

14.10d Fifth Judge, Gideon's Lapse (Judges 8:1–32)

✓ “Check” it out; opinion, inference, supposed conversation, or fact one can verify follows
[. . .] indicates a remark to the teacher that usually should not be read. It also indicates answers to questions.

Visuals and Tools:

- Pictures and other visuals found at the end of this lesson. Please give credit to the sources of pictures.
- Check “Activities” and “Handwork” found below for additional materials.
- An apple box full of books—like half a set of encyclopedias (53 pounds)
- Thorns and briars

Bible Time Tips and Terms to Teach: Vocabulary words are enlarged for flashcards at the end of this lesson. Print, cut out, and glue to card stock, or just print on colorful cardstock.

- *ephod*: a coat without sleeves worn by priests
- *to harvest*: to gather the produce of ripe crops
- *to glean*: to strip the produce from vines or stalks after harvest
- *princes*: sons of kings or rulers of small kingdoms
- *snare*: a trap that catches and secures
- *crescent*: the curved shape of the waxing or waning moon (☾)

Scripture: (ESV)

Judges 7:24 Gideon sent messengers throughout all the hill country of Ephraim, saying, “Come down against the Midianites and capture the waters against them, as far as Beth-barah, and also the Jordan.” So all the men of Ephraim were called out, and they captured the waters as far as Beth-barah, and also the Jordan. 25 And they captured the two princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb they killed at the winepress of Zeeb. Then they pursued Midian, and they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon across the Jordan.

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 briars.” 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 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.

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 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.

Introduction/Review:

Gideon had sent messengers to his own tribe, Manasseh, and to the tribes of Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali [locate] to muster an army against the Midianites, Amalekites, and people of the East. How many soldiers answered the call? [32,000.] How many went home because they were afraid? [22,000.] What test did God call for to pare down the remaining 10,000? [Separate the men who slurped water from their hands from the men who got their faces in the water.] How many were left in the army? [300.] What battle plan did Gideon enact? [Divide the 300 into three groups of 100 each; at the signal, break jars with torches inside; blow trumpets; shout, “The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!”; stand still.] How was the battle plan successful? [The enemies killed each other; some fled.]

Story:

Ephraim is miffed

Although Gideon asked for help from the tribe of Ephraim to secure the passages over the Jordan River so that the Midianites, Amalekites, and people of the East could not escape, Ephraim was miffed and offended that Gideon hadn’t invited them to the original “battle” against this innumerable enemy. They accused Gideon fiercely, “What is this that you have done to us, not to call us when you went to fight against Midian?”

Gideon wisely answered 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? God has given into your hands the princes of

Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. What have I been able to do in comparison with you?”

Now, let’s explain this answer. Gideon compared himself and his few men from four tribes to those who reaped the harvest by routing the enemy at first. However, it was one tribe, Ephraim, who “gleaned” in an even more important way by destroying the important two princes of Midian.

Gideon’s words placated Ephraim; they were no longer angry.

Gideon requests bread

Gideon still had work to do, for the two kings of Midian had gotten across the Jordan. They needed to be captured. So Gideon and his 300 men crossed Jordan, exhausted but still pursuing.

When they arrived at Succoth [locate], Gideon asked the men of the city, “Please give loaves of bread to the people who follow me, for they are exhausted. I am pursuing after the kings of Midian, and we need food.”

Those officials of Succoth gave a petty, stingy answer: [Speak sarcastically.] “Have you already captured those two kings that we should give you and your army bread?”

Gideon answered, “Well then, since you won’t give us nourishment, when the Lord has given the two kings into my hand, I will whip your flesh with the thorns and briers of the wilderness.” ✓The Succothites didn’t seem too concerned about that possibility.

Gideon and his men continued on the ✓two miles to the next town, Penuel. Again, they requested, “Please give loaves of bread to us, for we are exhausted. We are pursuing the kings of Midian.”

Can you believe it? The men of Penuel answered the same way the Succothites had responded! “Have you already captured those two kings that we should give you and your army bread?”

“Well, then,” answered Gideon, also responding in like fashion as he had to Succoth, “when I come again in peace, I will break down the tower in your town.”

Gideon and his men, exhausted and hungry, continued to pursue, probably marching rather rapidly, all this way. [Show map and point out the distance from the Jezreel Valley to Penuel.]

Gideon captures two kings

Where were the Midianites? They were ✓ten miles farther down the road at Karkor [locate] (<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/judges-8-11.html>). Even though 120,000 of their soldiers had already died, most of them in “friendly fire,” the enemy still had about 15,000 men. That means that for every soldier Gideon had, there were fifty enemy soldiers—50 to 1. They had gotten this far away from Gideon’s army and mistakenly felt they were home free. But they weren’t, for it was here that Gideon caught up with the Midianites and their two kings.

Gideon teaches a lesson

Gideon’s men attacked the “secure” army, destroying some enemy soldiers and throwing them all into a panic. The kings took off, but Gideon was able to capture them. Now, with the two kings in tow, it was time to go back and teach the cities of Succoth and Penuel a lesson.

Just as he had promised, he learned the identity of the twenty-seven officials who had rebuffed him in Succoth, gathered them together, and said, “Look. Here are the two kings about whom you taunted me, saying, ‘Are the two kings already in your hand that we should give bread to your men who are exhausted?’” Then he whipped those twenty-seven officials with thorns and briers from the wilderness exactly as he had threatened.

Penuel’s lesson was more severe. ✓Perhaps the men of the city fled to their tower to be safe, but Gideon tore down that town tower. Wherever they were, Gideon found and slew the men of the city.

Gideon avenges blood

After this, we learn that the enemy horde had killed some Israelite men (✓perhaps before the original surprise attack), for Gideon asked the two kings, “Where are the men whom you killed at Mount Tabor?”

The two kings didn’t answer *where?* but they answered *who?* They said, “Those men looked just like you. Every one of them resembled the son of a king.”

Gideon answered, “Those men were my brothers, the sons of my mother. You shall die because you slew them.” And right there Gideon killed those two enemy kings.

Gideon refuses kingship

When Gideon returned to his home, the men of Israel came to him and urged, “Gideon, rule over us—you, your son, and your grandson—because you delivered us from Midian.”

Valiantly and properly, Gideon answered, “I shall not rule over you, nor shall my son. The Lord shall rule over you.” Amen! That was a good answer!

Gideon receives gold

But after that fine speech, after all his bravery, after all his trust in the true God of Israel, after seeing God give victory over the 135,000 enemy troops, Gideon blew it. He said, “I have one request: Please give me the golden earrings you took from the Midianites.” Why would Gideon want the earrings? Did he just want a reward for leading Israel to victory?

The people didn’t know why Gideon wanted the gold, but they answered Gideon’s request, saying, “We gladly give them.” And they did. They gave 1700 shekels of gold, which amounts to 53 pounds, about the weight of half a set of encyclopedias. That’s a lot of gold! But that wasn’t all they gave. They also contributed gold crescent ornaments, collars, and chains from the camels’ necks and purple clothing that they had taken from the dead kings of Midian. Remember, the camels were innumerable; ✓so that gift must have been a lot of gold!

Gideon makes an ephod

Why did Gideon want all this gold? Was it to give to God’s work at the tabernacle? Was it to help the poor people around him? Was it just to enrich himself? The answer is *No* to all these questions. I’m embarrassed to tell you how he used this gold.

Gideon took all of these items, melted them down, formed a golden ephod, and put it in his city, Ophrah [locate]. It must have been a beautiful sight, this golden garment. In fact, it was so alluring that all of Israel came to worship it, departing from their worship of the one true God. The Bible states that this ephod became a snare to Gideon and his family. It ensnared the rest of Israel too.

Jerubbaal (Gideon) lived about forty years after these incidents. He died in a good old age and was buried in his hometown of Ophrah. Israel lived in peace forty years while Gideon lived, but the cycle was beginning again.

Lessons from this lesson:

- We see Jesus:
Gideon, before his lapse, had refused to be made king even though he had accomplished great things for Israel. Jesus, although He is God, humbled Himself and refused to be crowned king while He lived on earth. One day, however, He will be King of kings and Lord of lords over all creation.
- “Many are led into false ways by one false step of a good man”
(<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-complete/judges/8.html>).
- Keep on going even when weary and hungry. A task that needs to be done is worth the effort.

Activities:

- Play dough: gold chains; earrings; collars; crescents; purple clothing
- Snack: Crescent rolls
- Review questions: (Game: Print the clipart of a grape cluster found below. Back with paper towel. Cut out each grape and the leaves/stem. Place all the elements in their proper places on a flannel board. For each correct answer, a student will “harvest” a grape by removing it. Two grapes will be left to “glean.”)
 1. Why were the Ephraimites fussing with Gideon? [Because he hadn’t invited them to fight in the initial “battle” against Midian and the other enemy troops.]
 2. With what two processes involving grapes did Gideon compare himself and the Ephraimites? [Harvesting grapes and gleaning grapes.]
 3. For what did Gideon ask the officials of Succoth and Penuel? [Bread/food for his troops.]
 4. How did Succoth and Penuel answer Gideon’s request? [“Are the two kings already in your hand, that we should give bread to your army?”]
 5. What did Gideon do to Succoth and Penuel after he captured the two enemy kings? [Whipped Succothites with briars and thorns; destroyed Penuel’s tower and men.]
 6. How did Gideon answer when he was asked to become king? [Neither he nor his son nor his grandson would become king; God would be their king.]
 7. Although Gideon refused to become king, for what did he ask? [The golden earrings the soldiers had gotten from the enemy.]
 8. How did all this gold become a snare to Gideon and all Israel? [They worshiped the ephod made from the gold.]

Memory Verse[s]: (ESV)

- Judges 8:23— Gideon said to them, “I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the Lord will rule over you.”

Handwork:

- See several grape crafts at <https://www.funnycrafts.us/grape-craft-preschool/>.

ephod

to harvest

to glean

princes

crescent



<https://www.biblestudy.org/maps/battles-of-gideon.jpg>











