

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Judges And Ruth: Personal Blessing Amid Group Apostasy

Part II: History Of The Era Of The Judges

B. The Record Of Specific Judges, Judges 3:7-16:31

5. Gideon's Judgeship: God's Developing A Prodigal Into An Effective Leader, Judges 6:1-8:21

c. God's Enabling Gideon To Handle External And Internal Obstacles To Victory

(Judges 7:22-8:21)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Living for Christ today presents a challenge not only from the outside world, but often even from the Church:

(1) Michael Barone's op-ed, "Why Political Polls Are So Often Wrong" (The Wall Street Journal, November 12, 2015, p. A17) claims that "polls tell us that the sharp partisan polarization of Americans today is based . . . on deeply held moral and religious (or secular) beliefs." Thus, our holding to Bible truth is at great odds with the lost world around us, making for a significant challenge in our discipling people outside the Church.

(2) However, we often face challenges to living the truth from fellow Christians in the Church: (a) 2 Timothy 3:15-4:2 claims Scripture is sufficient for all of life and ministry, but many believers heed Christian counselors who utilize various secular psychology views. However, Jay E. Adams noted, "The unbelieving counselor . . . knows that every statement, that every judgment, that every decision that he makes in counseling is challenged and countered by scores of authors from an equal number of viewpoints" (Adams, The Use of Scriptures in Counseling, 1983, p. ix as cited in Martin and Deidre Bobgan, Psychoheresy, 1987, p. 203), and secular Psychiatrist Lee Coleman in his book, The Reign of Error, 1984, p. xv (as cited in Bobgan, *Ibid*, p. 30-31) who has testified in 130 court cases against the idea that psychology and psychiatry are science, claims "the opinions produced" by "psychiatrists or psychologists . . . have no scientific merit." (b) 2 Thessalonians 3:14 calls us not to fellowship with believers who do not heed Paul's epistle there, and some truths it teaches are the Pretribulation Rapture (2:1-17), the consistent literal interpretation of Scripture [as Pretribulationism is built on it, J. Dwight Pentecost, Things To Come, 1972, p. 193], the eternity of hell (1:9), eternal security of salvation (2:13), and opposing experience-based theology (2:8-9 with Deut. 13:1-4), but some in Biblical churches often meet with professing Christians who do not hold to these teachings.

Need: *So we ask, "With today's external and internal obstacles to righteous living, what is a believer to do?!"*

- I. **When God's Spirit literally "clothed Himself" (*labash*, B. D. B., A Heb.-Eng. Lex. of the O. T., p. 527-528) with Gideon, meaning God took complete possession of him (Judges 6:34), Gideon led a band of 300 men to defeat a huge host of Midianite invaders in a great, arduous victory, Judges 7:22-25; 8:10-12:**
 - A. Gideon routed Midian with its camels at the Hill of Moreh in the Valley of Esdraelon, his 300 foot soldiers chasing them 35 miles southeast to the Jordan where the Midianites meant to cross shallow river fords with their camels at the eastern border of the tribe of Ephraim, Jud. 7:22; The MacMillan Bib. Atlas, 1968, map 76.
 - B. Thus, Gideon called for help from several northern tribes, and asked the men of Ephraim to seize the fords of the Jordan River at their eastern tribal border to intercept these fleeing Midianites, Judges 7:23-24, 25.
 - C. However, 15,000 Midianites still crossed the Jordan and headed east of the Dead Sea, resting there as they thought they were outside of Gideon's reach (Jud. 8:10, 11b). Yet, Gideon and his men pursued and defeated the rest of Midian 90 miles from Moreh, capturing Zebah and Zalmunna, Midian's kings, Jud. 8:11a, 12; *Ibid*.
- II. **Though Gideon's victory over the Midianites was great, his ultimate achievement was far greater, for he had to handle a number of internal obstacles to his battle efforts that arose from within Israel itself:**
 - A. Gideon faced and handled the obstacle of jealous, proud criticism from the men of Ephraim, Judges 8:1-3:
 1. When Gideon called Ephraim to seize the river fords, they captured two Midianite princes, Judges 7:24-25.
 2. However, the men of Ephraim sharply criticized Gideon in the midst of his pursuit of the Midianites for not calling them to help in his initial attack on Midian back at the Hill of Moreh, Judges 8:1.
 3. Actually, **God Himself** had *bypassed* the men of Ephraim as we can discern from the extended context:
 - a. Only when God's Spirit had possessed Gideon did he blow a trumpet to gather men to follow him, and then he called several tribes of Israel to follow him, Judges 6:34-35. Ephraim was **not** among these tribes.
 - b. The *reason* for this initial omission of Ephraim is explained in Judges 7:2 with 8:1: when Gideon had first gathered 32,000 men, the **Lord** told him that if He gave them victory, they would boast over it, Judges 7:2. The men of Ephraim in Judges 8:1 were angry for being left out of Gideon's initial attack force, exposing their pride and jealousy, so God did **not** want them in the initial attack lest they boast!

4. Nevertheless, since the men of Ephraim still helped Gideon fight Midian, and since he was humble at heart as seen in his original call by God in Judges 6:11-16, Gideon placated their wrath, claiming they had achieved more than he had then achieved as they had captured Oreb and Zeeb, the princes of Midian, Jud. 8:3. Gideon humbly added that the gleanings of Ephraim after the grape harvest yielded more than the whole grape harvest of his home in Abiezer of Manasseh, so the men of Ephraim calmed down, Jud. 8:2.
- B. Gideon faced and handled the obstacle of traitorship in the men of Succoth and Penuel, Judges 8:4-9, 13-17:
1. About forty miles into chasing the Midianites, and after crossing the Jordan River, Gideon asked for food from the men of Succoth and Penuel, two towns of Israel just east of the Jordan, Judges 8:4-5, 8a; Ibid.
 2. However, the men of both towns, apparently fearing reprisals from the Midianites unless Gideon had first defeated them, refused to help Gideon, essentially faithlessly siding with the Midianite enemies against the Lord and against His human deliverer in Gideon, Judges 8:6, 8b; Bible Know. Com., O. T., p. 395.
 3. Thus, to teach all Israel to heed God and His leaders in their callings, Gideon promised to return after defeating and capturing the Midianite kings and to punish the men of these two towns, Judges 8:7, 9.
 4. After defeating the Midianites east of the Dead Sea, Gideon kept his promise and returned to Succoth and Penuel to destroy the men of these towns and to break down the tower of defense at Penuel as a lesson for all Israel to unite behind God and His human deliverer in a time of war, Judges 8:13-17.
- C. Gideon faced and handled the obstacle of immobilized weakness in his own son, Judges 8:18-21:
1. When Gideon was finally free to focus on dealing out justice upon the captured Midianite kings, he interrogated them about their having unjustly murdered his brothers at Mount Tabor, Judges 8:18-19.
 2. To deal out justice, Gideon urged his inexperienced son, Jether, to slay these kings, a humiliation for the Midianite rulers and an honor for Gideon's son, Judges 8:20; Ryrie St. Bib., KJV, 1978, fn. to Jud. 8:20.
 3. However, Jether as a youth inexperienced in war was afraid to take action against them, and Zebah and Zalmunna urged Gideon himself to slay them that they might have greater honor, Judges 8:21a.
 4. Gideon was humble as seen in his Judges 6:11-16 call, so he empathized with his son's fear. Thus, he gained justice for his brothers and honor for his son by himself slaying the Midianite kings and taking the ornaments from the necks of their camels that his son might honorably inherit them from him, Jud. 8:21b.

Lesson: *God called a humble man in Gideon as He needed one who would swallow his pride in dealing with ungodly but supportive men (Ephraim and his son), and God emboldened Gideon by building up his faith to deal firmly with opposing foes (Midianites and the men of Succoth and Penuel) all under the filling of the Holy Spirit.*

Application: *To be effective in life and service in today's complex apostate era, (1) may we trust in Christ to be saved and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, John 3:16; Romans 8:9. (2) Then, (a) may we rely on the Holy Spirit to make progress amid obstacles both from without the Church as well as from within it. (b) God will equip us to stay humble so as to absorb unjust criticism from self-serving believers while also helping the weak (c) while we still fully trust God for the boldness we need to take firm action against those who oppose His interests!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

When Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, the founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, produced his book, True Evangelism: Winning Souls By Prayer in 1919, it was opposed by men like John R. Rice, Bob Jones, Sr., founder of Bob Jones University, and others who pleaded with Moody Press to remove it from circulation (Robert L. Sumner, Ed., The Biblical Evangelist, Sept.-Oct. 2005, p. 2, "Book Reviews" in a review of R. Larry Moyer's, 21 Things God Never Said) Chafer's book critiqued unbiblical efforts in evangelism that are still with us to this day, and some of those practices were: (1) having a "professional" evangelist hold evangelistic meetings in a church where Scripture presents such meetings as being held outside the church, and pastors versus evangelists building up the local body (Acts 8:5-8, 26-40 with 21:8 for evangelists and 1 Timothy 4:12-16 for pastors); (2) making demands from the pulpit on the unsaved to perform a work to be saved such as going forward in a church meeting or raising their hand versus trusting alone in Christ alone, Ephesians 2:8-9; (3) preaching to the lost about Christian doctrines and social issues versus simply giving them the Gospel alone, 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; etc. (Ibid., Chafer, 1974 (reprint), p. 3-23)

As in Gideon's case, it must have taken much humility and courage under the Holy Spirit's enabling for Dr. Chafer to put his reputation on the line before other ministers and his generation and to write what he did in that book. His book on evangelism encourages me in my era to hold to the views I share with him on Biblical evangelism!

May we put our faith in Christ to be saved. Then, under the Spirit's enabling, may we remain humble to handle obstacles from within the Church and courageous to heed God's will in ministry before the world!