolling jelly rolls.*" Not a very flattering name. But victory was predicted for Gideon's army. He returns to the camp fired up and *ready to rumble... or tumble* as described in the dream.

"Then he divided the 300 men into three companies, and he put a trumpet into every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and torches inside the pitchers.

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: 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 follows instructions...

He gives each man a trumpet, a torch, and a pitcher – *but wait a minute, this is war - what about a sword, a spear, and a shield?* But God has another plan...

"So Gideon and the 100 men who were with him came to the outpost of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch (about 10:00 PM), just as they had posted the watch; and they blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers that were in their hands. Then the three 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!"

These torches probably consisted of smoldering rags on the end of a stick. The torch was turned upside down, and stuck down the neck of the ceramic jar. When the jars were broken the rush of oxygen into the jar fueled the smoldering rags, and set the torch ablaze. It was as close as you could get to a fireworks show.

In ancient times, a battalion of 1000 men marched behind one torch. When the sleepy, groggy Midianites saw the mountains ablaze with torches – they panicked. Their imaginations ran wild - they thought they were outnumbered. Verse 21...

“And every man stood in his place all around the camp; and the whole army ran and cried out and fled. When the 300 blew the trumpets, the LORD set every man's sword against his companion throughout the whole camp... Thousands of Midianites died from friendly fire. The rest of the army “fled to Beth Acacia, toward Zererah, as far as the border of Abel Meholah, by Tabbath. And the men of Israel gathered together from Naphtali, Asher, and all Manasseh, and pursued the Midianites.”

To God be the glory – great things He has done!

In the remainder of the chapter Gideon calls for *back-ups* to *mop-up*.

The two Midianite princes, Oreb and Zeeb, are captured and beheaded. Their heads are brought to Gideon. God has worked a miracle and Gideon *got ahead*.

Make that *two heads* - and of course, “two heads are better than one.”

Before we leave chapter 7 let's focus for just a second on what happens to the 300 clay jars that Gideon's army broke on the mountainside... to me this is a microcosm of the whole battle. You can say, these lights defeated Midian...

The crash and trumpet blast, and shouts got their attention, but it lasted for only a few seconds. But the hundreds of lights on the hillside created the confusion.

And God has called each of us to shine the light of His love and truth. Too many Christians fight the darkness. Turn on the light and the darkness flees.

But here's the secret – *here's how to shine... a flame burns brightest from a broken vessel!* Some of us carry a smoldering fire. We're like the rag in Gideon's jar. If left enclosed in that earthen vessel the flame diminishes - but break the jar, and the wind of the Holy Spirit will rush to the smoldering rags, and ignite a blaze. We burn brightest when we're broken of our pride, and ego, and stubbornness.

Chapter 8, "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." It's amazing how jealous we can become of another man's spiritual successes. Rather than rejoice in the victory, we get angry that we were left out.

"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? 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.” He quiets the jealous Ephraimites with diplomacy. He compliments them on their catch of Oreb and Zeeb – they shut up and he goes back to battle.

In the next verses Gideon pursues the Midianite kings, “Zebah and Zalmunna”. Two Hebrew cities, Succoth and Penuel, side with Midian and refuse to help Gideon.

Gideon promises them both that He’ll be back to deal with their treachery.

Verse 10 “Now Zebah and Zalmunna were at Karkor, 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.” Of the 135,000 Midianites only 15,000 survived the chaos and carnage that resulted from God’s battle plan.

“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.

When Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued them; and he took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and routed the whole army.

Then Gideon the son of Joash returned from battle, from the Ascent of Heres.” And this was bad news for Succoth and Penuel. He whips the elders of Succoth with briers and thorns – and tears down the tower of Penuel, killing its men.

Verse 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, (Hebrews) so were they; each one resembled the son of a king." 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."

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. 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."

Verse 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." Israel wants to crown Gideon as king. Put his family on the throne.

“But Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you." Even after the point God made in the battle, Israel would've still robbed God of His glory... *if Gideon hadn't stopped them...*

Guys, beware. Often after you've been used by God people will try to put you on a pedestal. It's your responsibility to turn it down. We are not pedestal material. Give God the glory! A truly great person never forgets Who deserves the credit.

“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 gold earrings, because they were Ishmaelites. 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. Now the weight of the gold earrings that he requested was 1,700 shekels of gold (that's about 850 ounces of gold. This ephod was extravagant.), 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.

Then Gideon made it into an ephod and set it up in his city, Ophrah.”

Gideon refuses a crown, but molds an ephod - a priestly garment.

Some people speculate that though Gideon turned down the throne, he did desire priestly influence. In the book of Judges the priests are conspicuously absent – and perhaps Gideon sensed a need for a priestly presence.

Remember the ephod held the Urim and Thummim – the two stones by which the priest discerned God's will. Perhaps Gideon's golden ephod was intended to be a permanent fleece – some kind of mechanical means of deciphering God's will. Walk up to the ephod, ask your question, and presto... an instant answer.

Wouldn't that be nice! You wouldn't have to walk with God - or draw near to Him - or quiet your soul - or cultivate fellowship with God – *just visit the golden ephod*. Whatever Gideon's motive it proved to be a terrible idea - it backfires.

For verse 27 says “And all Israel played the harlot with it there. It became a snare to Gideon and to his house.” The

ephod became an idol - which always happens when you substitute a *program* for a *personal relationship with God*.

Be careful when people start trusting the 7 keys of healing, or the 12 steps to victory, or the 40 days of purpose... when people look to a program for God's guidance rather than pray, and seek the Lord, and trust in His Word.

One is walking in the flesh – the other is walking in the Holy Spirit.

“Thus Midian was subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted their heads no more. And the country was quiet for 40 years in the days of Gideon.

Then Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and dwelt in his own house.

Gideon had 70 sons who were his own offspring, for he had many wives.

And his concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, whose name he called Abimelech. 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.”

There is evidence that though Gideon refused the title of king he didn't mind living like one. He kept quite a harem. His many wives produced him 70 sons.

And he named his son, “*Abimelech*”. The word means “*my father is king*” - a strange name for a father to give to a son if he had no visions of grandeur.

Vs 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. 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; nor did they show kindness to the house of Jerubbaal (Gideon) in accordance with the good he had done for Israel.”