**The LORD will Rule over You**

Judges 8:1-35

Key verse **23 But Gideon told them, "I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The LORD will rule over you."**

In chapters 6-7, we saw God raised a weak and timid man, Gideon, into a mighty warrior. The mighty warrior's first assignment was to destroy the altar of Baal and Asherah pole and restore worship to God.

The second mission was to deliver Israel from the Midianites. Gideon believed in Almighty God, so he reduced the number of the entire army to three hundred men. Then, Gideon and the 300 defeated 120,000 Midianite forces with torches and trumpets. Indeed, the Lord fought for them and gave them a great victory.

Chapter 8 describes Gideon’s great triumph and critical mistakes, leading Israel into idolatry. I pray that we may learn about Gideon’s humility and his persistence in fulfilling God’s mission and learn that the LORD is the Sovereign Ruler over our lives. Today’s message has four parts.

Part I. Gideon’s humility and persistence (1-9)

Let’s look at verse 1. 1 **Now the Ephraimites asked Gideon, "Why have you treated us like this? Why didn't you call us when you went to fight Midian?" And they criticized him sharply.**

The men of Ephraim criticized Gideon for not including them in the initial fight against the Midianites. However, their complaint was not right. As we look at the map of the tribes, we notice that the Midianite invasion did not directly impact Ephraim. Besides, Gideon obeyed God’s directions and only needed three hundred men for the battle, enough to reveal God's mighty power and glory fully. So, it is not surprising that Gideon did not call for the Ephraimites. The real issue is the pride of the men of Ephraim. They are not joyful about Gideon's great victory. They are not praising God for the salvation that God gave through Gideon and the 300. They are upset because Gideon omitted them.

Gideon responded to the Ephraimites' pride and criticism with humility. Look at verses 2-3. **2 But he answered them, "What have I accomplished compared to you? Aren't the gleanings of Ephraim's grapes better than the full grape harvest of Abiezer? 3 God gave Oreb and Zeeb, the Midianite leaders, into your hands. What was I able to do compared to you?" At this, their resentment against him subsided.** Gideon did not exhibit his achievement but wisely and humbly responded to Ephraim, giving them credit for their later contribution and pointing out that their defeat of the Midianite leaders Oreb and Zeeb was more significant than his efforts. Here we learn that the mighty warrior does not exalt himself but humbly exalt God and acknowledge his brothers' effort.

Even if we are misunderstood and criticized, we must look to God and treat our brothers and sisters with humility. Prov15:1 says, A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. Prov 16:32 Better a patient person than a warrior, one with self-control than one who takes a city. Jesus also said in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth" (Mt 5:5).

Gideon was not discouraged or distracted, but tried to finish up God’s given mission. Look at verse 4 **Gideon and his three hundred men, exhausted yet keeping up the pursuit, came to the Jordan and crossed it.** Gideon and his 300 were exhausted yet kept pursuing the escaping enemy of Midian. They had already defeated most of the enemies, so they could have U-turned at the Jordan, but they crossed the Jordan and chased the Midianites. Here, we see Gideon's faith and persistence in completing God's mission. Our Lord Jesus came to the world to fulfill God’s will. In Gethsemane he prayed, My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.' I pray that we may learn about the attitude of persistence for God’s mission.

There, Gideon asked for help from the towns of Succoth and Peniel. Look at verses 5-9. **5 He said to the men of Succoth,** **"Give my troops some bread; they are worn out, and I am still pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian." 6 But the officials of Succoth said, "Do you already have the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna in your possession? Why should we give bread to your troops?" 7 Then Gideon replied, "Just for that, when the LORD has given Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, I will tear your flesh with desert thorns and briers." 8 From there he went up to Peniel and made the same request of them, but they answered as the men of Succoth had. 9 So he said to the men of Peniel, "When I return in triumph, I will tear down this tower."** Gideon was not asking for soldiers or weapons, just loaves of bread for exhausted men, but they refused to give them. Furthermore, they despised Gideon and the three hundred.(15) Gideon must have been ashamed and enraged at his brothers' coldness, ridicule, and selfishness. Gideon promised punishment for their selfishness when he returned.

Part II. Gideon’s Great Victory and Retribution (10-21)

Look at verses 10-12. **10 Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor with a force of about fifteen thousand men, all that were left of the armies of the eastern peoples; a hundred and twenty thousand swordsmen had fallen. 11 Gideon went up by the route of the nomads east of Nobah and Jogbehah and fell upon the unsuspecting army. 12 Zebah and Zalmunna, the two kings of Midian, fled, but he pursued them and captured them, routing their entire army.** As we saw in Chapter 7, 120,000 Swordsmen of the Midianite army had already been killed, leaving only 15,000 troops remaining. However, they were still 50 times more numerous than Gideon's 300. Gideon again launched a surprise attack using a route they had never expected. They defeated them and captured the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna.

Verses 13-21 record how Gideon carries punishment on the elders and officials of Succoth and the men of Peniel. Let’s read verses 15-17 **15 Then Gideon came and said to the men of Succoth, "Here are Zebah and Zalmunna, about whom you taunted me by saying, 'Do you already have the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna in your possession? Why should we give bread to your exhausted men?' " 16 He took the elders of the town and taught the men of Succoth a lesson by punishing them with desert thorns and briers. 17 He also pulled down the tower of Peniel and killed the men of the town.** Just as Gideon had warned them, he punished the elders and officials of Succoth with desert thorns and briers. He pulled down the tower of the Peniel and killed the men of the town. What is the lesson Gideon taught them about? They should not stand on the side of the enemy to save life in times of crisis, but they should stand on the side of God and not ridicule the dedicated people who fight for God.

It is a grave sin to ridicule those devoted to the Lord and gospel work. Even though those who go out and fight with faith may seem reckless in the eyes of human beings, God blesses and gives victory to those who fight with faith and those who are dedicated. On the other hand, a person who only cares for their benefit selfishly will encounter wild thorns and briars, and the tower of their life will collapse. During Joshua's time, the tribes east and west of Jordan fought together in Cannan's conquest and remained unified and dedicated. They encouraged and admonished each other not to rebel against God and worship together. However, in Judges' times, each did what was right in their own eyes, which resulted in idolatry and selfishness. God’s people fall when we cave into selfishness. I pray that we may not be selfish but that we may learn faithful devotion to God even if there seems to be immediate loss.

**Part III. The Lord is the Ruler (22-23)**

**Look at verse 22. 22 The Israelites said to Gideon, "Rule over us - you, your son, and your grandson - because you have saved us out of the hand of Midian."** The Israelites recognized Gideon’s leadership and asked him to rule over them with his descendants. They are asking for a new monarchy to begin with Gideon and his descendants. Gideon gives a wise answer in verse 23. Let’s read verse 23. **23 But Gideon told them, "I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The LORD will rule over you."** Gideon wisely refused, acknowledging that God alone should be their Ruler. He knows very well that God is Israel's only Savior and Ruler.

"The Lord will rule over you." This message is what God revealed and taught to Gideon from the beginning up until now. Gideon knew who he was before God. He was a weak and fearful man like barley bread in the smallest tribe. But God saved him from idolatry and called him a mighty warrior. God fought for him and brought him a great victory. He experienced that battle and salvation belong to God. God is the living and almighty God. God is the Ruler of Israel. No one and nothing can replace God. “The LORD will rule over you.”

The book of Judges consistently declares that God is our King and our Ruler. He kept leading sinful Israel to turn away from idolatry and return to God by appointing each time a deliverer. Even when they worshiped idols and left God, even when they could not recognize that God was always there, God was ruling them as the Ruler all the time. God didn’t want anything or anyone to rule over them. Who rules over your life? Who rules over your family? Who rules over our society? Many want the power to rule. People want someone or something powerful to rule over us. The power is money and information, careers etc. This is the trend of this world: Each country wants a leader with more robust power. Brilliant people, trillionaires, AI technology, and money rule over the world everywhere. But as we peel away this visible shell, we see Satan controls them, but for a while. If we peel off the shell again, we can see God, the Sovereign Ruler, Lord of lords, and King of kings, who rules over all creations. This is what Isaiah saw and what Christ Jesus revealed to Apostle John. God is the Sovereign Ruler over all. I pray that God may rule over our heart and minds and our lives. I pray that we may live as royal priests and holy nations who bear witness to Christ Jesus, our Ruler and King.

**Part IV. Gideon’s ephod and Abimelech (24-35)**

Gideon made two significant mistakes in the last years of his life. Although Gideon rejected the offer to become king, he did make one request. He asked for gold earrings of the spoils of victory. Let’s read verse 24. **24 And he said, "I do have one request, that each of you give me an earring from your share of the plunder." (It was the custom of the Ishmaelites to wear gold earrings.)** They are glad to give him gold rings. The total weight of the gold rings came to around 20 KG.What did Gideon make with the gold? Let’s look at verse 27. **27 Gideon made the gold into an ephod, which he placed in Ophrah, his town. All Israel prostituted themselves by worshiping it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and his family.** He made an ephod from the gold (a priestly garment) and put it in his city, Ophrah. However, all of Israel later ended up worshipping the ephod by turning it into an idol. Gideon’s ephod became a snare to him and his family. It would have been nice to leave only the legacy, but he left his ephod. Why did he make this ephod? That was not Gideon's intention at all. He intended the ephod to be a testimonial to all Israel that God alone is to rule over them, and they are to worship him. But it turned into an idol by the people. It’s like the image of the serpent in the wilderness Moses had made. Initially, it was meant for good, but the people later turned it into an idol that was a snare to Moses. Ultimately, Gideon’s decision to make the ephod was not right, regardless of its intention. We must keep in mind Gideon's mistake. Our small actions can lead people to idols. This warns us not to cause anyone to fall into idolatry and not to idolize anything or anyone except for God and Christ Jesus, our one mediator. John Calvin, the best-known theologian, achieved the Protestant Reformation, but he was afraid that people would idolize him, so he told them not to mark his gravestone on his tomb. I pray that we may exalt the name of the LORD God until the end and help others look only at God and not ourselves.

Verses 28-35 describes Gideon’s late life. During Gideon's lifetime, the land enjoyed peace for forty years.However**,** Gideon's later life did not set a good example. He had many wives and concubines who bore him seventy sons. He had a son by one of his concubines and named him Abimelech. Abimelech’s name means, “My father is king.” It is irony that he named one son like it. This indicates that he had a desire to live as a king. After Gideon's death, Israel turned away from God and worshipped Baal. Further, the people forgot the Lord their God who had delivered them, and they did not show kindness to the family of Gideon in return for all the good he had done for Israel.

Gideon's later life warns about the difficulty of finishing life well. It takes hard work to finish strong in the Lord. We do not retire from God. We do not retire from seeking and displaying God's glory.

In conclusion, we studied in detail in Judges chapters 6 to 8 about God calling, raising, and using Gideon as a mighty warrior. We learned about Gideon's faith, obedience, and dedication. Through Gideon, the power and salvation of Almighty God were revealed. Indeed, the LORD is our Sovereign Ruler. I pray that our lives may bring glory to God and leave good footprints of faith for the next generations.