

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

JUDGES 5-8

When you think of famous musical duos certain names come to mind: *Simon and Garfunkel, Hall And Oates, Georgia-Florida Line, Outkast, Bebe and Cece, Deborah and Barak...* **Deborah and Barak?**

Yep, they sing the only duet in the Bible. It's recorded in Judges 5 and celebrates an Israeli military triumph!

Deborah was the fourth judge of Israel. She rallied a reluctant leader, Barak, to fight against Sisera's army.

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

Verse 1, **"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!"** God is blessed when leaders fearlessly lead - and people willingly follow. *Faith-filled leaders and faithful followers* can make beautiful music together... Of course, **"when a person can't lead and won't follow all they make is a dandy roadblock."**

The church today needs leadership! We need leaders with integrity and character. The Church needs people who take the bull by the horns, yet trust God completely. **Good leaders and good followers...**

A young coed's heart sank when she read the question on the college application. **"Are you a leader?"** She had too much integrity to lie... she wrote **"No."** The girl figured honesty would cost her acceptance into this prestigious university. But a few days later, the letter came, **"Dear Applicant. A study of applications reveal this year our college will have 1,452 new leaders. We are accepting you since we need at least one follower."**

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

"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, our response is 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 details not found elsewhere.

God sent thunderstorms to water the desert floor. Not only did they drink water from the rock, but rare desert rains *lowered the temperature, prevented sandstorms, bolstered their water supply.*

Verse 6 fast-forwards to the days of the Judges, "In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath, in the days of Jael (Jael was the sweetheart who hammered the tent peg through Sisera's skull - *and strangely ended up on a coffee mug*) During Jael's day, 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 out 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 due to their years of slavery, Israel went to battle with no weapons. They were 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 (the rich), and who walk along the road (the poor)." Both went to battle, and now praise God.

"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!" *"And awake Calvary Chapel, recount God's righteous acts, and give Him the glory."*

Verses 13-18 chart the involvement of various tribes in this battle... Warriors from Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir (or Manasseh), and Issachar battled bravely.

Verse 15, 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." Apparently, Reuben thought a lot about pitching in, but never did. He searched his heart, but took no action.

Reuben "sat among the sheepfolds" or sat in a cushy chair at church. He heard the worship team's "piping for the flocks" and responded to the sermon with "great searchings of heart." But he never acted on any of it.

Verse 17 "Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan, and why did Dan remain on ships? Asher continued at the seashore, and stayed by his inlets." These three tribes sat on

the sidelines... Gilead or the Gadites kept their distance... Dan stayed on ships. He was too busy with business to serve the Lord... And Asher spent the day at the beach, by the inlet. He was all about leisure.

And I hear the same all the time: *I live too far away. I'm too busy. It's my only day off... excuses, 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 tribes fought to the death. They made serious sacrifices to win battles and advance God’s kingdom. *What about you? Will you awake to serve the Lord?*

“**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 fought from the heavens; the stars from their courses fought against Sisera.**” This is interesting... *The stars fought against Sisera.* The Hebrew word translated “**star**” can refer to any heavenly body - a comet, asteroid, meteor, planet.

Here, the stars and their courses (or orbits) fought Sisera. Recall the odds stacked against Barak. Sisera had 900 iron chariots with soldiers and weapons. Barak had only 40,000 slaves with no shield or spear.

Perhaps God pelted the Canaanites with a hailstorm, or a meteorite shower. Barak may've been aided by a kind of celestial artillery - similar Joshua's long day.

Also “**The torrent of Kishon swept them away, that ancient torrent, the torrent of Kishon. O my soul, march on in strength!**” Thunderstorms played a role in Israel’s victory. The Brook Kishon is normally a small stream. It overflows only on occasion during monsoon-like rains.

Yet it’s said of Sisera’s army, “**the torrent of Kishon swept them away.**” Their iron chariots were stuck in the mud, and couldn’t move, while lightning is flashing all around them. *You don't want to be sitting in an iron chariot in the middle of an electrical storm.* Suddenly, the chariots were more a liability than an asset. Drivers ditch their chariots and run for cover. Amazingly, God has ways of turning the enemy’s assets into liabilities.

Verse 24, “**Most blessed among women is Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite; blessed is she among women in tents.**” Jael was the brutal gal who impaled Sisera.

“**He asked for water, she gave milk; she brought out cream in a lordly bowl.**” She sedated him and put him to sleep with a huge glass of thick milk. “**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." I guess you could say of Jael, "*She nailed it!*" In antiquity, for a general to die at the feet of a woman was the ultimate humiliation and insult. Here God humbles Sisera.

In the next few verses Deborah sings of Sisera's mother wondering why her son is late returning from battle. *Perhaps he's collecting his spoils? She'll soon learn the sad news.* The song closes 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 forty years."

Recall the cycle in Judges... Israel sins. God allows the nation to be enslaved. They cry out in supplication to God. He raises up a Savior. His Spirit delivers Israel. Followed by a serenity... until Israel sins again and the cycle gets repeated. It happens again in Chapter 6...

"Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven 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*. When they went marauding, the Israelis learned to flee 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 Israel could expect to see their enemies - the nomadic Midianites and their friends - riding in to steal the 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." And notice here, Midian employs a new weapon in their warfare, *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 five gallons of water.

It's hump also stores the fat it uses when food is scarce. When it draws on 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.

And a camel's feet are tough - ideal for traversing sharp rocks and hot sand. In contrast to Jabin's iron chariots camels were the perfect choice for a desert cavalry... *long range, high mobility, quick deployment.*

Verse 6, “So Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried out to the LORD...” and “the LORD sent a prophet to the children of Israel.” (*It was an unnamed prophet*) Usually, we think of prophets as men who give us information we don’t know, but this prophet repeats what they’d heard before, but refused to obey.

The Lord brought Israel out of Egyptian bondage and gave them a new land. Now, rather than fear the gods of the Amorites, they need to drive them out of the land... Verse 10, “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 have his oxen thresh his wheat in an open area called *the threshing floor*. But Gideon is doing the threshing by himself - maybe by foot. He’s stomping out his wheat - not on the threshing floor, *but in a winepress*.

In short, Gideon is harvesting his crop in secret. He’s afraid the Midianites might see what he’s doing.

And this small glimpse into Gideon’s character makes him a most unlikely hero. He’s defeated, and frightened, and skeptical. But the Angel of the LORD addresses him in verse 12, “**The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor!**” God refers to this frightened, fearful farmer as “*you mighty man of valor*.” Surely, 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*. He refers to the minion as *manly*. He sees the fearful as “**a 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. But God talks about Gideon being a great leader long before he starts acting like 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 words are an admission of doubt and skepticism. *Where is God? Has He forsaken us? Is He asleep on the job?* “**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?"** Gideon is will become the answer to his own doubts.

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. Originally he complains about God not working *for him*. Now God calls his bluff, and promises to work *through him*, but he's not so sure. *He's the least of the weakest.*

But "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 has nothing to do with our *ability*. *God is the One who provides the ability* - our part is just the *availability*. God works the miracle. We trust God and obey His Word.

"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 is so weak he asks for a sign - a tangible, visible confirmation of God's will.

Gideon tells the Angel, "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." Gideon rushes into the kitchen - packs goat meat in a basket and broth in a pot - then returns, and at the Angel's direction, lays the meat on a rock and pours the broth on the meat. An ancient version of a Blackstone Grill. *But look how the grill gets fired up...*

Verse 21 "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." Obviously, **Burger King** was not the originator of "*the flame broiled burger.*" That would be the Angel of the LORD, perhaps *the pre - incarnate Christ.*

And it all impresses Gideon. Verse 22 "Now Gideon perceived that He was the Angel of the LORD. 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 *Jehovah-Shalom*) To this day (not today, but until the day of Samuel's writing of Judges.) 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 seven 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.

And God calls his son... *to disobey his dad - violate the tradition of the land - the faith of his own family - and make a radical statement for the one, true God...*

"And build an altar to the LORD your God on top of this rock in the proper

arrangement, and take the second bull (his father's bull) and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the image which you shall cut down." So Gideon took ten 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." Realize, this was a bold act - a declaration - a protest equivalent to *Martin Luther's 95 theses*, or *the Boston Tea Party*.

Gideon's faith is growing, but it's still not as strong as it should be. He obeys God, but only under the cover of darkness. He's hoping for anonymity. *He's applying for God's secret service. But there's no such agency.* God expects all his servants to go public with their loyalty.

But his night time raid does rouse a reaction from the townspeople. Verse 29, "*And when they had inquired and asked, they said, "Gideon the son of Joash has done this thing."* When the men see the *demolition of Baal's altar and the sacrifice of Yahweh*, they want to *sacrifice* Gideon. They "*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 had won his first convert; for *his dad* 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 wakes up to the folly of his idolatry. What kind of a god allows his altar to be bulled over, and his image burned? *Let Baal defend himself!* If he's a god big enough to be worshipped; then he should be big enough to take up for his own interests.

And out of this ordeal Gideon gets a new name. "*On that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, "Let Baal plead against him, because he has torn down his altar."*" *"Jerubbabel"* means "*Let Baal plead for himself.*"

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 puts that name on the *Midianite most wanted list*. They send an army into the Jezreel Valley to put down this uprising.

Now, Gideon is already a skittish young man. His faith is growing, but still shaky. Now he's got an army camped against him. He needs help. And right on time verse 34, "*The Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon.*"

My son, Mack, use to play roller hockey, and was talented - probably the city's best in his age group. One of our team's parents called him "*the difference.*" *And he was - no other team had a Mack...* But I also like that name for the Holy Spirit! God's Spirit is

how the Christian differs from other people. *We're not smarter, or more talented, or more righteous* the difference between us and others is that God's Spirit comes upon us. That makes all the difference, as we'll soon see.

"Then (Gideon) blew the trumpet..." And Israelites from the neighboring tribes flocked to his side ready to fight... Gideon even put Bibles in all the hotel rooms throughout the land. *(No, sorry, that comes later.)*

But the stage is set for a major showdown between Israel and her enemies. Verse 36 **"So Gideon said to God, "If You will save Israel by my hand as You have said..."** And note, the shallowness of his faith. Wait a minute, if God says it, He'll do it - no ifs, ands, or buts about it. Gideon has yet to learn He can take God at His Word. That's why he's always asking for 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." Yet the problem with signs is they don't produce real faith, *only a desire for more signs*. Which is what 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 wants to guard against a fluke, and asks to reverse the previous sign. **"And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, but there was dew on all the ground."**

Here's the relevant question, *when we're discerning God's will should we ever ask for a sign? Employ our own fleece?* It worked for Gideon, why not for us?

Well, I won't say God never speaks through a fleece. Gideon needed a crutch until his faith grew stronger, but I know God doesn't want us permanently trusting in fleeces. Signs were common in the OT, but once the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, the Bible never mentions another fleece or sign. From that point, the goal is to walk in God's Spirit - not follow a fleece.

When the newly birthed Church replaced Judas the disciples cast lots - which was a type of fleece. And there's evidence they got it wrong. The lot fell to Matthias. I believe God's choice was the Apostle Paul.

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 any freakish occurrence. And this is the problem with a fleece - *it may or may not be God*. This is why we need to learn to trust **God's Word** and the clear leading of **God's Spirit**, not follow fleeces.

Once, a lady in our church was struggling with a decision, and kept asking God for sign. 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.

This sign flew across the intersection, and slammed into her car. She said it was as if the Lord was saying, *"You want a sign. I'll give you a sign."* From then on Renee decided to trust God and take Him at His Word.

Chapter 7, *"Then Jerubbaal (or Gideon) and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the well of Harod (on our trips to Israel we visit Harod Springs), so that the camp of the Midianites was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley."* This battle will play out just south of the Sea of Galilee - near the Jordan River. But first, God has to thin out the troops. *He knows human nature too well.*

Verse 2, *"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."* Human beings, all humans, are glory snatchers. Get close to any glory and we'll grab it. Thus, here God is going to create such ludicrous odds there's no way Gideon or the Israelites 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."* Realize, the Israelites were facing 135,000 Midianites. The army was scared, so God sent the fearful home... If no one had gone home Gideon would've had 32,000 troops - and been outnumbered 4 to 1. Now his army shrinks 10,000 - he's over matched 13 to 1. *But God isn't finishing adjusting the odds...*

"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..." Verse 5, "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, so as to remain alert to what's going on around him. Only a sloppy soldier would fall to his face, stick his head in the stream, and start lapping up 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's got to go to battle with a small army - well, 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 home 9700 alert and trained troops, and leaves Gideon just 300 sloppy soldiers. He's now outnumbered 450 to 1, with a poor military. But God finally has the odds about right. God is creating a scenario where not even glory-hogging Hebrews are arrogant enough to deny God the credit.

And this is how God works even today. He uses the foolish and the weak to do mighty deeds. God puts His treasure in clay jars. He chooses containers that won't distract from the contents. God overthrows great armies with 300 ragamuffin foot-soldiers. God loves to create impossible, outrageous scenarios, so when He comes through it's obvious He deserves all the glory.

Here, a skittish farmer turned general, outnumbered 450 to 1 - his first battle - with a bare-bones army - all of whom are *a discredit to the uniform* - will win a war!

Yet even on the eve of battle, Gideon is still unsure, so God tells him to take a servant, Purah, slip into the enemy camp, and eavesdrop in on their conversation.

Verse 12, **"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."**

Gideon heard a man tell 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."** What a strange dream - a runaway barley loaf steamrolls their tent.

But his companion had the interpretation, **"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 is the battling bagel!** Gideon's army gets a not-so-flattering name that fires them up, **"battling bagels"** - **"rolling jelly rolls."** But this is the confidence Gideon needs to get himself ready to *rumble*... or *tumble* as described in the dream.

So he divides his 300 men into three companies, and gives to each man a trumpet, torch, and clay jar - *but wait, this is war - what about a sword, a spear, a shield?* But God has another plan... Verse 19, **"So Gideon and the 100 men who were with him came to the outpost of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch (around 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!"

Realize the torches were smoldering rags at the end of a stick. The stick was upside down in the clay jar. Then on cue, the jars were broken (creating a crashing sound), and the rush of oxygen into the jar fueled the smoldering rags, setting the torch ablaze. It produced an ancient fireworks show across the mountainside.

In ancient wars, a battalion of a thousand men marched behind one torch. So when the sleepy, groggy Midianites saw the mountains ablaze with torches, they panicked. 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 army fled into the night.

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

In the rest of Chapter 7 Gideon calls for *back-ups* to *mop-up*. Oreb and Zeeb, princes of the Midianites, are captured and beheaded. Their heads are brought to Gideon. God works a miracle and Gideon **gets ahead. Really two heads, for two heads are better than one.**

Now, before we leave Chapter 7 think for a moment about those 300 clay jars... To me this is a microcosm of the whole battle. **For light defeated darkness.** The crash, and trumpet, and shouts got the Midianite's attention, but lasted only a few seconds. It was the 300 shining lights on the hillside that caused the confusion.

And God has called each of us to shine His light of love and truth. Turn on the light and darkness will flee.

But here's the secret... *how do you shine?* **A flame burns brightest from a broken vessel!** Some of us carry a smoldering fire. Like the rags in Gideon's jars, if left enclosed in our earthen vessel the flame diminishes, but break the jar, and the wind of the Holy Spirit rushes to the smoldering rags, and ignites a blaze. In short, we burn brightest when we're broken of our pride, our self-sufficiency, our stubbornness.

Chapter 8... after the victory, men of Ephraim, a tribe south of those that fought, *want to know why they weren't invited to the battle?* Dealing with God's people was more a challenge to Gideon than the enemy...

Also, Gideon finds out that two Israeli cities, Succoth and Penuel, had sided with 15,000 remaining Midianites. Neither city was willing to give his famished troops

rations, so after he tracks down the Midianite kings, Zebah and Zalmunna, he returns and deals with both cities. He whips the elders of Succoth with briers and thorns, and tears down the tower of Penuel.

Later Gideon confronts the two kings of Midian, “**Zebah and Zalmunna**” and orders his firstborn son, “**Jether**” to kill both kings. Yet verse 20, **But the youth would not draw his sword; for he was afraid, because he was still a youth.**” *He had no stomach for killing...*

But that’s when the kings make a huge mistake and challenge the old Gideon, “**Rise yourself, and kill us...**” *Big mistake.* Gideon kills them both. 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 king, and establish a dynasty. “**But Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you."**” This happens often, God uses a man; then people want to put him on a pedestal. Here, Gideon refuses to let them. **And it's our responsibility to turn down the pedestal.** Hey, none of us are pedestal material, myself included. Don’t be deceived. Give God **ALL** the glory! Say “*no*” pedestals.

Yet sadly, Gideon asks for the Ishmaelites’ gold as the spoils of battle. Their earrings, pendants, chains. And it adds up to 1700 shekels or 850 ounces of gold.

Gideon had refused a crown, but he molds a golden ephod, a priestly garment. Bible students speculate, though Gideon turned down the throne, he desired priestly influence. In Judges, priests are conspicuously absent. Gideon may’ve wanted to assume their place.

Remember, the High Priest’s ephod is what held the Urim and Thummim - two stones by which the high priest discerned God’s will. Maybe this golden ephod was meant to be a mechanical fleece... *walk up to the ephod... ask a question... presto, an instant answer...*

Wouldn’t that be easy! You wouldn’t have to study God’s Word - or walk in the Spirit - or quiet your soul to hear God’s voice... *just visit the golden ephod...*

And this from the man who trusted fleeces! Whatever his motive, it proved to be a terrible idea - it backfired. For verse 27 says “**And all Israel played the harlot with it there. It became a snare to Gideon and to his house.**” His ephod became an idol - **a snare** - which always happens when you substitute a *program* (or *anything mechanical*) for a *personal relationship with God*.

Be careful when it's all about the 7 keys to healing, or 12 steps to victory, or 40 days of purpose... when you're guided by a "*thing*," not God Himself. Pray, walk in the Spirit, trust in His Word. **Fleeces are not faith.**

Yet due to Gideon "the country was quiet for forty years..." Verse 29, "Then Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and dwelt in his own house. Gideon had seventy 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." Gideon refused the title of king, but he didn't mind living like one. He kept a harem. His many wives birthed seventy sons... He named one, "*Abimelech*," which means "*my father is king*." A strange name for a father to give to a son if he had no visions of grandeur.

Chapter 8 ends with Gideon's death, *and his body is still warm*, when Israel again backslides and worships Baal. Which sets us up for our next judge, Abimelech.