Gideon: the Final Chapter

Judges 8:21-35

Introduction:

Do you remember when voice recorders first came out, two big reels and we had to get everybody to say something into the microphone?

Some people would say, “Do I sound like that?” What was the answer? Noooooo!

Then, the photographs came. They told it like it was. One lady decided to have her portrait painted. When she first saw it, she said, “that picture doesn’t do me justice” The painter said, “Lady, you don’t need justice; you need mercy”

God is like that painter. When He paints a picture in the Bible, He paints warts and all.

That’s why we have the record of:

Abraham, the man of faith, who in a moment of unbelief took Hagar in order to have a seed for the promise.

Moses, the meekest man on earth, who got mad and struck the rock and by that deed missed going into the promised land .

David, the man after God’s own heart, committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered her husband

Elijah, the man of prayer who killed the prophets of Baal

Then ran away scared of Jezzebel.

Peter, the rock who boasted, “though all forsake you, I will not forsake you.” But denied the Lord before a little girl.

Gideon, the mighty man of God who with 300 men killed 120,000 Midianites.

This is where we usually stop with Gideon. But there is the rest of the story that we must hear. It isn’t pretty! But we need to hear it so that we can avoid the same pitfalls.

As we take one last look at the life of Gideon, we will learn about six things which caused him much grief and negated the great work that he is known for.

I. Gideon was Exalted by His Enemies – 8:18

Last week we saw that Gideon had captured the two kings of Midian.

“And he said to Zebah and Zalmunna, “What kind of men *were they* whom you killed at ﻿﻿Tabor?” So they answered, “As you *are,* so *were* they; each one resembled the son of a king.” (8:18-19)

That reminds us of Proverbs 26:28

“a flattering mouth works ruin.”

And Proverbs 29:5

﻿“A man who flatters his neighbor, spreads ﻿a net for his feet.”

They exalted him with false praise.

A. False Praise Inspires Conceit

Remember how humble Gideon was when we first met 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.” (Judges 6:15)

But now he has been mistaken for a son of a King!

Ephraim - When Ephraim demanded credit for the battle, Gideon mentioned God, but he did not clarify that all credit belongs to God alone.

Succoth and Penuel - Gideon’s actions seem to be inspired more by revenge than by necessity.

How different it was when Paul explained this subject in I Corinthians 3:5-7

“Who then is Paul, and who *is* Apollos, but ﻿﻿ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? ﻿I planted, ﻿﻿Apollos watered, ﻿﻿but God gave the increase. So then ﻿﻿neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.”

How clear -- How concise -- How un-conceited.

B. False Praise Misplaces Confidence

As Gideon begins to think that royal blood flows in his veins and that, if he should be wounded, the blood-flow would be blue, the more he trusts in himself instead of God.

The prophet Jeremiah writes:

“Thus says the Lord: “Cursed *is* the man who trusts in man and makes ﻿﻿flesh his ﻿﻿strength, whose heart departs from the Lord.” (17:5)

C. False Praise Weakens Convictions

We will come back to this verse later, but, for now, notice v. 24

“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.”

Gideon has refused the kingship. Then why is he asking what amounts to a tax from them. (Of course you don’t call it a tax.) He seems to want the things that go with kingship.

II. Gideon was Flattered by His Friends – 8:22

“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.”

A. He was Tempted to Play God

Only God can be King in Israel and He alone can appoint kings.

B. He was Tempted to Plague Others

They were asking him to commit others to the same mistake.

“both you and your son, and your grandson also”

C. He was Tempted to Pervert God’s Plan

God’s plan for Gideon was clearly 1) to be a judge and; 2) to deliver Israel. Nothing was said about being a king!

Strange things can happen when you listen to your friends instead of God. They claim to know more than God. They may say, “God told me that you should do this.” If God hasn’t told you? Be careful.

Acts 13:1-2

“As they [the prophets and teachers] ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ﻿﻿“Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work ﻿﻿to which I have called them.”

God gives the call and only God can change that call.

III. Gideon was Ambushed by His Ambitions – 8:24-25

“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 golden earrings, ﻿﻿because they *were* Ishmaelites.” (8:24)

A. The Request

They were wearing earrings because they were Ishmaelites.

Ishmael was the son born to Abraham and Hagar was named Ishmael (Genesis 6:15).

By now the name had a broader usage and included the Midianites and the Amalekites.

A part of their preparation for war was the putting on of the earrings. On the night of the battle these rings were readily available. 120,000 dead soldiers and 300 scavengers equals 400 earrings apiece. (Assuming they all had one).

“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 one thousand seven hundred *shekels* of gold, ($150,000 today) 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. (8:25-26)

B. The Reason – 8:27

Gideon wanted to make an Ephod

“Then Gideon ﻿﻿made it into an ephod and set it up in his city, ﻿﻿Ophrah.” (8:27a)

What is an Ephod you might ask? - An apron that a High Priest wears. But Gideon is not a Levite. That’s OK, he is going to use it to worship Baal.

C. The Result

“And all Israel ﻿﻿played the harlot with it there. It became ﻿﻿a snare to Gideon and to his house.” (8:27b)

How sad that the spoils of the Lord’s victory should be used to make an idol to take them back to where they were at the beginning – into idolatry.

Gideon the idol breaker becomes Gideon the idol maker. The Judge who took them out of idolatry, now takes them back into idolatry. How tragic to see him fall at the finish line.

IV. Gideon was Disgraced by His Descendants - 9:1-4

We mentioned before the three major sins of Israel during the time of the judges:

Infidelity to God

Idol worship.

Intermarriage with foreign wives

Gideon embraced all three.

We have seen the first two. NOW, He had a foreign concubine

“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.” (8:30-31)

After Gideon’s death, Abimelech went to Shechem where his 70 half-brothers were doing a corporate rule.

“Then Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem, to ﻿﻿his mother’s brothers, and spoke with them and with all the family of the house of his mother’s father, saying, “Please speak in the hearing of all the men of Shechem: ‘Which is better for you, that all ﻿﻿seventy of the sons of Jerubbaal reign over you, or that one reign over you?’ Remember that I *am* your own flesh and ﻿﻿bone.” (9:1-2)

“His mother’s family spoke to the men of Shechem and they decided to follow Abimelech for “he is our brother.” So they gave him seventy *shekels* of silver from the temple of ﻿﻿Baal-Berith, with which Abimelech hired ﻿﻿worthless and reckless men; and they followed him.” He went to his father’s house and killed his 70 brothers on one stone, except for Jotham the youngest who hid himself.” (9:3-5)

V. Gideon was Forgotten by His Followers – 8:33-35

What do you want on your tombstone?

He/she was a good person.

Served in the church?

Led many people to the Lord?

Or maybe George who?

Gideon’s obituary was really sad!

“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.”

He had faltered at the finish-line. Nobody knew his name or what he did and they did no kindness to his family.

VI. Gideon was Distracted by His Successes –

“Pride *goes* before destruction, and a haughty spirit before ﻿﻿a fall.” (Proverbs 16:18)

“Therefore ﻿﻿let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” (I Corinthians 10.12)

There are 4 reasons why Gideon was distracted by his successes.

A. He Lost Sight of Who He Was

First, he was a vessel empowered by God. Then, he thought that he was the power. Finally, he thought he was God.

God warned Israel of this before they entered the land:

Deuteronomy 4:23

“Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the Lord your God which He made with you, ﻿﻿and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which the Lord your God has forbidden you.”

It’s possible for any one of us to fall right at the finish line and negate a life of service. (There’s no fool like an old fool) People will remember what you did last, and so will God.

B. He Lacked Honesty about His Own Heart

When he was asked to be king, he quickly said, “I will not rule over you. The Lord will rule over you”

It sounded as though he meant it, and I believe he did.

* But, he did commit the two kingly sins:

Don’t multiply riches.

Don’t multiply wives.

* And he collected tribute (by another name) from the soldiers.

In these acts, he acted like a king.

C. He Named His Illegitimate Son (Son of a King)

Gideon, if you don’t want to be king, why did you named your illegitimate son Abimelech which means “Son of a king.” This is not honesty.

D. He Left God Out Of His Victory.

There is not one line of glory to God in this whole section.

When Deborah won the victory in chapter 4, she sang a song of praise to God, chapter 5.

Where is Gideon’s praise?

Here is a good principle:

When you receive praise for what God has done, if you don’t give it away to Him, it begins to collect on you. Then pride gets into your heart and soon you are falling at the finish line.

Conclusion:

Let’s not forget what God did through Gideon. We can follow his example.

God wants to do great thing through us as well. But let’s also remember what Gideon did to himself and to his nation and to his God.

We can use this as a negative example. We must not let this happen to us!

But how can we escape that real danger of falling at the finish line?

Jude ends his short Epistle with a prayer:

“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present *you* faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, *be* glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever.﻿﻿ Amen. (Jude 24-25)