

Week #:	183	Series:	God's Judgment	Title:	Gideon – Seeking Refuge
Scriptures:	Judges 8:1-35				
Songs:	Awesome God – Rich Mullins (3:02)				
	Draw Me Close – Michael W. Smith (4:28)				
	PRAYER:	Let It Rain (3:23)			
Videos:	Judges Song – What's in the Bible #4 (Time- 31:31-33:25)				

Judge #5 - Gideon: Seeking Refuge

The first four judges in our study have been:

1. Othniel: He was Caleb's nephew. Israel lived in peace after him for 40 years
2. Ehud: He was known for the physical feature of being left-handed. Israel lived in peace after him for 80 years.
3. Shamgar: He was known for killing 600 Philistines with a farm tool, an oxgoad.
4. Deborah: She was a female prophetess, whom God used to free the people from Jabin [Yavin], King of Hazor, and his commander Sisera.
5. Gideon: Called God's valiant hero.

We left off last week with Adonai leading Gideon and his army of only 300 into battle with a very interesting strategy – they were to surround the army's encampment and use clay pots, torches, and shofars to cause confusion, and the army turned on itself.

Judges 8:1-3

¹ But the men of Efrayim complained to Gid'on, "Why didn't you call on us when you went to fight Midyan? Why did you treat us this way?" They were sharp in their criticism. ² He answered by saying to them, "How can what I have done be compared with what you have done? Aren't the grapes Efrayim leaves on the vines better than the ones Avi'ezer harvests? ³ God handed over to you Midyan's chiefs, 'Orev and Ze'ev. What could I do that matches what you did?" By saying that, he appeased their anger at him.

The tribe of Ephraim enjoyed a status of supremacy over all the other tribes of Israel, at least the more northern tribes (notice we don't see any mention of the southern tribes Judah or Simeon). This stemmed from the fact that Joshua was an Ephraimite, and that Ephraim had been given the special birthright privileges not only over his older brother Manessah, but even over his uncle Reuben. As was Jacob's deathbed blessing back in Egypt more than a hope and a dying man's wish, Ephraim indeed was fulfilling the Genesis 49 prophecy that Joseph (his father) would become very fruitful. Ephraim controlled fertile fields, lush hills, and had grown large and powerful. Other tribes deferred to them, and Gideon (being of the tribe of Manessah) did the same.

So, in verse 1 we have the leaders of Ephraim come to Gideon with a complaint:

"Why didn't you call on us when you went to fight Midian?"

Right. As though Ephraim had no idea any of this was going on. Here was Gideon, God's anointed leader, who had just risked everything to rid the land of these invaders, and the leaders of Ephraim are upset because Gideon broke protocol in their eyes. Ephraim was the big dog in Canaan at this moment; and the leaders of Ephraim expected to not only be personally consulted before any grand undertakings near their territory, but also be allowed to have their place at the head of the line when it came time for the things that automatically result from victory.

Shiloh and Bethel were undoubtedly two of the most revered and hallowed places for all of Israel and they were both in Ephraim's territory. So even the religious centers for all Israel bore Ephraim's mark. But

there was an even deeper reason for Ephraim's sharp rebuke of Gideon: 135,000 soldiers plus their families leave a lot of spoils of war behind when they flee, and more is acquired when they're captured.

Gideon proves to be a wise man and responds to the Ephraimite leaders' accusations with a soft and diplomatic response. He uses a typical farm metaphor to curry favor and says that the leftover grapes on the vines of Ephraim are better than the best crops of Avi'ezer (Avi'ezer is Gideon's clan). He's saying that even though it might seem that the full harvest of Gideon's victory over Midian WITHOUT the help of Ephraim is greater, in fact the mop-up operations (the seeming gleanings or the leftovers of the harvest) of Ephraim were the most important thing, and full and complete victory was impossible without it. The part played by Ephraim (though not so spectacular and widely known as the prime battle led by Gideon) was the real reason for ultimate success, Gideon says. We are witnessing some major sucking-up here in typical Middle Eastern style. Essentially Gideon was helping Ephraim save-face and thus avert a serious insult that almost assuredly would have led to inter-tribal warfare.

Gideon reminds Ephraim that it was they who had the glory of capturing and executing those two key leaders of the Midianites, 'Orev and Ze'ev. It worked. Ephraim was given their pound of flesh (and undoubtedly MANY pounds of gold and silver), and Gideon publicly submitted to them so Ephraim didn't have their status challenged and so they calmed down.

Judges 8:4-7

⁴ By now Gid'on and his three hundred men had come to the Yarden and crossed over. They were exhausted but were still pursuing the enemy. ⁵ In Sukkot he asked the people there, "Please give some loaves of bread to the men following me, because they are exhausted, and I am pursuing Zevach and Tzalmuna the kings of Midyan." ⁶ But the chiefs of Sukkot said, "You haven't captured Zevach and Tzalmuna yet, so why should we give bread to your army?" ⁷ Gid'on said: "If that's your answer, then after *ADONAI* has put Zevach and Tzalmuna in my hands, I will tear your flesh apart with desert thorns and thistles!"

Since the 300 elite troops of Gideon didn't have the usual retinue of some women and children bringing up the rear with supplies and food, they would have to forage as they tracked down the remnants of the Midianite invaders. They stopped at a town called Succoth and asked for food as they were tired and famished. Gideon explained what they were doing and the leaders of Succoth declined to help; they wouldn't even give them the customary (and required) hospitality of a meal and rest. That the residents of Succoth were Israelites made this offense all the worse and Gideon would see to it later that this offense was not forgotten.

Here's the picture we need to get from this so that we can understand the condition of Israel at this time: those 3 Israelite tribes residing on the east side of the Jordan had taken yet another step away from their former unity with their brethren who lived on the west side of the Jordan in Canaan. Reuben, Gad, and 1/2 of the clans of Manassah no longer had any sense of brotherhood with the other 9 1/2 tribes and certainly no feeling of obligation. They were closer in mindset and allegiance to those "children of the east" who Gideon was chasing than as family of the pursuers.

Thus Gideon said that when he returned there would be severe punishment. Exactly what that punishment was to be (as explained in verse 7) is not entirely clear. They may have intended to drag the offenders over thorn bushes like a sled over the threshing floor, or perhaps use thorn branches like small whips to tear the flesh off of their bodies. The Hebrew word translated here as "tear" (*dosh*) is more normally used to mean, "thresh" (like in threshing wheat). In any case an unpleasant fate awaited those unpatriotic Israelites when Gideon had finished off the enemy. Succoth was located in the tribal territory

of Gad. The town of Penuel lay about 5 miles further east from Succoth. At Penuel Gideon made the same request and they gave the same answer. Apparently Penuel had built a watchtower that was well known and important to their survival; Gideon said he would punish Penuel's treason by destroying that tower. Penuel was a well-known place in Hebrew lore because it was there that Jacob had his strange wrestling encounter with a spirit being that donned physical form. Both of these towns in the Trans-Jordan were around 50 miles from the main battle sight in the Jezreel Valley so Gideon's men had reason to be hungry and tired at this point.

Judges 8:8-17

⁸ From there he went up to P'nu'el and made the same request, and the people of P'nu'el gave the same answer as those of Sukkot. ⁹ So he answered the people of P'nu'el similarly, "When I return safe and sound, I will break down this tower!"

¹⁰ Now Zevach and Tzalmuna were in Karkor with their army, about 15,000 men, all that remained of the entire army of the people from the east; since 120,000 arms-bearing soldiers had fallen.

¹¹ Gid'on went up, using the route of the nomads east of Novach and Yogbehah, and struck down the army when they thought they were safe. ¹² Zevach and Tzalmuna fled, but Gid'on pursued them. Thus he captured the two kings of Midyan, Zevach and Tzalmuna, and routed their whole army in panic. ¹³ When Gid'on the son of Yo'ash returned from the battle by way of the Heres Pass, ¹⁴ he captured a young man from Sukkot and asked him about the chiefs and leaders of Sukkot; he wrote down for him the names of seventy-seven of them. ¹⁵ Then he came to the people of Sukkot and said: "You insulted me when you said, 'You haven't captured Zevach and Tzalmuna yet, so why should we give bread to your exhausted men?' Well, here are Zevach and Tzalmuna!" ¹⁶ And he took the leaders of the city and desert thorns and thistles, and used them to teach the people of Sukkot a lesson! ¹⁷ He also broke down the tower of P'nu'el and put the men of the city to death.

Verse 10 explains that two Midianite leaders remained who were his main interest: Zevach and Tzalmuna. Now in Hebrew Zevach refers to a certain class of sacrifices that are voluntary, usually associated with vow offerings. Tzalmuna is also Hebrew that means, "withheld its hospitality". Since these leaders were Midianites they hardly had Hebrew names and especially not names with those kinds of meanings; thus these names are what they became called by the Hebrews sometime later and before the editor that compiled the Book of Judges began his work.

These two enemy leaders were in a place called Karkor, a place they must have felt was safe. About 15,000 men remained of the 135,000 enemy fighters and like Sisera in Deborah's time that slept in Jael's tent under a false sense of security, so it was for these Midianite men and their leaders. Gideon attacked them and they were totally unprepared for it. Let's face it, who would think that Gideon would follow them all that distance? But they probably still didn't know that Gideon had only 300 men and so the recollection of all that panic but a few days earlier was still with them.

Beginning in verse 13 we find out why Gideon delayed executing Zevach and Tzalmuna; he wanted to use them as an object lesson for his eldest son and he wanted to demonstrate to the people of the villages of Succoth and Penuel that they never should have doubted him. So, he took those two Midianite leaders with him on his way back home and stopped at Succoth to carry out the vengeance that he promised when the townspeople refused to offer customary and expected hospitality and rest for his 300 men (remember, the people of Succoth were brother Hebrews). So just as he had promised some days earlier, he used thorns and thistles to tear the flesh from the bodies of the leaders of Succoth to teach the people

a lesson. He then moved on to Penuel and tore down their watchtower and put several of the city's leading men to death.

It says Gideon and his men followed this remnant of 15,000 using the "route of the nomads." This is the formal name of a known desert highway in that era. Huge masses of people couldn't travel like Lewis and Clarke, blazing new trails everywhere they went. They needed established routes, usually beaten down and easily identified that went by the necessary water sources and re-supply points where traveling caravans would know to meet up with travelers. Verses 11 and 12 explain that eventually Gideon and his men caught up to the army and defeated them, although without doubt they did not annihilate them all. The two leaders did what leaders did in those days; they fled when they knew they were in trouble. But Gideon soon captured Zevah and Tzalmuna and then headed back towards home, stopping for some revenge along the way.

Judges 8:18-21

¹⁸ Then he said to Zevach and Tzalmuna, "Tell me about the men you killed at Tavor." They answered, "They looked like you, like a king's sons." ¹⁹ Gid'on replied, "They were my brothers, my mother's sons. As surely as *ADONAI* is alive, I swear that if you had spared them, I would not kill you." ²⁰ Then he ordered his oldest son, Yeter, "Get up, and kill them!" But the boy didn't draw his sword; being still a boy, he was afraid. ²¹ Then Zevach and Tzalmuna said, "You, do it. You, kill us. Let a grown man do what takes a grown man's strength." So Gid'on got up and killed Zevach and Tzalmuna; then he took the ornamental crescents from around their camels' necks.

Gideon did what all the earlier and later leaders of Israel were supposed to do: not stop until the Holy War was complete. Therefore, Gideon followed the mere 8% of the Midianite enemy that remained for a distance of 150 miles in order to confront them and wipe them out. The problem of finding food for his men was ever present, and even the two Israelite cities in the Trans-Jordan that could and should have helped him refused. How discouraging that must have been but Gideon pressed on and refused to cave in. Thus, the Midianites from that time on ceased to be a problem for Israel.

What we find is that the biggest source of Gideon's discouragement was NOT the enemy, but those who ought to have been friends and allies. His own brethren were so interested in maintaining a comfortable lifestyle, in not rocking the boat, in assuring that they suffered no inconvenience that they preferred co-existence with the enemy rather than a tight bond with their own people and with God.

The people of Succoth and Penuel weren't asked to go and fight with Gideon, only to help provision them and to not stand in the way.

First it was the Ephraimites who approached Gideon (immediately following his battle) with their complaining and they effectively hindered him from doing his job in order to suffer their self-centered and egotistical demands. Then it was the townspeople of those two Israelite cities in the Trans-Jordan who denied co-operation and support while he was on his way to finish off the enemy.

Judges 8:22-29

²² The men of Isra'el said to Gid'on: "Rule over us, you, your son and your grandson, because you saved us from the power of Midyan." ²³ Gid'on replied, "Neither I nor my son will rule over you; *ADONAI* will rule over you." ²⁴ Then he added, "But I have this request to make of you, that each of you would give me the earrings from the booty you have taken." For the enemy soldiers had worn gold earrings, like all the other tribes descended from Yishma'el. ²⁵ They replied, "We're glad to give them to you." They spread out a robe, and each man threw in the earrings from his booty.

²⁶The gold earrings he requested weighed more than forty-two pounds; and this doesn't include the crescents, pendants and purple cloth worn by the kings of Midyan and the chains around their camels' necks. ²⁷Out of these things Gid'on made a ritual vest, which he located in his city, 'Ofrah. But all Isra'el turned it into an idol there, and it thus became a snare to Gid'on and his family.

²⁸This is how Midyan was defeated by Isra'el, so that they ceased to be a threat. The land had rest forty years during the lifetime of Gid'on; ²⁹Yeruba'al the son of Yo'ash returned to his home and stayed there.

Gideon (even though he was deeply flawed) knew enough of God to refuse the offer. Gideon was an anointed leader (shofet), not a melech (a king). So, he told the people that Adonai was their king and there was no need for any other.

As much merit as Gideon showed by not accepting the position of king, there is no doubt that the trappings of being a king intrigued and ultimately seduced him. Because in verse 24 he says that while he humbly refuses the offer of kingship, he would appreciate it if they would offer him tribute! Gideon asks that all who helped to fight, and who had received some of the spoils of war from the Midianites would give to him all the gold earrings they had taken from the defeated enemy. The people complied and included some of the crescents, pendants, and even some very valuable purple cloth that was worn by kings and royalty. So while Gideon may not have been a king, he would certainly live like one.

But then Gideon took yet another step that is very troubling; he may have refused to be Israel's official king, but he obviously attempted to create a new alternative to the existing priesthood by making himself equivalent to the High Priest. He took much of the roughly 50 pounds of gold and made an ephod, a ritual vest worn by the High Priest. He used it in his personal hometown of Ofrah.

One of the reasons that Israel was constantly flirting with idolatry and then going through these cycles of apostasy, punishment by God, oppression (as part of that punishment), deliverance and then restoration and a long period of peace, is that the priesthood was not functioning properly. It was probably due to a combination of the people paying little attention to them (the priests had no actual civil authority over the 12 tribes), the people not giving the priesthood their tithes and offerings so the priests had little choice but to work for a living, and the priesthood losing respect over their corruption.

The Tabernacle at this point was located in Shiloh; so for Gideon to make for himself a High Priest ritual vest and keep it in Ofrah demonstrates how far from any Scriptural teaching Israel was operating. Verse 27 says that the people looked up to that ephod of Gideon as an idol. More accurately it says they went whoring after it; but the point is that they accepted the ephod and its wearer as the real thing. Soon it became not a tool of God but an object to be worshipped: an idol.

God had ordained one High Priest only, but now Gideon (who had refused the civil role as a king) turned right around and created the spiritual/religious role of High Priest for himself. This sort of thing would be copied many years in the future when the Israelites of Samaria broke away from the Jerusalem based priesthood and created their own separate and independent priesthood and even built their own temple that was in operation in Jesus' day. Despite all of Gideon's foibles and delusions of grandeur, Midian was defeated, the northern tribes of Israel were delivered, and Gideon settled in as the Judge over that area of Canaan. His office would last for 40 years, and there would be peace and rest for God's people (at least in the north of Canaan) all during that time.

Judges 8:30-35

³⁰ Gid'on became the father of seventy sons, because he had many wives. ³¹ He also had a concubine in Sh'khem, and she too bore him a son, whom he called Avimelekh. ³² Gid'on the son of Yo'ash died at a ripe old age and was buried in the tomb of his father Yo'ash, in 'Ofrah of the Avi'ezri.

³³ But as soon as Gid'on was dead, the people of Isra'el again went astray after the *ba'alim* and made Ba'al-B'rit their god. ³⁴ They forgot *ADONAI* their God, who had saved them from the power of all their enemies on every side; ³⁵ and they showed no kindness toward the family of Yeruba'al, that is, Gid'on, to repay them for all the good he had done for Isra'el.

To demonstrate Gideon's rather inflated view of himself, verse 30 explains that he had 70 sons by as many wives. Having 70 wives takes a lot of wealth (do you remember much earlier Gideon had explained to God that he couldn't possibly be a Savior for Israel because his clan was the poorest of the tribe of Manessah?). Having many wives was also something decidedly looked down upon by God and was only deemed acceptable in Hebrew society if royalty produced such a harem.

Then in the following verse is the set-up for the next chapter and we're introduced to a fellow named Avimelech (Abimelech). This man was Gideon's son by means of a concubine from the city of Shechem. That does NOT mean that Avimelech was illegitimate; but it does mean that he automatically carried a lower status than his brothers. The chapter ends with Gideon's death; it says he lived to a ripe old age meaning that he had received God's blessing of a full life span. But as soon as he died, Israel immediately started chasing after the Canaanite gods again. They went so far as to actually officially name Ba'al Brit (Baal of the covenant) as their god.

Good leadership is essential in God's plan. But any human leader is subject to failures; Gideon was no different. What he couldn't have known, though, is what his example would do to his family after his death.

Abimelech means *the father is king*; it is a regal title. Abimelech is a title, not a name. In other words this is not the formal name that this son of a concubine was given shortly after birth (we are not told what it was). Rather it was a title given to him later on in life by Gideon; probably when this son was an adolescent. Thus, we see Gideon's propensity to serve out his time as a judge in a very kingly manner. Now such a title is given to a son because the father has high aspirations for him. And we're going to see in Judges 9 that Abimelech fully embraced those aspirations.

It is absolutely astounding how fast a person, a family, or an entire nation can forget God's blessings that made them who and what they are, and turn away to idolatry. Israel just could not resist the pull towards Ba'al because the people that lived among Israel were Canaanites who were permitted to continue to worship Ba'al. This pagan Mystery Babylon religion must have been awfully attractive to most Hebrews because it seems that they couldn't wait to get back to it the minute a godly leader wasn't there to insist on their allegiance to YHWH.

Yet in all of this one should not overlook the power of Satan to bring delusion. He had deluded the Israelite people in the first place to follow this false way and now he was able (rather easily) to do the same all-over again despite the awesome and unmistakable lessons God had taught to Israel. One must never underestimate the power of the great and continuing enemy of God and God's program of redemption.