

## JUDGES SESSION #11

### G. ATTACK OF DISUNITY

In this session we'll look at the remainder of Gideon's story.

Now, as often happens after an experience of great success, the Bible describes an unexpected attack – an attack of disunity

To get the background, we need to see what happened partway through Gideon's pursuit of the Midianites:

Judg 7:24-25

<sup>24</sup> Then Gideon sent messengers throughout all the mountains of Ephraim, saying, "Come down against the Midianites, and seize from them the watering places as far as Beth Barah and the Jordan." Then all the men of Ephraim gathered together and seized the watering places as far as Beth Barah and the Jordan. <sup>25</sup> And they captured two princes of the Midianites, Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb they killed at the winepress of Zeeb. They pursued Midian and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon on the other side of the Jordan.

So then what happened? Here's where the *internal* attack came:

Judg 8:1-3

Now the men of Ephraim said to him, "Why have you done this to us by not calling us when you went to fight with the Midianites?" And they reprimanded him sharply.

<sup>2</sup> So he said to them, "What have I done now in comparison with you? *Is* not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? <sup>3</sup> God has delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. And what was I able to do in comparison with you?" Then their anger toward him subsided when he said that.

- Ephraim was the largest tribe in Israel at this time
  - but they had made no effort to attack Midian
  - and none of them had volunteered for Gideon's army
- their complaint here is clearly motivated by jealousy & injured pride
- and Gideon dealt with this jealousy and resentment wisely, illustrating the truth of Prov. 15:1 – "a soft answer turns away wrath."

...there are at least a couple of lessons here:

- 1) the unity of God's people is more important than personal pride
- 2) we must not take our eyes off the enemy
  - Gideon had no time to fight with Ephraim because he was still involved in defeating Midian

### H. ATTACK OF FALSE UNITY

What follows next is another attack against Gideon, but this time it is one of "false unity"

Judg 8:4-9

<sup>4</sup> When Gideon came to the Jordan, he and the three hundred men who *were* with him crossed over, exhausted but still in pursuit. <sup>5</sup> Then he said to the men of

Succoth, "Please give loaves of bread to the people who follow me, for they are exhausted, and I am pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, kings of Midian."

<sup>6</sup> And the leaders of Succoth said, "Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in your hand, that we should give bread to your army?"

<sup>7</sup> So Gideon said, "For this cause, when the Lord has delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers!" <sup>8</sup> Then he went up from there to Penuel and spoke to them in the same way. And the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered. <sup>9</sup> So he also spoke to the men of Penuel, saying, "When I come back in peace, I will tear down this tower!"

Vs. 13

<sup>13</sup> Then Gideon the son of Joash returned from battle, from the Ascent of Heres.

Vss. 16-17

<sup>16</sup> And he took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth. <sup>17</sup> Then he tore down the tower of Penuel and killed the men of the city.

- Succoth & Penuel were Israelite towns and their leaders should have been united with Gideon against the Midianites; but they weren't, and refused to help
- they picture those who are only empty religious shells, claiming the name of God's people but without the reality that comes from commitment; they were just fence-sitters
  - no unity was possible with them; only **judgment**
- but he doesn't stop to deal with them yet; Gideon must first continue to pursue the enemy
  - and he does so with great **persistence** – vs. 4 tells us they were "exhausted but still in pursuit"
  - he reminds me of a good definition of **genius**: the faculty for everlasting concentration on one thing

## I. GIDEON'S GREATEST VICTORY

He and his 300 men, with God's great help, accomplish a great victory over their enemy:

<sup>28</sup> Thus Midian was subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted their heads no more. And the country was quiet for forty years in the days of Gideon.

However, in one sense we can say this was not Gideon's *greatest* victory. His finest moment may be his response to the men of Israel *after* the battle. Look at...

Judg 8:22-23

<sup>22</sup> 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."

<sup>23</sup> But Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you."

- notice there is no record of *praise* to God by the people after the great defeat of Midianites
  - out of *unthankful* hearts arose an *ungodly* idea: Gideon should be their **king**
- they gave Gideon credit he did not deserve
  - it was *God's* victory

- and they made a request outside the will of God
- but fortunately, Gideon refused; a great personal victory

## J. GIDEON'S GREAT MISTAKE

*Unfortunately*, this is not the end of the story. What follows next turns out to be Gideon's great mistake:

Judg 8:24-27

<sup>24</sup> 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.

<sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> Now the weight of the gold earrings that he requested was one thousand seven hundred *shekels* of gold, 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. <sup>27</sup> Then Gideon made it into an ephod and set it up in his city, Ophrah. And all Israel played the harlot with it there. It became a snare to Gideon and to his house.

- there are two problems or corruptions here:

### 1) Gideon made a golden ephod

- an ephod was a special vest adorned with 12 gems representing the 12 tribes of Israel; it was worn only by the High Priest and contained a pocket which held two small stones by which God communicated His will to the High Priest
- Gideon, riding on a national wave of popularity and being the kind of person who always seemed to need **reassurances** from God, now comes up with a way to have his own personal 'password' into God's guidance & revelation: he made an ephod for himself
- but this was an absolutely **wrong** thing to do because he was in effect taking on the role – not just of 'judge' – but of high priest as well!
- but he was not from family of Aaron, the only ones eligible to serve as priests
- furthermore, this was all done at **Ophrah**, Gideon's home, not at the tabernacle in Shiloh where God had appointed that worship & priestly rituals be done
- in effect, Gideon rejected the authority of God's Word in his life, and a serious decline began in his personal life
  - ...perhaps he illustrates that it is easier to honor God in courageous action in national emergency than consistently in ordinary everyday life
- God clearly condemns this action by showing us the result in the life of the **nation**: "all Israel prostituted themselves by worshiping it [the ephod] there [at Ophrah]."
- not only was it bad for the nation, it was bad for Gideon **personally**: "it became a snare to Gideon and to his house"
  - ...rather than focusing on the Living God, this family now focused on the **ephod** which soon replaced true worship with superstitious religion

### 2) Gideon's second problem was encouraging a wrong attitude in his family

- he named his son 'Abimelech' (which means "my father is *king*")

- clearly by this time, in spite of his earlier refusal to be Israel's king, Gideon had adopted a kingly life-style, with a royal harem & royal luxury  
...this Abimelech later killed all the other sons & set himself up as a 'king' for a short time, as we will see in the next session
- what a tragic ending for Gideon! ...brought about because he compromised his obedience to God's Word
- once again, as so often happens in Scripture, a '**mountaintop**' victory experience leads all too soon to sliding down the **slippery slope** of sin
  - one of our most **vulnerable** times, spiritually, is when we have had a spiritual victory or exciting spiritual experience ...we need to be especially alert at such times because we are more open to danger then
- but also notice that Gideon has lost touch with the **main truth** God was teaching over and over throughout his story: "when I am **weak**, then I am **strong**"
  - it's when we *think* we are **strong** that we become **truly weak**, because then we cut ourselves off from God's strength by our pride
- an anonymous writer said it well: "It's my **pride** that makes me independent of God. It's appealing to feel I am the master of my fate; I run my own life, I call my own shots; I go it alone. But that feeling is my basic dishonesty. I *can't* go it alone. I have to get help from other people, and I *can't* ultimately rely on myself. I am dependent on *God* for my very next breath. It is dishonest of me to pretend that I am anything but a man, small, weak and limited. So, living independent of God is self-delusion. It's not just a matter of pride being an unfortunate little trait and humility being an attractive little virtue, it's my inner psychological *integrity* that's at stake. When I am conceited, I am lying to myself about what I am. I am pretending to be God, and not man. My pride is the idolatrous worship of myself, and that is the **national religion of hell.**"