

The Lord Will Rule Over You!

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[0:00] As we get started this morning by way of reminder, we are in the book of Judges.

! And as you hopefully remember, Judges comes after the Lord has delivered the people of Israel! from slavery in Egypt and carried them through their rebellion and their wandering and brought them into the promised land under the leadership of Joshua.

And near the end of Joshua's life, he challenges Israel to choose whom they would serve. So if you would, begin by looking with me at some of the verses from Joshua chapter 24.

Just a few excerpts of his final challenge to Israel, starting with verse 14. Joshua says, Now therefore, fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness.

Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the river and in Egypt and serve the Lord. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the river or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell.

[1:21] But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Then verse 19. But Joshua said to the people, You are not able to serve the Lord, for he is a holy God.

He's a jealous God. He will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm and consume you after having done you good.

And the people said to Joshua, No, we will serve the Lord. Verse 23. And he said, Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your heart to the Lord, the God of Israel.

And the people said to Joshua, The Lord our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey. Now, as we know at this point in Joshua, they did not fully obey God's command to drive out the inhabitants of the land or their gods.

And so we hear time and time again the book of Judges reverberates with Joshua's challenge, Choose this day whom you will serve. Hopefully you remember that after Joshua's generation died, another generation arose that did not know the Lord or remember his works.

[2:39] Now, remember, they still knew about Yahweh, the one true God, but they're not living in faithful covenant relationship with him.

You remember from chapter 6, even Gideon himself knew the stories. He says, Where are all God's wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us? But they mixed Canaanite beliefs and worship with the worship of Yahweh.

You remember Gideon's own father, Joash, maintained an altar to Baal and had an Asherah, and the people of the town came there to worship. So because Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, he gave them into the hand of Midian.

And hopefully you remember that it's been seven years that the Midianites and the Amalekites have swept through the land, devouring its produce, its livestock, until it says Israel was brought very low. And this time, when Israel cried out, God sent a prophet first before sending a judge. And you probably remember, the prophet made the real problem clear.

[3:53] It was not Israel's deepest problem that they had enemies outside of them, but it was their unfaithfulness inside of them, their disobedience and the corruption of true worship.

Then you remember in Judges chapter 6, the angel of the Lord found Gideon. He was fearful, hiding in a winepress. And the angel of the Lord calls Gideon a mighty man of valor.

And he sent him first to confront the Baal worship in his own household. Now Gideon obeyed, but again, you remember, he does it at night because he's afraid.

But from it all, he gets the nickname, Jeroboam, which means let Baal contend with him. And it becomes an ongoing testimony that Baal could not defend himself.

So the spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon, and God patiently reassures Gideon because of the fleece and having the opportunity to know this is what God's doing.

[4:56] And Gideon has gathered an army now on the, or near Mount Gilboa, overlooking the Herod Valley. You can see on the back of your listening guide, there's a map if you'd like to get a clearer picture of where things are happening today.

But that's where we'll pick up the story in Judges chapter 7 and 8. And if you're using one of the Bibles from the seat around you, and I hope you will follow along in the Bible, you can find that on page 206.

Now, these chapters contain one of the most positive and powerful moments in Judges, followed almost immediately by a critical turn deeper into Israel's downward spiral.

Now, let's begin near the end. After the battle has been won. In Judges 8, verses 22 and 23 read, 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.

Gideon said to them, I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you. The Lord will rule over you. Now, that statement is going to give us the theme for this morning's message.

[6:18] The Lord will rule over you. And we're going to look at five ways that his rule is revealed. But to do that, we have to go back in time from this point of the story to about a week before.

The first thing we're going to see is the Lord rules through our weakness. The Lord rules through our weakness. And if you would follow along, starting in Judges chapter 7 with verse 1, it reads, Then Jeroboam, that is Gideon, and all the people who were with him, rose early and encamped beside the spring of Herod.

And the camp of Midian was north of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley. The Lord said to Gideon, The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, My own hand has saved me.

Now, therefore, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return home and hurry away from Mount Gilead. Then 22,000 of the people returned and 10,000 remained.

So Gideon begins with 32,000 soldiers against what we will later learn is an army of 135,000.

Israel's already outnumbered more than four to one, but God says the problem is that Gideon has too many soldiers.

[7:49] Now, why is that? I think it's because by nature we're glory thieves. You see, if there's any plausible way to make ourselves into the hero of the story, we will.

So God deliberately removes every reasonable ground for Israel to say, My own hand has saved me. And following the principle laid out in Deuteronomy 20, verse 8, The fearful are permitted to go home, and 22,000 leave.

Now, it's interesting. This all happens at the spring of Herod. And in Hebrew, you could also understand that as the spring of trembling. And it's a fitting scene that exposes how deeply fear and unbelief had spread through Israel.

You see, they knew the stories of God's mighty acts, but they had very little confidence that he would keep his promises now. So, only 10,000 remain.

And yet, the Lord says, There are still too many. Continuing with verse 4. It reads, And the Lord said to Gideon, The people are still too many. Take them down to the water, and I will test them for you there.

[9:09] And anyone of whom I say to you, This one shall go with you, shall go with you. And anyone of whom I say to you, This one shall not go with you, shall not go. So he brought the people down to the water.

And the Lord said to Gideon, Everyone who laps the water with his tongue as a dog laps, you shall set by himself. Likewise, everyone who kneels down to drink. And the number of those who lapped, putting their hands to their mouths, was 300 men.

But all the rest of the people knelt down to drink water. And the Lord said to Gideon, With the 300 men who lapped, I will save you, and give the Midianites into your hand.

Let all the others go, every man to his home. So the people took provisions in their hands, in their trumpets, and he sent all the rest of Israel, every man to his tent, but retained the 300 men.

And the camp of Midian was below him in the valley. Now, the point of the drinking test is not that God's identifying his special forces. Okay?

[10:11] The text never says that those 300 were more vigilant or more courageous. In contrast, the test reduces the army until Israel's weakness should be unmistakable.

300 men against 135,000. Now, the odds about 450 to 1. You see, God knows we readily steal his glory.

So he makes Israel too weak to honestly explain the victory apart from him, exposing their weakness, forcing them to depend on him.

Now, let's just take a moment and ask yourself, where are you stealing God's glory? Do you quietly credit your success to your own hard work or your wisdom, your ability, forgetting that every good and perfect gift is from above?

Do you look down on those that you consider less capable or less disciplined or less intelligent, less mature, less stable? Also, think about where are you fighting against the weakness that God has allowed in your life?

[11:32] Do you tell yourself, if only I had more time, more money, more ability, more strength, more youth, more experience, then I would obey, I would serve, I would do this for the Lord.

You see, so often, we want God to make us strong enough to obey, strong enough that we can do it without depending on him, but the Lord rules through our weakness.

Now, honestly, what he's called you to may truly be too big for you, but that's because his plan was never for you to do it on your own. He calls us to walk in faithful obedience, step by step, letting our weakness become the stage on which his strength and his glory are displayed.

Now, the second thing we want to see is the Lord rules mercifully in our fear. The Lord rules mercifully in our fear. And just by way of reminder, God has been remarkably patient with Gideon's fear throughout this story, right?

He finds him hiding in a wine press. He speaks peace to Gideon when Gideon thinks he's going to die because he's sending the angel of the Lord face to face. He doesn't reject or criticize him for tearing down the altar of Baal at night.

[12:59] He patiently reassures him with the fleece. Now, the night before the battle, we're going to see that same mercy continues. Continuing with verse 9, it reads, That same night, the Lord said to Gideon, Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hand.

But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah, your servant, and you shall hear what they say, and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp.

Then Gideon went down with Purah, his servant, to the outposts of the armed men who were in the camp. And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the people of the east lay along the valley like locusts in abundance.

And their camels were without number as the sand that is on the shore, the seashore in abundance. When Gideon came, behold, a man was telling a dream to his comrade.

And he said, Behold, I dreamed a dream. And behold, a cake of barley, barley tumbled into the camp of Midian. And it came to the tent and struck it so that it fell.

[14:07] It turned it upside down so the tent lay flat. And his comrade answered, This is no other than the sword of Gideon, the son of Joash, a man of Israel.

God has given into his hand Midian in all the camp. Now, God commands Gideon to arise and go down against the Midianites.

Then he adds, But if you are afraid, there's an extraordinary amount of mercy and gentleness in those words. And Gideon is afraid.

Of course he is. He's about to lead 300 men against 135,000. And we'll learn later that his own brothers had been killed in conflict with the Midianites.

Yes, Gideon had received direct revelation and repeated signs, but we should be slow to criticize the fear of a man who's actually stepping forward in obedience.

[15:08] Our merciful Lord does not mock or chastise him. He gives Gideon one more encouragement. Go down with Purah and listen. Now, to feel the strangeness of what Gideon overhears, let me let you imagine it this way.

Okay? Soldier One says, I had a dream. A day-old bagel rolled out of a kindergartner's lunchbox towards the Pentagon. It bounced over the curb, hit the building, and the whole Pentagon collapsed.

And Soldier Two answers, Well, that can only mean one thing. God's given the Pentagon and all its strength into the hand of Kevin Jones, a kindergartner living in Pentagon City. Right?

That's roughly how absurd the dream and its interpretation must have sounded. A loaf of barley bread, which is the food of the poor, topples the tent of mighty Midian, and the Midianite soldier immediately knows it's Gideon's victory.

But think of all the sovereign mercy that's packed into that moment. Right? It's obvious that that fear was already spreading through the camp of the Midianites.

[16:17] God directs Gideon and Pura to exactly the right place at the right time to hear this dream. And then Gideon's fears are comforted by hearing the fears of another soldier.

Then verse 15 happens. It says, As soon as Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, he worshipped. And he returned to the camp of Israel and said, Arise, for the Lord has given the host of Midian into your hand.

Now, the Lord's merciful rule in Gideon's fear produces two right results. The first is worship. Gideon bows before Yahweh.

And remarkably, this is the only place in Judges where this verb describes an Israelite bowing down before the Lord.

Elsewhere, it's all used to describe the Israelites bowing down before false gods. But the second thing that the Lord's merciful care produces is a faith that obeys.

[17:30] Right? Gideon returns to camp, announces, The Lord has given it into our hands and calls the men to battle. We see that Gideon's worship fuels his obedience.

And Gideon's obedience reflects the sincerity of his worship. You know, God's people do not have to be fearless. But we do have to obey.

So, when fear rises and it will, right, remember the Lord's patience, the Lord's mercy. Bring your fear honestly to him. Receive strength through his word, through his acts of providence.

And then, come and bow and worship before him and let that worship fuel the next step of obedience. The third thing to see, the Lord rules over our enemies.

The Lord rules over our enemies. Starting in verse 16, And Gideon divided the 300 men into three companies and put trumpets into the hands of all of them and empty jars with torches inside the jars.

[18:42] And he said to them, Look at me and do likewise. When I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then blow the trumpets also on every side of all the camp and shout, For the Lord and for Gideon!

So Gideon and the 100 men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch. When they had just set the watch and they blew the trumpets and smashed the jars that were in their hands, then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the jars.

They held in their left hands the torches and in their right hands the trumpets to blow and they cried out, A sword for the Lord and for Gideon! Now we're not told whether God gave Gideon the details for this battle plan or not, but we do know that the men are obedient.

They go down to fight against the camp and it's worth noting the irony of their battle cry, A sword for the Lord and for Gideon because at that moment they don't have a free hand for a sword.

They're holding a torch and they're holding a trumpet. But look what happens in verse 21. Every man stood in his place around the camp and all the army ran.

[19:57] They cried out and fled. When they blew the 300 trumpets the Lord set every man's sword against his comrade and against all the army. Now notice verse 21.

It's astonishing. Every man stood in his place around the camp and all the army ran. Now picture it with me, okay?

300 Israelites surround a camp of roughly 135,000. Again, one Israelite soldier for 450 Midianite soldiers.

At midnight, the darkness explodes with shattering pottery, blazing torches, trumpet blasts, a war cry from every direction. The Midianite soldiers pour from their tents with swords in hand.

They're unable to clearly understand what's going on or what's the size of the attacking force and panic begins to take over. They just begin striking the men nearest them. The camp fills with shouting and with running and clashing steel and blood and terror and yet, the Israelites stand in their place.

[21:03] They don't charge into the camp. Matter of fact, they can't even draw their swords. While everyone inside the camp moves in terror, God's people stand their ground in faith.

Midian has weapons but no clarity. Israel has no sword in hand but the promise of God. And the Lord set every man's sword against his comrade.

You see, Israel's task was not to make the victory happen. They were to obey, to hold their place, to watch the Lord do what only he could do. So the survivors flee.

Other tribes join in the pursuit. Ephraim captures Oreb and Zeb and the victory that God promised becomes a miraculous reality. You see, we also have enemies, don't we?

Ephesians 6.12 reminds us that our struggle is not ultimately against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces of evil. 1 Peter 5.8 warns us that our adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.

[22:14] Now maybe this morning your spiritual enemies seem as innumerable and insurmountable as those of Midian. Perhaps you've fought the same temptation so long that you feel like you're just hiding in a spiritual winepress trying to survive.

Let me call you to hear again the Lord's words to Gideon. The Lord is with you. Now, when the excuses rise, and they will, you're too weak, you're too afraid, you're too outnumbered, you've failed too many times.

Remember the Lord's words. I will be with you. Colossians 2.15 says that through Christ God has disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in Him. Amen. So do not give up the fight. Stand your ground. The decisive victory has already been won in Christ.

Our greatest danger, though, so often is not from the enemies outside us. And as we move into Judges 8, it's going to turn our attention to the enemies within.

[23:36] The fourth thing we want to see, the Lord rules by exposing the idols of the heart. The Lord rules by exposing the idols of the heart.

Now, the anonymous prophet's message at the beginning of Judges 6 really could provide the theological framework for all of Gideon's story. Yahweh remains unwaveringly faithful to save and Israel persistently refuses to hear and to fear and to remember and to worship him rightly.

So in some ways, the Lord really has been revealing the idols of the heart throughout the entire story of Gideon. But chapter 8 brings several of those idols into especially sharp focus.

The first is the idol of recognition. The idol of recognition. Follow along as I read in chapter 8 starting with verse 1. Then the men of Ephraim said to him, What is this you have done to us?

Not to call us when you went to fight against Midian? And they accused him fiercely. And Gideon 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 Abiezar?

[24:51] God has given into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeb. What have I been able to do in comparison with you? Then their anger against him subsided when he said this.

So the tribe of Ephraim takes personal offense that Gideon began the battle without them. But the deeper issue is a longing for recognition.

Now remember, the tribe of Ephraim was not originally summoned by the Spirit of the Lord when he clothed Gideon and called out the tribes. And it was only later that they were called to join in the pursuit.

And although they do capture Oreb and Zeb, they're still complaining fiercely that Gideon had not included them sooner. So Gideon answers wisely and calms the conflict, but he does not clearly redirect their hearts to the Lord's glory.

We see Ephraim placated more than corrected. Gideon actually assures them they had indeed received significant honor and recognition. And I think as a result, we'll see that same craving for recognition reemerge in Ephraim in Judges chapter 12.

[26:12] You see, God's just miraculously delivered Israel, yet Ephraim's preoccupied with their own recognition. How often do we see that same idol at work in our own lives?

Right? It tells us we deserve to be noticed, to be included, to be appreciated, to be valued. You can often detect it by how easily you're hurt when you feel like you've been overlooked in some way.

The idol of recognition steals our joy. It makes it difficult for us to thank God for what he does apart from our involvement. Or to worship when he uses someone else to do something.

Or simply just to rejoice with those who rejoice. You see, instead of asking, how has God been glorified, the idol of recognition leads us to ask, did anyone notice me?

The second idol is the idol of security. The idol of security. Continuing with verse four. It says, And Gideon came to the Jordan and crossed over. He and the three hundred men who were with him, exhausted, yet pursuing.

[27 : 24] 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'm pursuing after Ziba and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian. And the officials of Succoth said, Are the hands of Ziba and Zalmunna already in your hand?

That we should give bread to your army? So Gideon said, Well then, when the Lord has given Ziba and Zalmunna into my hand, I will flail your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briars. 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. And he said to the men of Penuel, When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower.

Now, the fears of the people of Succoth and Penuel are really after seven years of devastation, bread is precious.

And if you look at your map, you'll see they're a lot closer to Midian. They've already understood what it's like to face the wrath and the retribution of Midian. But it's real.

[28 : 30] And let's just be honest, Gideon is in some ways ridiculously asking them to support 300 exhausted men who are pursuing an army at this point of at least 15,000.

So the fear is understandable, but it becomes idolatrous when security becomes more important than faithfulness.

You see, the reasoning is essentially our judgment about what will keep us safe is more trustworthy than what God has said or what God is visibly doing.

So fear drives them to self-protection. It keeps them from trusting God's provision, his protection. It causes them to actually stand aside from the Lord's work.

In addition to that, they speak harshly to their own faithful brothers. Now the same idol grows in us when fear convinces us that preserving ourselves is more important than trusting and obeying God, often assuming we can judge what is safest for us better than God can.

[29 : 42] And so the idol of security makes us clutch and cling to what we have. It makes us suspicious rather than faithful and it often leads us to criticize any obedience that threatens our comfort.

Now, biblical wisdom is not recklessness, but neither is safety our highest good. The Lord should be.

The second idol, the third idol that we can see is the idol of self-importance. The idol of self-importance. Now, Gideon pursues and defeats the remaining 15,000 men.

He captures Ziba and Zalmunna and returns to Succoth with a list of its 77 officials. And for the sake of time, we're going to skip to verse 15. It says, And Gideon came to the men of Succoth and he said, Behold, Ziba and Zalmunna, about whom you taunted me, saying, Are the hands of Ziba and Zalmunna already in your hand, that we should give bread to your men who are exhausted? 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. And he broke down the tower of Penuel and killed the men of the city.

[31 : 00] Then he said to Ziba and Zalmunna, Where are the men you killed at Tabor? They answered, As you are, so were they. Every one of them resembled the son of a king.

And Gideon 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. 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.

Then Ziba and Zalmunna said, Rise yourself and fall upon us, for as the man is, so is his strength.

And Gideon arose and killed Ziba and Zalmunna, and he took the crescent ornaments that were on the necks of their camels. Now Gideon's growing sense of self-importance appears as he treats failure to support his leadership as a personal offense, deserving punishment, in effect saying, Those who will not stand with me will answer to me.

But there's a painful irony to observe here. Gideon's own leadership has been sustained from beginning to end by extraordinary mercy.

[32 : 13] The people of these cities feared many of the same things Gideon had feared. Right? Midian's overwhelming strength, the cost of resistance, whether victory would really come.

But they didn't have the same benefit of direct revelation and repeated reassurance that Gideon had received. So we see Gideon, the man who needed abundant mercy and patience, now shows little of either towards other fearful people.

Brothers and sisters, we must remember the mercy God has shown us. And we must especially remember it when dealing with the weaknesses of others.

It also appears that Gideon begins to confuse being graciously chosen by God with being personally important. His position didn't come from superior courage or faithfulness, but from God's gracious choice, mercy, and patience with him.

Yet the grace that made Gideon useful, increasingly becomes a status that he expects others to recognize and support.

[33:28] Then we see his God-given mission becoming entangled with personal vengeance. By verses 18-21, Gideon confirms that Zeba and Zalmunna killed his brothers, and their execution is tied to his family grievance or vindication.

So little by little, God's cause and Gideon's personal cause are becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish. But the idol of self-importance does the very same thing to us.

It takes the gifts or the calling or the position or the influence or the victories that we've received by grace and turns them into reasons we think others must recognize us and trust us and support and defer to us.

us. We should never confuse being used by God with being important in and of ourselves. You see, the importance of the work he entrusts to us does not transfer into personal significance that others must recognize.

And we must guard against allowing God's cause to become entangled with our own reputation or our own grievances or our own desire for vindication because it's dangerously easy to think we're defending truth, we're defending ministry, we're defending the church, we're defending God, when in reality we're just defending ourselves.

[34:59] So we must ask ourselves, am I seeking the honor of Christ or just the vindication of my own name? The fourth idol, is the idol of spiritual experience.

The idol of spiritual experience. Starting in verse 22, it says, 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.

Gideon said to them, I will not rule over you and my son will not rule over you, the Lord will rule over you. 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. And they answered, we will willingly give them. And they spread out a cloak and every man threw in at the earrings of his spoil.

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.

[36:07] 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.

So Midian was subdued before the people of Israel and they raised their heads no more and the land had rest for 40 years in the days of Gideon. So now we're back to where we began.

Israel gives Gideon the glory that belongs to the Lord. You have saved us. They elevate the instrument above the God who used him.

And they seek permanent hereditary protection. This is working out great for us. So you, your son, your grandson, you just keep doing that. And we see Gideon answer rightly.

I will not rule over you. The Lord will rule over you. But then comes the ephod. Now I'm going to be honest.

[37:05] Commentators differ widely about Gideon's motives. And the text doesn't explicitly tell us. But I think the details point us in this direction.

Think about it. Throughout chapters 6 and 7, Gideon enjoys extraordinary direct guidance from God. The angel of the Lord comes and speaks to him face to face.

There's miraculous signs. There's repeated divine speech. There's the fleece. There's even the providential dream in the Midianite camp. But after Judges 7 9, there's no recorded word from the Lord to Gideon again.

That silence must have been deafening. And then elsewhere in Scripture, we see that the priestly The ephod is connected with the God-appointed priesthood and with seeking the Lord's direction. In your listening guide, there's several passages there about the ephod. You could look up if you'd like to read some more. But because of that, I think it's plausible that Gideon wanted a continuing means to access God's guidance.

[38 : 16] What one commentator fitly calls, he wants a permanent fleece. I think the location is important too, right? Because Gideon puts it in Ophrah. And remember, that's the place where God first appeared to Gideon.

Where God miraculously accepts his offering. Where God speaks peace to him and where Gideon builds the altar that he calls the Lord is peace. So as a result, I believe Gideon may have been trying to preserve or restore direct access to the Lord.

And if that's true, we might perhaps hear an unspoken addition to his words. The Lord will rule over you and perhaps I can continue to be a conduit of his direction.

Now, even assuming the very best of Gideon's intentions, the problem is nonetheless very serious. Because God had already established how his people were to approach him through the tabernacle, through the priesthood, through the means that God had appointed.

And no matter how much failure the priests or the Levites were guilty of at this time, it didn't give Gideon the right to create an alternate system.

[39 : 33] That there's never a good reason to seek God or to worship God in a way that's contrary to his word. So instead of allowing God to determine how his people approach him, Gideon builds a religious practice around the place and the experience that were personally meaningful to him.

And whether intended or not, the result draws Israel away from the legitimate sanctuary and the legitimate priesthood and Israel hoard after the ephod.

You see, the desire for extraordinary spiritual experience becomes a substitute for ordinary dependence and obedience to the Lord. And in turn, it tells us the very thing Gideon makes becomes a snare to him and to his family.

And I think that danger remains for us, right? Because it's so easy for us to begin to treat yesterday's dramatic experience as more real than today's reading of God's word.

We can easily come to believe that an intense feeling is more trustworthy than ordinary obedience. Or to think that we have to come up with some special method to draw near to God beyond the means that he has given.

[40 : 53] But the Lord rules his people by his word and prayer, through his spirit, and through consistent communion with the people of God.

We don't honor the Lord by chasing spiritual experiences, some emotional spiritual highs, but by faithful daily obedience through the means that he has prescribed in his word.

So the fifth point, fifth and final point, the Lord rules through the better king. The Lord rules through the better king. Continuing in verse 29, says Jeroboel, the son of Joash, went and lived in his own house.

Now Gideon had 70 sons, his own offspring, for he had many wives. And his concubine, who was in Shechem, also bore him a son, and he called his name Abimelech.

And Gideon, the son of Joash, died in a good old age and was buried in the tomb of Joash's father at Ophrah of the Abiezarites. As soon as Gideon died, the people of Israel turned again and whored after the Baals and made Baal Beareth their God.

[42 : 02] 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. And they did not show steadfast love to the family of Jeroboel, that is Gideon, in return for all the good that he had done to Israel.

Now I want to just point back to verse 28 briefly, because it says the land had rest for 40 years in the days of Gideon. And it's worth noting that this is the last time in the book of Judges that it records the Lord giving Israel rest.

And from here the downward spiral is going to accelerate. We also need to notice that the dynasty that Gideon verbally rejected seems to emerge anyway.

He lives like a king in some of the worst possible ways. He has many wives and 70 sons and concubine. He names his concubine's son Abimelech, which means my father is king.

We also see Israel spirals downward with him. As soon as Gideon dies, they hoard after the Baals and made Baal bareth, which means Lord of the covenant, their God.

[43:12] Verse 34 gives us the heart of the tragedy. The people of Israel did not remember the Lord their God who had delivered them. Israel abandons covenant faithfulness to Yahweh to form a covenant with Baal.

Gideon's story leaves us longing for a better judge, for a true king. Gideon did real good for Israel, but he could not deliver them from the deepest enemies, their pride, their rebellion, their self-rule, and the desire to combine whatever seemed useful from the surrounding culture with their worship of God.

Gideon's life contains remarkable faithfulness and startling failure, and Israel ends his story spiritually worse than when it began for the first time in Judges.

It'll be about a thousand years from that point until the better deliverer Israel needed, and the deliverer that we need enters history.

That'll be Jesus, the Son of God. Now, this morning, maybe you found yourself somewhere in Gideon's story. Maybe you know about God, but don't truly know him, or what he's done through Jesus.

[44:33] Maybe you keep returning to patterns of rebellion, and you need to hear the word of the Lord afresh. Maybe you feel weak, or fearful, or hopeless before enemies that seem too strong, or innumerable for you.

Or maybe the Lord has exposed an idol in your life, a craving for recognition, a demand for security, a spirit of self-importance, or a pursuit of spiritual experiences that eclipses God's word and ordinary obedience.

But wherever you find yourself this morning, our hope can only be found in one place, letting the Lord rule our lives through the better king, King Jesus.

So I want to invite you wherever you are this morning to consider coming to Jesus this morning in honest repentance. Just admitting to him the things that you have seen about yourself and asking his forgiveness and committing to turn away from those things.

I invite you to renew your commitment to Christ's lordship in your life and to determine that you're going to live in daily dependence on his word and prayer and to make consistent communion with Jesus and his people a priority in your life.

[45:57] It's in doing those things that the Lord will rule over you. So the Lord rules through our weakness, the Lord rules mercifully in our fear, the Lord rules by exposing the idols of our hearts.

Let the Lord rule your life through the better king, Jesus Christ. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word.

We thank you that you have not left us to ourselves, but that you deal so patiently with us. And Father, we confess we are so often inclined to follow the idols of our heart.

Father, we pray that even now that you would give us resolve to cast them away, to cling to Christ, to live our lives under the rule of Jesus, our Lord, that we might become a clearer reflection individually and as a church of who Christ is, that we would see more and more people worship him as he deserves.

Father, thank you for this day. May you be exalted in our lives. In Jesus' name, amen. Thank you, guys. Have a great day.

[47:28] Thank you.