

The Book of Judges, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 6: Gideon's Three Hundred and the Lord's Victory

Judges 7:1–8:35

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

What is doctrinally at stake in Judges 7 and 8 is nothing less than the question of who saves and who gets the glory. The LORD deliberately dismantles Gideon's army, not because He needs a smaller force but because He refuses to share His glory with human strength. The stated purpose in 7:2, lest Israel boast that her own hand has saved her, runs like a spine through the whole chapter and reaches all the way forward to the gospel, where God again chose the weak and foolish things, a cross and an empty tomb, so that no flesh would glory in His presence (1 Corinthians 1:26–31). Salvation is the LORD's work, accomplished His way, so that the credit lands squarely and only on Him. Teach the class to see that this is not God being insecure; it is God being truthful, because He alone is the Savior and any boast we make in ourselves is simply a lie.

The second great matter is the subtle, sobering turn of chapter 8. Gideon makes a good confession and then makes an idol, and Israel, fresh from a miracle, runs back to Baal the moment their judge is buried. This passage will not let us hold the comfortable doctrine that God's people, once delivered, can never fall. Scripture warns plainly that a man may make a fine confession and still set a snare for his own house, that good and even religious things can become objects of spiritual prostitution, and that a people can forget the very God who saved them (8:27, 8:33–34; compare Hebrews 3:12–14; Galatians 5:4). The aim here is honesty about the human heart and the necessity of ongoing faithfulness, neither despairing nor presuming, but holding fast.

All of this aims at the student's own formation. The lesson is not finally about ancient Midianites; it is about the glory we quietly keep for ourselves and the idols we manufacture out of God's good gifts. The teacher's task is to bring every learner to a single, searching place: to ask honestly where they have said, my own hand has saved me, and what good thing in their hands, a ministry, a reputation, a relationship, a tradition, has begun to take the place that belongs to God alone. The goal is repentance that gives God His glory and ongoing, watchful faithfulness that does not assume the battle is permanently won.

Question 1

Student Question:

Why did the LORD insist on reducing Gideon's army, and what does the stated reason in Judges 7:2, lest Israel boast, My own hand has saved me, teach us about the way God secures glory for Himself in the salvation of His people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The chapter opens with Gideon and all the people rising early and camping beside the spring of Harod, with the Midianite host to the north in the valley (7:1). The military picture is grim. Israel is outnumbered and outmatched, and from a human standpoint thirty-two thousand men are already far too few against a horde described as locusts in multitude with camels beyond counting. Then the LORD speaks the line that governs everything that follows: the people with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hand (7:2).

The reason God gives is theological, not tactical: lest Israel boast over Me, saying, My own hand has saved me (7:2). God is not worried that Israel will lose; He is guarding against the lie they will tell if they win with a large army. He intends a deliverance so lopsided that no honest person could attribute it to human strength. This is a recurring pattern in Scripture, climaxing at the cross, where God again chose what the world calls weakness so that the glory of salvation belongs entirely to Him (1 Corinthians 1:26–31).

The reduction comes in two stages. First, by the LORD's own provision in the law (Deuteronomy 20:8), the fearful and trembling are released, and twenty-two thousand leave, a stunning two-thirds of the army gone in a single morning. Ten thousand remain, and still the LORD says, too many. The God who saves is unhurried about stripping away every prop His people might lean on instead of leaning on Him.

For God's people in every age the principle stands: the LORD often arranges our circumstances precisely so that we cannot credit ourselves. He is not stingy with help; He is jealous for truth. When deliverance comes, He means for us to say what is actually so, that He did it, and to give Him the glory His saving work deserves (Romans 15:4).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God secures His own glory in salvation and will not share it with human strength or human boasting (7:2; Isaiah 42:8).
- The pattern of God choosing weakness so that no flesh may boast points forward to the gospel and the cross (1 Corinthians 1:26–31).
- Holy fear is real and is honored, not condemned; God released the fearful by His own provision rather than driving them with shame (Deuteronomy 20:8).
- The stripping away of supports is an act of God's faithfulness, teaching dependence, not an act of cruelty.
- Old Testament narrative is written for our instruction, so the principle of giving God the glory applies directly to us (Romans 15:4).

Discussion Prompts

- Why would God call thirty-two thousand too many when Israel was already vastly outnumbered, and what does that reveal about His priorities?

- Where do you see God arranging circumstances so that His people cannot say, my own hand has saved me?
- How does this opening scene prepare us to read the rest of the chapter as the LORD's victory rather than Gideon's?

Question 2

Student Question:

When God strips away the supports you were leaning on so that you have nothing left but Him, how do you usually respond, and what would it look like to trust Him in that place instead of scrambling for a backup plan?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the searchlight inward. God's strategy with Gideon, removing supports until only He remained, is also His strategy with us. He often lets the props fall, the second income, the trusted friend, the plan B we were quietly counting on, so that we discover whether our trust was ever really in Him.

It is worth being honest about how we respond when that happens. The instinct is to scramble, to rebuild the safety net, to find another army. There is wisdom in diligence, but there is a difference between responsible effort and frantic self-rescue that refuses to rest in God. Gideon's three hundred could do nothing but obey and watch; that helplessness was the point.

Trusting God in the stripped-bare place is not passive resignation. It is active obedience without the comfort of visible odds. Gideon still had to position his men, still had to blow the trumpet, still had to act, but he did it leaning on a promise rather than on numbers. Faith works; it simply does not work in order to keep the glory.

The personal application is to name the specific support God may be removing right now and to ask whether we will meet that loss with anxious self-reliance or with the kind of trust that says, even with only three hundred, the LORD is enough.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's removal of our supports is often a means of teaching genuine dependence on Him.
- Trusting God is active obedience without visible guarantees, not passive resignation.
- The temptation when supports fall is frantic self-rescue rather than rest in God.
- Faith and diligent action are not opposites; the question is where the trust and the glory finally rest.

Discussion Prompts

- What support has God removed or threatened to remove in your life lately, and how did your heart react?

- What is the difference between responsible effort and a scramble that refuses to trust God?
- What would trusting God with only three hundred look like in your present situation?

Question 3

Student Question:

What is the significance of the means God chose for the victory, the trumpets, the empty jars, and the hidden torches (7:16–20), and how does the breaking of the jars to let the light shine illustrate the way God works through weak and broken vessels?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The means of victory are almost comic in their weakness: not swords first, but trumpets, empty jars, and torches hidden inside them (7:16–18). Gideon divides the three hundred into three companies and surrounds the camp in the night. The whole arsenal is noise and light, the most unmilitary of weapons.

At the signal the men blow the trumpets and smash the jars they hold, and the torches that were hidden inside blaze out into the darkness all at once (7:19–20). The jars had to be broken for the light to shine. The vessels were never the point; what they carried was. The shout, A sword for the LORD and for Gideon, names the true Warrior first.

The apostle Paul later draws exactly this picture for the Christian life: we have this treasure in jars of clay, so that the surpassing power may be of God and not of us (2 Corinthians 4:7). The light of God is meant to shine out of broken, ordinary vessels precisely so that the power is unmistakably His. God does not wait for us to become impressive; He shines through our cracks.

For the believer this reframes weakness and brokenness. The clay jar is not an obstacle to God's work; it is the chosen instrument. What He asks is that we let ourselves be broken open in obedience so that His light, not our competence, is what people see.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God chose weak and ordinary means, trumpets, jars, and torches, to make the victory plainly His (7:16–20).
- The jars had to be broken for the light to shine, picturing how God's power shows through human weakness (2 Corinthians 4:7).
- The battle cry honors the LORD first, A sword for the LORD and for Gideon, keeping the credit in order.
- Brokenness and ordinariness are not disqualifications but the very vessels God delights to use.

Discussion Prompts

- Why might God deliberately choose noise and light over conventional weapons for this victory?
- What does it mean that the jars had to be broken before the light could shine?
- How does 2 Corinthians 4:7 reshape the way you view your own weaknesses?

Question 4

Student Question:

Gideon was still afraid even after God's promise, and God graciously let him sneak down to overhear the enemy's dream (7:9–15). When has God met your fear with a fresh assurance, and are you willing to ask Him for the encouragement you need rather than pretending you have none?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Even after the army is reduced and the promise is sure, Gideon is still afraid. God knows it, and instead of rebuking him, He graciously says, if you are afraid to go down, go down with Purah your servant, and you shall hear what they say (7:9–11). God meets a fearful man with a tailored encouragement.

Gideon overhears a Midianite recounting a dream of a barley loaf tumbling into the camp and flattening a tent, and his comrade interpreting it as the sword of Gideon into whose hand God has given Midian (7:13–14). The enemy himself confesses the coming defeat. Gideon worships on the spot and returns ready to fight. God gave him exactly the assurance he needed.

This is a gentle and important truth about God: He does not despise our weakness or shame us for needing encouragement. He stoops to it. The same God who tested Gideon's faith also strengthened it, because His aim was never to crush the man but to bring him through.

The application is to be willing to ask God for the encouragement we need rather than pretending we are stronger than we are. Honesty about our fear, brought to God, is often the doorway to fresh assurance. There is no shame in being a Gideon who needs to overhear the dream before he can pick up the trumpet.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God meets honest fear with gracious, tailored assurance rather than rebuke (7:9–15).
- Confessing weakness to God is often the doorway to renewed faith and courage.
- God can use even the words of enemies to confirm His promises to His people.
- Worship was Gideon's response to assurance, modeling gratitude that turns courage into praise (7:15).

Discussion Prompts

- How does God's gentleness toward Gideon's fear shape your picture of how God treats you?

- When has God given you a fresh assurance in a moment of fear, and how did it come?
- What keeps you from honestly asking God for the encouragement you need?

Question 5

Student Question:

How did the LORD actually win the battle by setting the Midianites' swords against one another (7:22), and what does this tell us about who fights for God's people and where true victory comes from?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

When the three hundred blow their trumpets and the LORD sets every man's sword against his neighbor throughout the camp (7:22), the decisive blow is struck not by Israel but by God. The Midianites, panicked in the dark by sudden light and noise, turn on one another and flee. Israel's part is to stand, hold their torches, and watch the LORD fight.

This is the theological heart of the passage made vivid: the battle is the LORD's. The same God who told Israel at the Red Sea that He would fight for them while they stood still now routs an army by its own swords. Victory does not flow from Israel's might; it flows from God, and the human role is faithful obedience in position.

Zechariah would later distill the principle: not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of hosts (Zechariah 4:6). God's greatest victories are routinely accomplished by means that leave no room for human boasting, so that thanksgiving rather than self-congratulation is the only fitting response.

For the Christian this is steadying. The decisive battles of our lives, against sin, against despair, for the souls of others, are finally won by God. We labor, we obey, we hold our ground, but we do not save ourselves, and we give Him the glory when the enemy falls.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The LORD Himself won the battle by turning the enemy's swords on one another (7:22).
- God's people fight by faithful obedience and position while the decisive victory belongs to God.
- Not by might nor by power but by God's Spirit is the abiding principle of His deliverances (Zechariah 4:6).
- True victory removes the possibility of human boasting and leaves only thanksgiving.

Discussion Prompts

- What was Israel's actual role in the battle, and what was God's?
- How does this scene illustrate the truth that the battle is the LORD's?
- Where do you need to remember that the decisive victory is God's and not your own?

Question 6

Student Question:

Gideon's harshness toward Succoth and Penuel (8:4–17) shows a man whose success curdled into vengeance. Where might your own past hurts or appetite for vindication be shaping how you treat people who fail you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Chapter 8 opens the shadow side of Gideon. Pursuing the fleeing kings, he comes to Succoth and Penuel and asks for bread for his exhausted men. The leaders refuse, mocking him, and Gideon vows reprisal: he will thresh their flesh with thorns and tear down their tower (8:4–9). When he returns victorious he makes good on the threats, teaching the men of Succoth a brutal lesson and killing the men of Penuel (8:13–17).

The text does not pause to praise this. It records a man whose success has hardened into vengeance, whose treatment of his own countrymen reveals an appetite for vindication beyond what justice required. The same Gideon who once trembled now crushes. Power and victory have a way of drawing out what was already in the heart.

Scripture is honest about its heroes, and that honesty is for our instruction. We are not asked to admire everything Gideon did; we are asked to learn from it, including its warnings. Personal grievance, given the leverage of power, easily becomes cruelty dressed up as justice.

The personal question is whether our own hurts and our hunger to be vindicated are quietly shaping how we treat people who fail us, family members, fellow Christians, those who let us down in a hard moment. Vengeance is the LORD's, and the believer is called to leave room for it rather than thresh others with thorns (Romans 12:19).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Scripture records Gideon's harshness honestly, without endorsing it, for our instruction (8:4–17; Romans 15:4).
- Success and power tend to expose and amplify whatever is already in the heart.
- An appetite for vindication can disguise itself as justice and turn into cruelty.
- Believers are called to leave vengeance to God rather than repay those who fail them (Romans 12:19).

Discussion Prompts

- What changed in Gideon between the trembling man of chapter 6 and the avenger of chapter 8?
- How can a desire for justice quietly curdle into a desire for revenge?
- Where might your own past hurts be shaping how you treat people who have failed you?

Question 7

Student Question:

Gideon refused the crown with the good confession, I will not rule over you, the LORD will rule over you (8:23), yet then asked for the gold. What does this mixture teach us about the danger that lurks even in our most sincere moments of faith?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Israel offers Gideon a dynasty: rule over us, you and your son and your grandson, for you have saved us from Midian (8:22). Gideon answers with a genuinely good confession: I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the LORD will rule over you (8:23). He rightly refuses to take the kingship that belongs to God, and he corrects their theology, for it was the LORD, not Gideon, who saved them.

And yet in the very next breath he says, let each of you give me the earrings from his spoil (8:24). The man who would not be king begins gathering gold like one. The good confession and the seed of disaster sit side by side in the same conversation, which is one of the most sobering features of the whole account.

This teaches us that sincerity in one moment does not insulate us in the next. A right answer about God's rule can coexist with a heart that is already drifting toward self-exaltation. The danger is not only the obvious temptation we resist but the subtle one we do not even notice while we are busy resisting the first.

For us the lesson is watchfulness. Our most spiritual moments are not safe zones. Right after the good confession is precisely when the heart needs guarding, because pride and self-interest love to follow close behind our finest words (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Gideon's confession rightly gives rule to God and corrects Israel's misattribution of salvation to a man (8:23).
- A sincere and true confession can sit right beside the seed of a serious fall (8:23–24).
- Sincerity in one moment offers no guarantee of faithfulness in the next.
- Our most spiritual moments are exactly when the heart most needs guarding (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Discussion Prompts

- Why is Gideon's refusal of the crown such a good and right confession?
- How can a right answer about God's rule coexist with a drifting heart?
- What does it mean to guard your heart right after a moment of genuine faith?

Question 8

Student Question:

Israel wanted to make Gideon king, and we are quick to crown the people God uses. Whom are you tempted to lean on or idolize in place of God, a leader, a mentor, a hero of the faith, and how can you honor them without putting them where only God belongs?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Israel's instinct is to crown the deliverer, to make Gideon king because he saved them (8:22). It is a deeply human instinct. We naturally gravitate toward the visible person God used and quietly begin to lean on them, admire them, depend on them in ways that belong to God alone.

Gideon, to his credit, refused the throne. But the people's desire reveals a danger that outlives any single leader: the temptation to put a human being where only God belongs. Leaders, mentors, and heroes of the faith are gifts, but they are gifts that can become idols when our trust shifts from the Giver to the gift.

There is a healthy way to honor those God uses. We thank God for them, we follow them as they follow Christ, we learn from them, but we do not anchor our faith in them, because every human leader is mortal and flawed, as the rest of Gideon's story will painfully show. When we crown a man, we set ourselves up for the crash that comes when he falls or dies.

The personal work here is to name honestly whom we might be tempted to idolize, a pastor, a teacher, a parent, a Christian we admire, and to keep them in their rightful place: honored, loved, but never enthroned where God alone deserves to sit.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The human instinct to crown the deliverer reveals our tendency to idolize the people God uses (8:22).
- Leaders and mentors are God's gifts, but gifts can become idols when trust shifts from the Giver.
- Honoring leaders rightly means following them only as they follow Christ, never anchoring faith in them.
- Every human leader is mortal and flawed, so misplaced trust sets us up for a fall.

Discussion Prompts

- Why are God's people so quick to crown the people He uses?
- Whom are you tempted to lean on or idolize in place of God?
- How can you honor a leader or mentor without putting them where only God belongs?

Question 9**Student Question:**

Gideon made an ephod from the spoil, and all Israel prostituted themselves after it, so that it became a snare to Gideon and his house (8:27), and after he died the people turned again to Baal and forgot the LORD their God who had delivered them (8:33-34). How does a good or even religious thing become an idol, what does this whole arc teach us about giving God the glory rather than boasting in ourselves, and how does Israel's swift return to Baal warn us, against any notion that God's people cannot fall away, that we must remain faithful to the end?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Here the whole arc of these two chapters comes to its sobering point. Gideon takes the gold he has gathered and makes an ephod, setting it up in his city, and all Israel prostituted themselves after it there, so that it became a snare to Gideon and to his house (8:27). The ephod was a priestly object, something religious, perhaps even intended to honor God or commemorate the victory. Yet it drew Israel into spiritual adultery. The very thing that looked holy became the snare.

This is how idolatry most often works among God's people. It rarely begins with an obvious Baal; it begins with a good thing, a religious thing, a gift from a real victory, that slowly slides into the place reserved for God. Aaron's golden calf was meant to celebrate the LORD who brought Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 32:1-6); Gideon's ephod likely carried similar religious intent. Good things become idols precisely because they are good and therefore easy to trust, to admire, to bow before without noticing. The deeper question the passage forces is the question of glory: the LORD reduced the army so Israel could not boast, my own hand has saved me, and now Gideon, fresh from that lesson, fashions a monument that draws glory and devotion to itself. Whenever we keep for ourselves, or for our works, the glory that belongs to God, an ephod is already forming in our hands.

Then the story darkens further. The land had rest forty years while Gideon lived, but as soon as Gideon died, the people of Israel turned again and prostituted themselves after the Baals, and they did not remember the LORD their God who had delivered them (8:33-34). One generation watched fire pour from broken jars, and the next, the moment their judge was buried, forgot the God who saved them. This is a flat, unanswerable rebuke to any notion that God's people, once delivered, cannot fall away. They had been delivered, and they fell, and they forgot. Scripture warns us in the very same terms: take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God (Hebrews 3:12-14), and a person can be severed from Christ and fall from grace (Galatians 5:4).

So the passage presses a double demand. First, give God the glory and refuse the boast that you saved yourself, lest your gratitude harden into a monument to your own name. Second, do not presume that past deliverance secures present faithfulness; salvation is not a possession to be assumed but a relationship to be kept by ongoing, watchful trust. Israel's swift apostasy is a mirror held up to every believer who thinks the battle is permanently won.

The hope in all this is not despair but vigilance, and ultimately Christ. Where Gideon faltered and Israel forgot, the Lord Jesus is the faithful Deliverer who reigns now and never dies (Hebrews 7:24–25), and He calls His people to hold fast to the end, to give God the glory in every victory, and to keep our hands empty of the idols that gather so easily, even out of our blessings.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A good or religious thing, the ephod, became an idol and a snare to Gideon's whole house (8:27).
- Idolatry among God's people usually begins not with an obvious Baal but with a good thing wrongly trusted (Exodus 32:1–6).
- Keeping for ourselves the glory that belongs to God is itself a form of idol-making.
- Israel's swift return to Baal after Gideon's death refutes any once-saved-always-saved assumption (8:33–34; Hebrews 3:12–14; Galatians 5:4).
- Salvation is a relationship kept by ongoing faithfulness, not a possession that secures us regardless of how we live.
- The faithful Deliverer who never falters and never dies is the Lord Jesus, who calls us to hold fast to the end (Hebrews 7:24–25).

Discussion Prompts

- How does a good or even religious thing, like Gideon's ephod, slide into becoming an idol?
- What does Israel's forgetting of God right after deliverance teach us about the danger of falling away?
- Where is the line between gratefully remembering a victory and building a monument that steals God's glory?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back over the whole of Judges 7 and 8, name one specific way the Lord Jesus is teaching you through this passage either to give God the glory you have been quietly keeping for yourself or to surrender a subtle idol, even a good thing, that has become a snare, and what is the first concrete step of obedience you will take?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers the whole study into one personal decision. The lesson has shown us two enduring dangers: keeping for ourselves the glory that belongs to God, and letting a good thing in our hands quietly become an idol. The Lord Jesus, by His Spirit and His Word, means to form us out of both.

The first movement is to give God the glory we have been holding. Perhaps it is a success at work, a healthy family, a thriving ministry, a reputation, something you have half-consciously

been crediting to your own hand. The call is to say plainly what is true, that God did it, and to let your gratitude be loud and your boasting silent (1 Corinthians 1:31).

The second movement is to surrender a subtle idol, even a good one. Like Gideon's ephod, it may be religious, respectable, even born of a real blessing, yet it has crept toward the place that belongs to God alone. Naming it honestly is the beginning of breaking it.

The passage asks for one concrete step, not a vague resolution. Perhaps it is a specific confession, a deliberate act of giving credit to God in front of others, the dismantling of a particular dependence, or a renewed daily remembering of the God who delivers, so that we do not become the generation that forgot. The Lord forms us not in the abstract but in the next obedient act.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Spiritual formation moves from hearing the passage to a single concrete act of obedience.
- Giving God the glory means speaking the truth that He, not our hand, has saved us (1 Corinthians 1:31).
- Subtle idols, including good and religious things, must be named honestly before they can be surrendered.
- Christ forms His people through specific obedience, not vague intention.

Discussion Prompts

- What is one specific glory you have been keeping for yourself that you will hand back to God?
- What good thing in your life has crept toward becoming an idol, and how will you surrender it?
- What is the first concrete step of obedience you will take this week, and who can help you keep it?