

Adult Bible Study

in Simplified English

God Sends Help: A Study from Judges

Lesson 12: Gideon Falls

Bible Text

Judges 8:18-34

Memory Verse

“The Lord said, ‘These people show respect to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me.’” (Isaiah 29:13a)

Word List

effort: work done by the mind or body; energy used to do something

vengeful: feeling or showing a desire to harm someone who has harmed you

warrior: a person who fights in battles and is known for having courage and skill

Do you like roller coasters? As the car goes up, up, up, you can feel how much **effort** it takes. Then when you get to the top, for just a moment, you often have a clear view of the area below and around you. Sometimes the view is so wonderful, you almost wish you could stay at the top.

Then what happens after you reach the top of a roller coaster? You go down fast. It can feel like falling.

In a way, the story of Gideon is like a roller coaster ride. It is an exciting story. We have seen Gideon change and grow from a scared man, to a man with some doubts, to a willing leader, and finally to a strong **warrior**. We have learned, along with Gideon, about fear and doubt as well as about trust and faith. All through this, we have seen God teaching and leading Gideon to be a great judge for the people of Israel.

We would be glad if the story ended here. We would expect Gideon and the people to live happily ever after. We would expect them to always remember God. We would expect them to worship God alone.

But there is more to the story of Gideon’s life, and it is not happy.

Just as we have learned from the Gideon stories about how we should act toward God, now we will learn how nobody should act toward God.

After the amazing victory over the Midianites (Judges 7), Gideon gave a gentle answer to the angry men from Ephraim (Judges 8:1-3). He showed himself to be a good and effective leader.

By trusting and obeying God, Gideon had reached the top as a leader and a judge of Israel. With God’s help, Gideon and his army defeated the Midianites and had peace for 40 years (Judges 8:28).

Then something changed. In Judges 8:4-21, Gideon seems to be a different man. He went after the two kings of the Midianites. He and his men chased them across the Jordan River—out of the land of Israel—and killed them both. He killed many other people, too. Instead of being a calm leader who followed God’s orders, Gideon became angry, selfish and **vengeful**.

God did not tell Gideon to chase after the kings of Midian. Gideon started listening to himself instead of to God. He killed many people and took religious objects from their camels’ necks (Judges 8:21).

Gideon Wants What God Wants? (Judges 8:22-23)

22 Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, “Rule over us, both you and your son, and your grandson also. For you have set us free from the power of Midian.”

23 But Gideon said to them, “I will not rule over you. And my son will not rule over you. The Lord will rule over you.”

We can understand the people of Israel asking Gideon to be their leader. He was such a strong warrior and leader, they also wanted his son and his grandson to continue leading them.

And we can admire Gideon for telling the Israelites that only the Lord would be their ruler. Surely this was the highest point

in Gideon’s life and career. He had so much personal knowledge of God’s power and His care for His people. Trusting God to be their only ruler was what God wanted them to do.

Gideon Wants More (Judges 8:24-27)

24 Gideon said to them, “I only ask that each of you give me the gold objects you have taken to be worn on the ear.” (They had objects to be worn on the ear because they were Ishmaelites.)

25 And they said, “For sure we will give them.” So they spread out a coat, and every one of them threw into it an object he had taken.

26 The gold objects Gideon had asked for were as heavy as 1,700 pieces of gold money. He took the objects and purple clothing worn by the kings of Midian also. And he took the religious objects that were around the camels’ necks.

27 Gideon made it into a holy vest and put it in his city, Ophrah. All Israel worshiped it there. So it became a trap to Gideon and those of his house.

The Bible does not tell us exactly what changed in Gideon’s mind. Right after telling the people that God would be their ruler, Gideon asked for what seemed simple and good: only the earrings the Israelites had taken from the Midianites, or Ishmaelites, they had just beaten in battle. The people were glad to give Gideon these items.

The earrings were a lot of gold, equal to 1,700 pieces of gold money, or about 43

pounds. Gideon wanted more. Gideon also took up the expensive clothing from the kings and the gold religious objects from their camels. Gideon took them to his hometown of Ophrah. Maybe the people thought Gideon would use these riches as payment for his service and leadership. And there is no reason to think that would be a bad thing.

But Gideon made a holy vest that was only to be used by priests in worshiping God. And instead of worshiping God at the place He had named, Gideon and all the Israelites worshiped the holy vest at Gideon's home.

The holy vest and the way the people worshiped it became a trap to them. Once again, they became trapped in worshiping something or some false god instead of the Lord, the One True God.

The End of Gideon (Judges 8:28-34)

28 Midian was put under the power of the people of Israel. They did not lift up their heads any

more. And the land had peace for forty years, during the life of Gideon.

29 Joash's son Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) went and lived in his own house.

30 Gideon had seventy sons born to him, for he had many wives.

31 The woman in Shechem who acted as his wife gave birth to Gideon's son also. He was given the name Abimelech.

32 Gideon the son of Joash died when he was very old. He was buried in the grave of his father Joash, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

33 As soon as Gideon was dead, the people of Israel started again to worship the false gods of Baal. They made Baal-berith their god.

34 The people of Israel did not remember the Lord their God, Who had saved them from the power of all those around who hated them.

The end of Gideon's story tells a sad tale. He was remembered by his name that linked him to the false god Baal. He had many wives, which was not what God wanted for His people. He had a son by a woman who was not his wife. Gideon named his son Abimelech, which means "my father is king." Gideon and his family believed he was the king — not the Lord, the true King.

The people went right back to their old ways of worshiping the false gods of Baal. They did not remember all God had done for them. They just did not remember God.

Things to Think About

1. Can you think of some "great" people who fell into sin and disgrace?
2. Why do you think Gideon changed so much after the battle with the Midianites?
3. Why do you think the Bible says the holy vest that Gideon made became a "trap" to the people?
4. What do people of faith need to do to keep from falling as Gideon did?

Things to Remember

Gideon's life had so much promise. He began in fear, but God led him step by step to grow in trust and faith. At his best, Gideon was a great leader and warrior.

Then he became vengeful and selfish. He pulled the people's worship away from the Lord and onto the holy vest. The people turned to Gideon as king and priest, and away from God.

All we know is that Gideon's heart moved away from God. Maybe he forgot all that God had done for him and the Israelites. Maybe Gideon began to think that he, not God, deserved the credit for beating the Midianites.

We can only guess about why or when Gideon turned away from God. But each of us must carefully watch our own lives and the lives of our leaders to make sure we always focus on God and worship Him only.

Judges 8:22-34

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