

# Finer Grounds

## *Judges and Ruth* *Lesson 5: The Spoils of War (Judges 8)*

This is one of those chapters that is incredibly bittersweet. It will leave us both cheering for Gideon and cringing at some of his poor choices. This is a powerful reminder that our Bible heroes are human too; the only perfect person God ever used to fulfill his purpose was Jesus.

### **Read Judges 8:1-3**

These three short verses tell us a lot about Gideon and the tribe of Ephraim. We get to see the first glimpse of the prideful attitude that caused Ephraim's downfall. If you have studied through the subsequent Old Testament history books, you will remember that Ephraim was extremely self-centered. Here they should have been thankful for Gideon's victory. Instead, they were petulant that someone had taken away their spotlight.

If we are completely honest with ourselves, we see this scenario play out on a regular basis in our churches and in our own lives. Maybe it's that someone else got asked to teach a class that we were hoping for, or it might be that another woman "stole" a job that had always been yours (planning baby showers, organizing funeral meals or even making a particular dish at the potluck). All of these problems are centered around a prideful attitude. If we were truly focused on God's will and furthering His kingdom, it wouldn't matter who did the job, just that it had gotten done.

**What are some specific areas in which you have let pride affect your service to God?**

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**What does Jesus have to say about this kind of attitude in Matthew 23:12?**

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**According to Judges 6:11 who was an Abiezrite? Knowing this, describe Gideon's response to the Ephraimites.**

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In Gideon, we see the opposite of the prideful behavior demonstrated by the Ephraimites. This war hero responded with thoughtfulness and humility. It is evident that Gideon's father Joash passed his diplomatic prowess down to his son (Judges 6:31-32).

### **Read Judges 8:4-17**

The division occurring at the national level is evident here. Not only are the tribes not working together, they are now actually hindering one another. These Israelites across the Jordan river should have showed Gideon and his men hospitality and love; instead they mocked the weary warriors. We now see Gideon at his breaking point. He is exhausted and frustrated

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and his response reflects this. Gideon is no longer wise and diplomatic; here we begin to see his weaknesses.

**How does Gideon respond to those who wouldn't help him (Judges 8:7, Judges 8:9)?**

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Upon his return in Judges 8:13, Gideon begins to treat the Israelites across the Jordan as if they were the enemy. He captures a young man and follows through with his threats to these cities.

Quite often we let weariness affect our attitude and the way we interact with others. It may be as simple as the scowl we wear on our face at the end of an exhausting day or we might yell at our children because we are at the end of our rope. Whatever the case, however tired and frustrated we are, we must do our best to behave as God desires.

**When you are weary, in what areas are you most likely to falter? What precautions can you take to prevent this?**

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**Read Judges 8:18-21**

We now come to a shocking turn of events and learn some of the back story between Gideon and these kings. Not only had they been oppressing and starving his people, they had killed his brothers.

**According to Numbers 35:16-21, what was the right/responsibility of Gideon as the blood avenger to his brothers?**

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It is likely he asked his son Jether to kill them because this would have been a more shameful death. It would have also added to the pain as a young boy would not have been able to wield a sword as forcefully as Gideon, a strong and seasoned warrior.

**Read Judges 8:22-28**

Now that the battle was over and Israel had relief they looked to Gideon. Israel wanted to raise him up as a king.

**What was Gideon's response to their request?**

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This answer makes us want to stand up and cheer! Gideon tells them that they already have a king, God is their king. Keep this verse in mind, maybe even underline it. We will see it contrasted later on in the book. Even though Gideon says these words, his actions don't seem to match.

**What request does Gideon make of the Israelites?**

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Gideon is paying lip service to God by formally denying the throne; however, he still behaves as if he were a monarch. He takes a tribute from the people and more specifically

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takes many of the things that would have been considered royal spoils such as the purple robes and the crescent ornaments.

**What did Gideon do with his spoils?**

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Gideon has transformed into someone almost unrecognizable to us. This is the man who tore down the idols from his father's house and now here he is building new ones. This is such a sad turn of events.

Like Gideon, it is easy for us to become complacent in our victories. We defend our beliefs with bold words, but our actions don't back up our faith. We may even build blatant idols for ourselves while virtuously proclaiming to be a Christian.

**What are some of the ways that your actions don't line up with your verbal proclamations of Christianity?**

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**How do you use your prosperity and the spoils of your victories to build idols for yourself?**

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**What can we do to recognize when our words and actions don't line up?**

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**Read Judges 8:29-35**

While there was peace and prosperity for the rest of Gideon's life, it was short lived. Immediately upon his death Israel started worshipping the Canaanite gods once more. Because of some of Gideon's actions later in life we will see his family in turmoil after his death. In our next lesson we will examine a family crisis turned civil war that will devastate the nation.