

Lesson 3 – Judges 6-8

Text: Judges 6-8

Main Characters: God, Israelites, Gideon

Key Passages:

- Judges 7:22 – God was the one that confused the Midianites – not the cleverness of Israel.
- Judges 8:23 – Gideon affirmed that the Lord ought to be the king over Israel.

Main Storyline:

At some point, the Israelites once again fell into disobedience and idolatry. God punished them by allowing the Midianites to dominate them for 7 years. The Midianites along with the Amalekites and other nations made a habit of stealing and destroying the Israelites' crops, forcing the Israelites to live in great fear and with little food. Finally, after 7 years of punishment, the Israelites cried out to God.

When the Israelites cried out to God, He sent a prophet to explain why they were in such a bad predicament (perhaps the first typical prophet sent to them). Through the prophet, God reminded the people that He had saved them while they were in Egypt and Canaan and also reassured them not to be afraid of the Amorites' gods. Unfortunately, as the prophet explained, they had not obeyed God at all.

God chose a man from the tribe of Manasseh to be the next judge of Israel, Gideon. When the angel of the Lord (God) gave His commandments to Gideon, Gideon was initially very hesitant and offered excuses for why he shouldn't be the one to save Israel (similar to Moses in Exodus 3-4). Gideon asked for a sign to prove that it was God who was speaking to him. God responded by consuming with fire a meal Gideon had prepared for Him. Gideon immediately recognized that it had been God.

God instructed Gideon to begin his service to Him by destroying his father's altar to Baal and idol, then rebuilding an altar to God in its place and offering his father's bull on it as a sacrifice. Gideon obeyed God's commandments (by night, because he was afraid). In the morning, the men of the city saw the destroyed altar and called for Gideon's death. Gideon's father, Joash, told them that if Baal was upset, that he should be the one taking care of it, not them. Thus, Gideon was spared from death.

Gideon then gathered up soldiers from Israel and prepared to attack Midian as God had commanded. Gideon asked for two additional signs to bolster his faith in God's commandments. God performed the two signs and Gideon was satisfied. However, God told Gideon that his army was too large to fight Midian. God was afraid that if they won the battle with a large army, the Israelites would believe that it was their own doing and not God's. God gave specific instructions to Gideon on how to reduce the number of soldiers with him, ultimately reducing his army from 32,000 men to only 300 men. God gave Gideon one final sign to show that He was with them before Gideon attacked Midian. God gave them the victory, turning the Midianites against one another (perhaps 135,000 Midianites). Gideon pursued them, eventually killing the two kings of Midian and bringing 40 years of peace to Israel.

With the battles over, the Israelites asked Gideon to be their ruler (basically a king), followed by his son, and his son, etc. Gideon denied their request, reminding them that God was their ruler. Unfortunately, he used his position to get the people to donate gold to him, which he used to build an ephod which was used in idolatry. Eventually, Gideon died, and immediately the people returned to sin.

Lessons/Applications:

- 1.) Our faith in God must not be blind; rather, it must be based on logic and reason (John 20:30-31).
- 2.) We cannot be afraid to obey God even if we must go against our families (Luke 12:51-53; 14:26).
- 3.) We cannot be arrogant; we must recognize that God is the one that gives us our victories in life.
- 4.) When we have power and influence over others, we must seek to use it for good (1 Peter 5:1ff).