

DOWNWARD SPIRAL, PART 8: “GIDEON’S FALL”
JUDGES 8:1-35

Personal Introduction

Hi everyone! If you don't know me, my name is Eric and I'm a pastor at HMCC of Jakarta, and it's my privilege to preach the Word of God for us today.

Sermon Series Introduction

We're currently in Part 8 of our sermon series called “Downward Spiral,” where we're going through the book of Judges together.

And today's sermon is titled: “Gideon's Fall.”

So let's get right into it.

Sermon Introduction

Lance Armstrong. Bill Cosby. Tiger Woods.

All these men were once beloved, inspirational figures in the public eye.

Lance Armstrong was a cancer survivor who then went on to win seven consecutive Tour de France bicycle races, and he established the Livestrong Foundation to assist other cancer survivors.

Bill Cosby was a beloved comedian and actor; he's considered to be a trailblazer for African Americans in the entertainment industry, and he was known as “America's Dad” because of his fatherly image.

Tiger Woods was the only professional golfer to have won all four major championships in a row, which came to be known as “The Tiger Slam.” He's regarded as one of the greatest golfers of all time and is one of the most famous athletes in modern history.

But all these men also had a great public *fall*.

Lance Armstrong was discovered to use performance-enhancing drugs over his career, and he was stripped of all his titles, lost all his endorsements, and was banned from all official bicycling events.

Bill Cosby was convicted of multiple counts of sexual assault, and his career and reputation were completely tarnished.

Tiger Woods was exposed to having multiple adulterous relationships; and as a result, he lost most of his sponsorships and his family life was dismantled.

The falls of these three men didn't just affect them *personally*, but there was *fallout* (or *consequences*) experienced by many around them—whether disorientation, disillusionment, or divorce.

Unfortunately, these are not the only people who have fallen and caused much damage.

The painful reality is that we probably don't have to think too hard to realize that there are many more who have fallen.

And each time, those who fall cause a great fallout.

The One Thing

Those who fall cause a great fallout.

In today's passage, we'll see that when Gideon the judge-deliverer fell, it didn't just affect *him*, but it caused a great fallout (or negative consequences) for *all* of Israel.

Scripture Introduction

Turn your Bibles to Judges 8.

I'd encourage you to keep your Bibles open to this passage and look down at verses that are referred to throughout the sermon.

If you need access to a Bible, you can download the ESV Bible app, or just ask someone next to you, and I'm sure they'd be happy to share with you.

<pause>

"Judges" here doesn't refer to judicial or court judges, but these judges were military leaders that God raised up to deliver his people from an oppressor. They were not kings over all of Israel, but they were more like clan or tribal leaders.

Last week, we saw how the Lord shrank Gideon's army from 32,000 down to 300 men, for the purpose of bringing out their weakness so they would not boast in themselves but trust in him.

And as they faced the enemy army of 135,000 Midianites, Gideon and these 300 Israelites somehow defeated them by simply smashing jars, blowing trumpets, and shouting.

They then called out neighboring Israelite tribes to help them pursue the fleeing Midianites trying to cross the Jordan River. And the account ended with the tribe of Ephraim joining the battle, killing two Midianite princes, and bringing their heads to Gideon.

And I wish Gideon's narrative ended there, but for the first time in the book of Judges, the downward spiral back into sin and idolatry begins not *after* but *during* the lifetime of the judge.

So that's where we are as we begin today's passage.

Scripture Reading

Let's read Judges 8.

¹ Then the men of Ephraim said to him, "What is this that you have done to us, not to call us when you went to fight against Midian?" And they accused him fiercely. ² And 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 grape harvest of Abiezer? ³ God has given into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. What have I been able to do in comparison with you?" Then their anger against him subsided when he said this.

⁴ And Gideon came to the Jordan and crossed over, he and the 300 men who were with him, exhausted yet pursuing. ⁵ So 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 after Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian." ⁶ And the officials of Succoth said, "Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hand, that we should give bread to your army?" ⁷ So Gideon said, "Well then, when the LORD has given Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, I will flail your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers." ⁸ And from there he went up to Penuel, and spoke to them in the same way, and the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered. ⁹ And he said to the men of Penuel, "When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower."

¹⁰ Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor with their army, about 15,000 men, all who were left of all the army of the people of the East, for there had fallen 120,000 men who drew the sword. ¹¹ And Gideon went up by the way of the tent dwellers east of Nobah and Jogbehah and attacked the army, for the army felt secure. ¹² And Zebah and Zalmunna fled, and he pursued them and captured the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and he threw all the army into a panic.

¹³ Then Gideon the son of Joash returned from the battle by the ascent of Heres. ¹⁴ And he captured a young man of Succoth and questioned him. And he wrote down for him the officials and elders of Succoth, seventy-seven men. ¹⁵ And he came to the men of Succoth and said, "Behold Zebah and Zalmunna, about whom you taunted me, saying, 'Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hand, that we should give bread to your men who are exhausted?'" ¹⁶ And he took the elders of the city, and he took thorns of the wilderness and briers and with them taught the men of Succoth a lesson. ¹⁷ And he broke down the tower of Penuel and killed the men of the city.

¹⁸ Then he said to Zebah and Zalmunna, "Where are the men whom you killed at Tabor?" They answered, "As you are, so were they. Every one of them resembled the son of a king." ¹⁹ And he said, "They were my brothers, the sons of my mother. As the LORD lives, if you had saved them alive, I would not kill you." ²⁰ So he said to Jether his firstborn, "Rise and kill them!" But the young man did not draw his sword, for he was afraid, because he was still a young man. ²¹ Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, "Rise yourself and fall upon us, for as the man is, so is his strength." And Gideon arose and killed Zebah and Zalmunna, and he took the crescent ornaments that were on the necks of their camels.

²² Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, "Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also, for you have saved us from the hand of Midian." ²³ Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the LORD will rule over you." ²⁴ And Gideon said to them, "Let me make a request of you: every one of you give me the earrings from his spoil." (For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.) ²⁵ And they answered, "We will willingly give them." And they spread a cloak, and every man threw in it the earrings of his spoil. ²⁶ And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was 1,700 shekels of gold, besides the crescent ornaments and the pendants and the purple garments worn by the kings of Midian, and besides the collars that were around the necks of their camels. ²⁷ And Gideon made an ephod of it and put it in his city, in Ophrah. And all Israel whored after it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family. ²⁸ So Midian was subdued before the people of Israel, and they raised their heads no more. And the land had rest for forty years in the days of Gideon.

²⁹ Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and lived in his own house. ³⁰ Now Gideon had seventy sons, his own offspring, for he had many wives. ³¹ And his concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, and he called his name Abimelech. ³² And Gideon the son of Joash died in a good old age and was buried in the tomb of Joash his father, at Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

³³ As soon as Gideon died, the people of Israel turned again and whored after the Baals and made Baal-berith their god. ³⁴ And the people of Israel did not remember the LORD their God, who had delivered them from the hand of all their enemies on every side, ³⁵ and they did not show steadfast love to the family of Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) in return for all the good that he had done to Israel.

This is God's Word.

Overview

We'll look at this passage in two parts, and we'll see two heart attitudes of those who fall.

[Two heart attitudes of those who fall:]

- I. "Don't you know who I am?" (vv. 1-21)
- II. "Do as I say (but not as I do)" (vv. 22-35)

These may not be attitudes that we hold consciously, but these are more likely subconscious heart attitudes that our lives expose.

So as you listen and examine your own life in light of this passage, don't be too quick to say "this is not me" or "I don't think like this." Rather, ask yourself, "how does my life *reveal* this kind of heart attitude?"

I. "Don't you know who I am?" (vv. 1-21)

Look at verse 1.

[¹ Then the men of Ephraim said to him, “What is this that you have done to us, not to call us when you went to fight against Midian?” And they accused him fiercely. ² And 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 grape harvest of Abiezer? ³ God has given into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. What have I been able to do in comparison with you?” Then their anger against him subsided when he said this.]

The men of Ephraim “*accused* [Gideon] fiercely.”¹

Why are the men of Ephraim so angry? Because Gideon didn’t call them out to the battle *sooner* (cf. 6:35; 7:23), but only *after* the Midianites were already fleeing, so they felt like they were just the “clean-up” crew after the real battle was already over.

In short, it offended their *pride*, so these Ephraimites are picking a fight with Gideon.

To understand Ephraim’s response, we need to understand that Ephraim was considered “the big dog” among the tribes. They were one of the strongest tribes economically and militarily.² The tabernacle, which is where the Lord’s presence dwelled in a special way, resided in Ephraim, so they also had religious prestige.³

So in essence, Ephraim exuded a prideful attitude of “Don’t you know who I am?” to Gideon, and they were ready to fight their fellow Israelites over it.⁴

So how does Gideon respond?

Look at verses 2-3.

Here, Gideon has the sense to respond to the Ephraimites with “a soft answer [that] turns away wrath” (Prov. 15:1).

And so, Gideon avoids a battle with his fellow Israelites by basically saying that he and his small clan are nothing in comparison to the great tribe of Ephraim, and that God has given Ephraim the greater honor of killing the two Midianite princes.

And as a result, Ephraim’s pride is satisfied, their anger subsides, and this potential civil war among fellow Israelites is averted.

But unfortunately, that’s not the only conflict that Gideon is going to have with his fellow Israelites—and he won’t always respond as softly.

Look at verses 4-9.

¹ Miles V. Van Pelt (*Judges*, ESVEC [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021]) notes: “The verb rendered “accused” in 8:1 is the same as that used in 6:31–32 when the people of the town “contended” against Gideon for breaking down the altar of Baal. This same verb also forms the first part (Jerub) of his new name, Jerubbaal.”

² Tim Keller, *Judges for You* (Epsom, UK: The Good Book Company, 2013), 93.

³ Arthur E. Cundall (*Judges*, TOTC [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008]) writes: “The tribe of Ephraim appears to have enjoyed a supremacy over the other tribes during the earlier period of the settlement. Its territory in the central highlands was one of the few areas where the Conquest was in any way complete and the Ephraimites, preserved by their central position from many of the incursions of Israel’s hostile neighbours, experienced a far greater freedom to consolidate themselves than did the other tribes. The two most prominent sanctuaries of the judges’ period, Bethel and Shiloh, which functioned as the rallying-point of the tribes, were situated within its boundaries and this fact undoubtedly further increased its prestige.” The tabernacle was usually at Shiloh (Josh. 18:1, 8-10; 19:51; 22:9, 12-14; Judg. 18:31; cf. 1 Sam. 1-3) but occasionally at Bethel (Judg. 20:27-28).

⁴ Miles V. Van Pelt (*Judges*, ESVEC [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021]) writes: “This brief episode foreshadows similar events recorded in 12:1–6, when the Ephraimites contend with Jephthah. In that instance, however, the diplomacy of Jephthah will not be enough, as forty-two thousand Ephraimites will perish. Episodes such as these serve to highlight the progressive deterioration of Israel as she become more and more Canaanite in her attitudes and practices.” John Currid (*Judges*, TGC, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/commentary/judges/>) writes: “The Ephraimites have a history of this behavior with the other tribes (cf. Josh 17:14–18; Judg 12:1); the prophet Isaiah called it ‘the jealousy of Ephraim’ (Isa 11:13).”

[⁴ And Gideon came to the Jordan and crossed over, he and the 300 men who were with him, exhausted yet pursuing. ⁵ So 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 after Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian." ⁶ And the officials of Succoth said, "Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hand, that we should give bread to your army?" ⁷ So Gideon said, "Well then, when the LORD has given Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, I will flail your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers." ⁸ And from there he went up to Penuel, and spoke to them in the same way, and the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered. ⁹ And he said to the men of Penuel, "When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower."]

In pursuit of the two kings of Midian that escaped, Gideon crosses the Jordan River with his 300 men.

But from the original battlefield to these two cities of Succoth and Penuel would have been at least 50 miles or 80 kilometers⁵—and they would have been traveling on foot. So Gideon and his men were *exhausted*.

Since these two cities east of the Jordan River were part of the Israelite tribe of Gad, Gideon asks his fellow Israelites for bread to sustain his exhausted men as they pursue the two Midianite kings.

But out of *fear*, the people of Succoth and Penuel each refuse to help Gideon and his men.

Because if Gideon fails to kill the two kings and the Midianites find out that these two cities helped him, they fear that the Midianites would then come to attack *them*.

So out of *fear*, they'd rather not pick a side. They'd rather not get involved until *after* Gideon has captured and killed the two kings—once everything is already over.

If *Ephraim* was upset with Gideon for calling them too *late*, *these* two Israelite cities were fearful that Gideon was calling them too *soon*.

No matter what he does, Gideon just can't seem to please any of them.

But this time, rather than responding with a soft answer, Gideon responds like the Ephraimites did earlier with him—with prideful anger.⁶

How dare they doubt him! His 300-man army just defeated the 135,000-man Midianite army!

And so, like the Ephraimites, Gideon begins to reveal the same heart attitude of "Don't you know who I am?"

And he doesn't just pick a fight, but in verses 7 and 9, he declares *revenge* against Succoth and Penuel.

And Gideon's wrath cannot be turned away. He's committed to *proving* them wrong and then coming back to *punish* them for not helping him.

Look at verses 10-12 as the scene changes.

[¹⁰ Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor with their army, about 15,000 men, all who were left of all the army of the people of the East, for there had fallen 120,000 men who drew the sword. ¹¹ And Gideon went up by the way of the tent dwellers east of Nobah and Jogbehah and attacked the army, for the army felt secure. ¹² And Zebah and Zalmunna fled, and he pursued them and captured the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and he threw all the army into a panic.]

⁵ Arthur E. Cundall, *Judges*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008).

⁶ Tim Keller (*Judges for You* [Epsom, UK: The Good Book Company, 2013], 94) notes, "This reveals that Gideon's diplomacy regarding Ephraim was not because he did not want to strike at them, but because he could not."

The two Midianite kings and their remaining army are in Karkor, which was about 100 miles or 160 kilometers east of the Jordan River.⁷ So given how far they have fled, verse 11 says that the Midianites “felt secure.” They had no idea that Gideon and his 300 men would travel such a great distance to hunt them down.

And so, Gideon and his army caught them off guard and captured the two Midianite kings.

Now, look at verses 13-17 as the scene returns to the two Israelite cities who earlier, out of *fear*, refused to help Gideon and his men.

[¹³ Then Gideon the son of Joash returned from the battle by the ascent of Heres. ¹⁴ And he captured a young man of Succoth and questioned him. And he wrote down for him the officials and elders of Succoth, seventy-seven men. ¹⁵ And he came to the men of Succoth and said, “Behold Zebah and Zalmunna, about whom you taunted me, saying, ‘Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hand, that we should give bread to your men who are exhausted?’” ¹⁶ And he took the elders of the city, and he took thorns of the wilderness and briars and with them taught the men of Succoth a lesson. ¹⁷ And he broke down the tower of Penuel and killed the men of the city.]

Gideon captures and interrogates a young man from Succoth for all of the names of their leaders, and then in verse 16, Gideon does to them *exactly* what he said he would do.

Earlier in verse 7, he said he would “flail” their flesh with thorns, which meant that he would have either dragged them over thorns or he would have laid them on thorns and run them over with a sled embedded with sharp stones.⁸

Either way, Gideon clearly *tortured* them, and though it doesn’t say that he *killed* them, almost all the commentators agree that they would have certainly died from this kind of torture.

And in verse 17, regarding the men of Penuel, there’s no ambiguity. Gideon broke down their tower just like he said he would, and it’s clear that he “*killed* the men of the city.”

This is the *first* time in the entire book of Judges that a judge who was meant to *deliver* Israel from their oppressor ends up *killing* his own people.

The scene then returns to the two Midianite kings.

Look at verses 18-21.

[¹⁸ Then he said to Zebah and Zalmunna, “Where are the men whom you killed at Tabor?” They answered, “As you are, so were they. Every one of them resembled the son of a king.” ¹⁹ And he said, “They were my brothers, the sons of my mother. As the LORD lives, if you had saved them alive, I would not kill you.” ²⁰ So he said to Jether his firstborn, “Rise and kill them!” But the young man did not draw his sword, for he was afraid, because he was still a young man. ²¹ Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, “Rise yourself and fall upon us, for as the man is, so is his strength.” And Gideon arose and killed Zebah and Zalmunna, and he took the crescent ornaments that were on the necks of their camels.]

The whole time, we may have thought that Gideon was motivated to pursue them as part of his role as the judge-deliverer of Israel to basically “finish the job” because, as long as these two Midianite kings lived with their 15,000 men, they remained a threat to Israel.

⁷ Miles V. Van Pelt, *Judges*, ESVEC (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021).

⁸ NET footnote for Judges 8:7: “The metaphor is agricultural. Threshing was usually done on a hard threshing floor. As farm animals walked over the stalks, pulling behind them a board embedded with sharp stones, the stalks and grain would be separated.” Arthur E. Cundall (*Judges*, TOTC [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008]) writes: “The exact meaning of the punishment in store for the men of Succoth (7) is not clear, but as the word *tear* (AV, RV) means ‘to thresh’ or *flail* (RSV), it may have been a threat to drag them over thorns as a threshing-sledge is dragged over grain, or to lay them upon thorns and thresh *them* by drawing threshing-sledges over them. In any case an unpleasant fate is indicated by these words and one that was destined to end in certain death.”

But here, in Gideon's exchange with the two Midianite kings,⁹ we discover the *real* reason why Gideon was so adamant about pursuing them and capturing them—personal *vengeance*.

In verse 19, we find out that these Midianite kings had previously killed Gideon's *blood brothers*, and so Gideon wanted *revenge*.¹⁰

Perhaps Gideon had *convinced* himself that he was *really* just being a good judge in what he was doing. But you'll notice that, in *contrast* to the previous two chapters where the LORD is mentioned all over the place and credited for everything that happens, throughout *this* passage, the Lord is noticeably *absent*.

The only two times that he is mentioned is in verses 7 and 19, where Gideon uses the Lord's name to justify his actions. But the Lord is *not* credited for commissioning or accomplishing *any* of the things that Gideon does here in chapter 8.

Gideon could tell himself all he wanted that this was for the *Lord*, but verse 19 reveals his *real* sinful motivation.

<pause>

Brothers and sisters, beware the hidden sinful motivations in your heart.

It's so easy to use the Lord's name to justify our actions and to tell ourselves that we're doing things for *him*, when the *real* underlying motivation is our sinful desires.

Don't ever assume that your motivations are pure. As those who still have a sinful nature, we can be certain that they are *not*. Sin taints our motivation in *everything* we do, and we ought not to be deceived into thinking otherwise.

That doesn't mean that we should just *embrace* mixed motivations. No, we need to ask for God's help to see our sinful motivations because they will often masquerade themselves as something *good*.

For Gideon, perhaps *vengeance* masked itself as justice.

For us, perhaps *greed* masks itself as providing for your family. Or perhaps *pride* masks itself as stewarding well your gifts.

Ask God to help you see these sinful motivations—and then repent of them each time you see it, and ask God to help you uproot them out of your heart.

This would be a good conversation to have over dinner or later this week. Kids, this would be a good question to discuss with your parents too.

Discuss what are some of the sinful motivations that you see in your heart and how they try to masquerade (or disguise) themselves as something good.

<pause>

⁹ Arthur E. Cundall (*Judges*, TOTC [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008]) writes: "The question of verse 18 is literally, 'Where are the men ...?' (cf. RSV), and this is best rendered idiomatically, 'What about the men you slew at Tabor?'... The reply of the two kings (18), who knew full well that they were marked out for death, hardly answers Gideon's question. It is clear that they recalled the incident and Gideon's words probably made them aware of the likeness between the men they had slain and the man who now confronted them. There is also an incidental witness to the imposing appearance of Gideon."

¹⁰ Arthur E. Cundall (*Judges*, TOTC [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008]) writes: "There is no means of establishing the time or the circumstances of the death of his brothers. It could have been in a preliminary skirmish when Gideon's army was assembling, or in a Midianite campaign of a previous year. If it was the latter case Gideon was clearly lacking in courage to avenge his brothers' deaths before the divine intervention. Verse 19 may suggest that his brothers had been captured by the Midianites and subsequently put to death, not killed in the heat and anonymity of battle, and that the two kings were therefore directly responsible."

Going back to Gideon, in verse 20, he commands his *son* to kill the two Midianite kings. And this is meant to *humiliate* them because it would have been disgraceful for them to be killed by a *youth* (cf. 9:54).

But the boy is too *afraid* to do it. And in verse 21, the two Midianite kings begin to *taunt* Gideon of being *weak* and challenge him to execute them himself.

And so, Gideon, wanting to show himself to be *strong*, ends up killing them.

<pause>

Now, if you've been following along with Gideon's narrative over the last two weeks, you'll know that the Gideon here in chapter 8 is almost completely *unrecognizable* from the Gideon we saw in the previous two chapters.

We were first introduced to Gideon threshing grain in a winepress hiding in *fear* of the Midianites, but now he's threshing his *own* people with thorns and *killing* them because of *their* fear of the Midianites.

The Israelites in Succoth and Penuel are too *afraid* to do anything against the Midianites who have been oppressing them for the last seven years (6:1-6).

Doesn't that sound like *Gideon* in the previous two chapters?

Had he forgotten how much fear and doubt he was filled with? Had he forgotten how much the Lord needed to reassure him again and again before he went out to battle?

If there was *anyone* who should have been *empathetic* to his fellow Israelites for *fearing* the Midianites, surely it should have been *Gideon*.

But even though Gideon had received undeserved mercy, he then turns around and issues unrelenting wrath (cf. Matt. 18:21-35).

<pause>

When the angel of the Lord first called him to be the next judge to deliver Israel from the Midianites, Gideon responded, "Don't you know who I am? My clan is the *weakest* of my tribe and I am the *least* in my father's house. How in the world am I going to save Israel?" (cf. 6:15).

But now, his response to his *fearful* Israelites is, "Don't you know who I am? I am the one who led 300 men to defeat 135,000 Midianites. How dare you doubt that I'll capture the two remaining Midianite kings!"

And his response to the Midianite kings is "Let me show you how *strong* I am!"

Gideon looks like a completely different person in this chapter.

What has happened to him?

In a word, success.

Gideon was not the same man after he defeated the 135,000 Midianites with just 300 men. You could say that his *success* in battle was the beginning of his *spiritual* downfall.

This is how Tim Keller describes the spiritual dangers of success.

Success can easily cause us to forget God's grace, because our hearts are desperate to believe that we can save ourselves. God-given victory can easily be used to confirm the belief that, in fact, we have earned blessing for ourselves, and should receive the praise and glory for that success.

For example, imagine a man who works extremely hard at his job because he needs to prove himself through financial success. What is the worst thing that can happen to him? The obvious answer is *career failure*. Of course, someone who is basing their happiness and identity on their work will be devastated by career failure. But at least, through the failure, he may stop idolizing career advancement. He may realize that status and money could never fulfill him. No, the worst thing that can happen to him is *career success*. Success will only confirm his belief that he can fulfill himself and control his own life. He will be more a slave to success and money than if he failed. He will feel proud and superior to others.¹¹

This is not to say that we should not be successful, but we should be keenly aware that there are grave spiritual dangers that come along with success.

With success often comes temptations towards pride, entitlement, self-reliance, impatience, anger, and harshness—and if we're not careful, a great fall and a great fallout will soon follow.

Gideon thought that his *greatest* battle would be fighting 135,000 Midianites with just 300 men, but it wasn't. His *greatest* battle would be fighting the *pride* in his heart amidst his success. And Gideon lost—and he fell hard.

He spiritually self-destructs, and as a result, he causes a great fallout, leaving an aftermath of fellow Israelites that he tortured and killed—all because he was blinded by his success.

Beware the deceitfulness of success and the many delusions that success whispers into our ears and hearts.

For some of us, perhaps the *greatest* test of faith and the *greatest* test of character you will ever face in life is not *affliction* but *success* (cf. Prov. 27:21).

<pause>

So the first heart attitude of those who fall is “Don’t you know who I am?” And the second heart attitude of those who fall is...

II. “Do as I say (but not as I do)” (vv. 22-35)

Look at verse 22.

[²² Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, “Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also, for you have saved us from the hand of Midian.” ²³ Gideon said to them, “I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the LORD will rule over you.”]

After Gideon has killed the two Midianite kings, the men of Israel want to make him *king* over them. They offer him a *dynasty*, where he and his son and his grandson will *rule* over them.

And look at their reasoning: “for *you* have saved us from the hand of Midian.”

This goes directly against *everything* that the Lord did in chapter 7.

The Lord *deliberately* shrank Gideon’s army from 32,000 to 10,000 to 300 for the *explicit* purpose of Israel *not* being able to boast over him, saying “My *own* hand has saved me” (7:2).

But instead of crediting the *Lord* for their salvation, the Israelites credit *Gideon*.

So how does Gideon respond?

Look at verse 23.

He *refuses* their offer of kingship, and he *rightfully* affirms that the *LORD* is their king.

¹¹ Tim Keller, *Judges for You* (Epsom, UK: The Good Book Company, 2013), 96.

He's saying, "You don't need *me* to be your king because you *already* have one! The LORD alone is your king" (cf. 1 Sam. 8:7; 10:19).

So Gideon says the right thing... but just look at what he does! Everything he *does* afterwards seems to contradict what he just said.

Look at verses 24-32.

[²⁴ And Gideon said to them, "Let me make a request of you: every one of you give me the earrings from his spoil." (For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.) ²⁵ And they answered, "We will willingly give them." And they spread a cloak, and every man threw in it the earrings of his spoil. ²⁶ And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was 1,700 shekels of gold, besides the crescent ornaments and the pendants and the purple garments worn by the kings of Midian, and besides the collars that were around the necks of their camels. ²⁷ And Gideon made an ephod of it and put it in his city, in Ophrah. And all Israel whored after it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family. ²⁸ So Midian was subdued before the people of Israel, and they raised their heads no more. And the land had rest for forty years in the days of Gideon.

²⁹ Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and lived in his own house. ³⁰ Now Gideon had seventy sons, his own offspring, for he had many wives. ³¹ And his concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, and he called his name Abimelech. ³² And Gideon the son of Joash died in a good old age and was buried in the tomb of Joash his father, at Ophrah of the Abiezrites.]

Gideon refuses their offer of kingship, but then the very *first* thing that he does is "tax" them (so to speak), like a king would. In verses 24-26, he asks them for all their golden earrings, which amount to 1,700 shekels of gold; that would have been just over 40 pounds or 19 kilograms, so he would have amassed a small fortune from them.¹²

In verse 26, Gideon takes all the *royal* garments and jewelry worn by the Midianite *kings* and even their *camels* for himself (cf. 8:21).

In verse 30-31, Gideon establishes a *harem* of many wives and concubines, which was what many of the *kings* of the ancient near east would do.

And in verse 31, Gideon names one of his sons "Abimelech," which means "my father is king."

So Gideon says to his fellow Israelites that he's *not* their king, but then he *acts* like a king in *everything* he does—even going as far as *identifying* himself as king through the name of his son.

Whether he realizes it or not, his life *reveals* a heart attitude of "Do as I say (but not as I do)."

<pause>

And in verse 27, Gideon made an ephod.

An ephod was a special garment that was only worn by the high priest in the tabernacle (Exod. 39:1-26), and it was associated with the Urim and Thummin (Exod. 28:30; Lev. 8:8), which were two objects that were used to receive "yes" or "no" answers from God.¹³

So there was only supposed to be *one* ephod worn *only* by the high priest at the tabernacle, which was usually in the city of *Shiloh* at this point (18:31).

But here, Gideon makes *another* ephod—and we're not exactly told why.

¹² Arthur E. Cundall (*Judges*, TOTC [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008]) writes: "The amount of *gold* (26) collected in this spontaneous offering was incredible, amounting to between 40 and 75 pounds' weight, depending on whether the light or heavy shekel was employed. It illustrates both the extent of the victory and the esteem in which Gideon was held."

¹³ Tim Keller (*Judges for You* [Epsom, UK: The Good Book Company, 2013], 94) conjectures that "they may have been like coins, which were flipped; likely, two upsides meant 'yes,' two downsides meant 'no,' one of each meant 'no answer.'"

Perhaps he wanted the convenience of having his *own* ephod in his *own* hometown to discern the Lord's will and to use for divine reassurance whenever he wanted.

Whatever the reason may have been, the effect was that Gideon had effectively set up a rival place of *worship*.

No longer did people need to go to the tabernacle in *Shiloh* to worship the Lord, but they could now supposedly come to *Gideon's* hometown to worship and inquire of the Lord.

And just in case you don't think that sounds too bad, verse 27 says that "all Israel *whored* after it there, and it became a *snare* to Gideon and to his family."

Those two words—"whored" and "snare"—are the same two words that the author and the angel of the Lord used in chapter 2 to describe Israel's covenant *unfaithfulness* to the Lord and their *idolatry* (2:17, 3).

The last time we saw the Israelites giving their golden earrings up to make something, it was the *golden calf* (Exod. 32:2-8).

And that's functionally what this ephod becomes to Gideon, his family, and all of Israel.

Gideon *started* his role as the judge-deliverer by *pulling down* the rival idols in his hometown (6:25-27), but by the *end*, he's *erecting* a new idol in his hometown, leading them all astray in false worship.

Gideon has fallen far from where he had started—and he unfortunately becomes the cause of a great fallout among all of Israel.

<pause>

So was Gideon just giving *lip service*—just *saying* that the Lord alone is king? Was he just a blatant *hypocrite*?

I don't think it's that simple. You'll probably be shocked to know that Gideon is in the hall of faith in Hebrews 11, where he's held up as a *model* to imitate for his faith (Heb. 11:32).

Gideon in Judges 6-7 is a *better* model for us than Gideon in Judges 8. Still, given his presence in the hall of faith at all, though it might be difficult to see in this chapter, Gideon was indeed *saved*—and thus, *not* a blatant hypocrite.

I don't think Gideon was *intentionally* trying to have his life undermine his profession. He wasn't *intentionally* holding the attitude of "Do as I say (but not as I do)," but his life *exposed* that kind of heart attitude was there.

We *have* to understand that sin is not only *intentional*, but sin is also *unintentional* (Lev. 4:1-3; 5:17-18; Num. 15:27-31; Ps. 19:12; Ezek. 45:20).

Like Gideon, I don't think many of us are blatant hypocrites where we *intentionally* put on a mask. Rather, like Gideon, many of us struggle with the *unintentional* sin of our lives *not* matching our profession of faith.

This comes out in a variety of ways.

We say, "Jesus alone is king," but then we live as if we are king over our lives.

We say, "I'm a sinner," but then we reject correction.

We say, "I trust God at his word," but then we pursue worldly wisdom.

We say, “Christ is all I need,” but then we pursue worldly wealth and status.

We say, “we’re brothers and sisters in Christ,” but then we don’t seek to know or be known by one another in the church.

We say, “My sin deserves the agonizing and eternal punishment in hell,” but then we act like sin in our lives isn’t that big of a deal.

Brothers and sisters, in these ways and many more, our lives *expose* the subtle heart attitude of “Do as I say (but not as I do).”

Sadly, many unbelievers have *rejected* Christianity *not* because they have considered the claims of *Christ* but because they have stumbled over the lives of *Christians*.

Whether intentional or unintentional, when our lives as Christians *undermine* our profession of faith, like Gideon, we can unfortunately become the cause of a great fallout.

Brothers and sisters, we would do well to think more about whether our lives *support* or *undermine* our profession of faith.

One of the accountability questions that Pastor Jeff and I regularly ask each other is, “Is your *public* life and devotion to Jesus a *mirror* of your *private* life and devotion to Jesus?”

That would be a great question to begin reflecting on personally later today or this week: “Is your *public* life and devotion to Jesus a *mirror* of your *private* life and devotion to Jesus?” And if you see discrepancies, I’d encourage you to not only confess that to God, but confess that to a trusted brother or sister, and ask them to help you have your life more and more conformed to the gospel that you profess.

Keep a close watch not only on your *doctrine* but on your *life*, “for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Tim. 4:16).

<pause>

Now, going back, look at verse 28: “And the land had rest for forty years in the days of Gideon.”

Notice that this comes right in the *midst* of Gideon’s and Israel’s *fall*—as *idolatry* is being re-established.

And this just highlights the *immensity* of God’s grace and kindness to those who fall.

Rest didn’t come only after a great *victory* (3:11, 30) or in the midst of *praise* (5:31), but even in the midst of their *sin*.

And this was not a *short* amount of rest either, but 40 years was a whole generation.

This was *not* deserved at all. This was purely God’s *grace*.

But, this will be the *last* time that this language of “the land had rest for x amount of years” will be used in the rest of the book of Judges.

Unfortunately, the land is *never* at rest again, but everything that follows only gets worse and worse as the downward spiral continues until the Israelites end up looking more like the pagan Canaanites than the people of God.

Look at verses 33-35.

[³³ As soon as Gideon died, the people of Israel turned again and whored after the Baals and made Baal-berith their god. ³⁴ And the people of Israel did not remember the LORD their God, who had delivered them from the hand of all their enemies on every side, ³⁵ and they did not

show steadfast love to the family of Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) in return for all the good that he had done to Israel.]

After Gideon died, the people of Israel *return* to their worship of the false god Baal, and they even call him “Baal-berith,” which means “Baal of the *covenant*.”

That’s just a slap in the face to the Lord because the Israelites were in a covenant with the *Lord*, and it was the *Lord* who has been so faithful to his covenant with them, *delivering* them from the hand of *all* their enemies on every side.

How could the Israelites do this??

It appears that the *Lord* was their God for moments of *crisis*, but *Baal* was their god for *everyday life*.

<pause>

Before we’re too quick to judge the Israelites for doing this, consider how easily *we* can fall into this as well.

We call on the *Lord* when we’re in *distress*, but we have our *everyday* idols of success, approval, comfort, family, money, and so forth that we *constantly* turn back to—or to use the language of verse 33, that we constantly “whore after”—not remembering the LORD our God who has delivered us time and time again.

<pause>

And this passage concludes with verse 35, where the Israelites “did not show steadfast love to the family of... Gideon.”

Just note the *fickleness* of the people. Earlier, they wanted to make Gideon, his son, and his grandson their *king*, but by the end, they have no regard for his family at all.

When we look at the *Israelites* though, we ought to see the fickleness of our *own* hearts.

Conclusion

So as we close, we might be asking, “Wait, where is the hope? Where is the grace?”

But before we jump too *quickly* to that and potentially *undermine* what this passage is meant to *first* show us, we need to deal honestly with the mood and purpose of this text.

This passage is meant to be a *mirror* to us.

It’s meant for us to see the *hideousness* of sin in the person of *Gideon* and to show us that each of us is *also* just like Gideon.

During sermon collaboration earlier this week, someone commented that “Gideon is so *slimy*.”

But the reality is that, when we look honestly at the heart attitudes that our lives often expose, we’re *all* slimy like Gideon.

We *need* to see that—or there’s nothing for you in this passage.

Dirty, slimy, smelly animals have no idea how offensive their odor is to us, and so they do not appreciate being washed—and they dive headfirst back into the grime.

Similarly, if you do not grasp the guilt, vileness, and offensiveness of your sin in the sight of God, then forgiveness, grace, and acceptance through faith in Christ will not mean much to you—at best, it will just be a warm, fuzzy feeling, but it will not transform your life.

But through this text, if you're beginning to see a bit more of your *sliminess*—your *sinfulness*—and you're beginning to feel a bit more of the *weight* of it, then this text is meant to drive you to *Christ* who alone can *wash* you clean and *wear* your burden of sin upon himself.

Gideon was *not* the true deliverer that God's people needed. He fell just like Adam and just like the rest of us.

But praise God that *he* has come in the person of Christ to be our *true* deliverer.

Whereas Gideon's life showed his fallen attitude of "Do as I say (but not as I do)," Jesus is the only person who could ever say, "Do as I say and *live* as I do," for he alone lived the perfect, sinless life on behalf of his people.

And whereas Gideon's *prideful* attitude of "Don't you know who I am?" led to the torture and killing of his own people, Jesus, who had every right as God to say, "Don't you know who I am?" instead came in *humility* and gave himself over to his *own* torture and killing for the sake of his people to take the punishment we deserved for our sins.

So now, whoever repents of their sin and believes in Jesus as their Lord and Savior is washed of their slimy and weighty sin and given not just forty years of rest but eternal life with God.

If you're not a follower of Christ, we're glad that you're joining us today. And as you hear this gospel message (this good news of Jesus Christ), you need to know that this gracious offer of salvation in Christ will not hold forever, but it will expire when you die or when Christ returns.

Now is the time to respond to the Lord Jesus—to repent of your sins and believe in Christ as your Lord and Savior. I pray that you would know his salvation today.

And brothers and sisters, though we're all fallen sinners, we are also saints being sanctified.

We *will* continue to struggle and fall, but as those who trust in Christ, our certain hope is that he *will* conform us more and more into his likeness until he brings us home.

We are great sinners, but praise the Lord that we have a *greater* Savior!

Those who fall cause a great fallout... but those who trust in Christ can never fall out of his hands.

Let's pray.