

Finer Grounds

Judges and Ruth

Lesson 4: Tearing Down Altars (Judges 6&7)

Read Judges 6:1-10

Again we see Israel in a bad place because of their actions. They have done what was evil in the sight of the Lord and He has sent Midian to oppress them.

List the aspects of the cycle of Judges you see in these verses.

How was Midian oppressing Israel?

Just last year we planted a garden, our first at this house. I spent the spring carefully tending, pulling weeds and watering. I couldn't wait to enjoy the literal fruit of my labor. There is nothing more delicious than fresh food that you have grown in your garden sitting on your table! Unfortunately, we neglected to fence in our garden and this became a big problem...especially since we have free-range chickens. I would sit and watch juicy watermelons, cantaloupes and tomatoes growing; waiting patiently until I could pull them off the vine and share them with my family. What I didn't realize is that the chickens had the same plan. Before I could get a single tomato or melon off the plant they were always devoured. We did not get to enjoy any of them. While this was truly frustrating (and you can bet we are currently saving up money for garden

fence this year), my disappointment couldn't come close to what the Israelites were feeling at the hand of Midian.

Imagine spending time growing and tending your crops like the Israelites; this wasn't just a hobby, this was your livelihood. This was their food for the entire year! And then, just as harvest time comes enter the Midianites. How frustrated and hopeless would you feel?

According to Judges 6:8-10 what was the cause of this oppression?

The Israelites had followed the gods of the Ammorites and were now facing barren fields because of it. Not just empty fields, but empty lives of hiding out in caves, starving, helplessly watching as the Midianites stole the food they had worked so hard to grow. No matter how hard they tried, Israel could not do this on their own. Without God all of their toiling would be in vain.

What are some of the barren fields in your life? Do you have areas that you have worked for a certain outcome and yet because of your lack of dependence on God you don't see the fruit of your effort?

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How can you work to improve your dependence on God in these areas?

Read Judges 6:11-24

In these verses we get to meet another of our Sunday school heroes from Judges: Gideon. When Gideon enters our scene we see a cautious man full of doubts and questions; however, his faith and obedience transforms him into a fearless warrior who does some amazing things for God!

This section reminds me so much of Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3). Just like Moses, Gideon was on the run. He was hiding, attempting to salvage what little food they had left. At this time when all seemed so incredibly bleak Gideon had an unexpected encounter with one who could offer salvation. Even more astonishing was that Gideon himself would be the vessel for this salvation.

In your own words describe the dialogue between the angel of the Lord and Gideon in Judges 6:12-18.

Gideon has clearly been taught about the awesome power and he was about to experience it first-hand.

What sign did the angel of the Lord give to Gideon in this passage?

What was Gideon's response?

It is evident that Gideon has great respect and reverence for God. Once he understood that he was truly communicating with God he could think of no other response but to worship.

Read Judges 6:25-32

This is one of my favorite passages in the entire book of Judges and while Gideon is a familiar character, this section is often overlooked in lieu of the battle scene. It is here though that the hero wins our heart and proves his bravery and loyalty.

What does God ask Gideon to do?

I truly think of all of the amazing things that Gideon did this one took the most courage. To go into his father's home and destroy something of such value and importance would have been unforgivable. In addition to destroying these altars Gideon used his father's bulls to sacrifice to the true God. Financial loss aside, this would have been a big emotional blow to Gideon's father and their entire house.

God knew that Gideon could not be an effective example and godly leader if his own household was promoting idolatry. These idolatrous altars had to be removed.

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Do you have any altars in your life that tarnish your example as a Christian?

What actions can you take this week to tear these altars down?

What was the response of the men in the city?

How did Gideon's father respond?

I want to take a minute to dwell on this wise response. It would have been easy for Joash's first reaction to be one of anger just like everyone else. Why has my son done this to me? How could he disrespect me in this way? What is everyone going to think of me now? Instead he shows great discernment and calms the crowd. Joash knew the accounts of the supremacy of God, he had taught them to his son. While he may have been temporarily misguided he allowed himself to be humbled in respect of God's truth.

I hope and pray that if anyone ever discovers any false gods in my life they will help me rip down those altars without fear of how I might respond. This is true love for one another! I also pray that when people do point out those altars in my life that I will be brave enough to acknowledge my false gods for what they are.

Has anyone ever pointed out a problem in your spiritual walk because of their love for you and God? How did you respond?

What can you do to be more receptive to godly correction when it comes your way?

Read Judges 6:33-40

This is an odd little encounter. After Gideon has done this enormously brave thing he asks God for some reassurance. It is very likely that at this point he is being mocked and possibly threatened for his actions. What I love about looking at the account of Gideon is that it is very evident that God welcomes our honest emotions. Gideon remains respectful but this brave warrior bears his heart to God. He shares his fear and doubt which for such a brave man could not have been an easy thing.

Describe this interaction between God and Gideon in your own words.

How does the way Gideon approaches God with doubt and fear differ from the way Barak did in Judges 4?

Something else to take note of is that throughout this account Gideon gives credit for

this victory to God, even before the battle has even occurred. There is no doubt in this great warrior's mind that if the Israelites win it will be because Yahweh defeats their enemy.

Read Judges 7:1-8

Summarize this passage in your own words.

If you are familiar with Gideon this is probably the account you remember. Gideon's army of 32,000 wouldn't have been massive, but it would have been respectable; however, God does not allow it to remain. He slowly whittles the number down until Gideon has only 300 men.

Why did God want such a small army?

God wants it to be evident to all that it was HIM who delivered them. He didn't want anyone to be able to even hint that they had the power to do this. This would be another opportunity for Yahweh to show his awesome power.

Read Judges 7:9-18

God often asks His people to do things that take great bravery and commitment; however, He always offers comfort and encouragement. God understands the gravity of what He asked Gideon to do.

How does God provide encouragement for Gideon?

What are some ways that we receive encouragement from God to obey His will even when we are fearful?

By all earthly standards what Gideon was about to undertake could be viewed as insane. So few people with only torches, pitchers and trumpets, this was an impossible battle with absolutely no hope of success. Gideon understood that it wasn't the earthly standards that would define this battle, though. He knew that Yahweh was on his side and no one could stand against the awesome power and might of Him.

Read Judges 7:19-25

Describe this battle in your own words.

What action did God take in this battle (Judges 7:22)?

The Midianites were quite literally their own worst enemy. God cause such confusion in the camp that they killed one another in their attempts to fight and flee. Gideon didn't need swords, the Midianites fought themselves.

We will continue this battle in our next lesson. For this week I will leave you with these thoughts. Is your life "altar-free"? Are you willing to stand up for God no matter the cost like Gideon? How does God give you strength?