



Mass Chaos

A Study of the Book of Judges

Session 5: Gideon

Introduction

From 1970–2010, our synod experienced a 27% resignation rate among pastors.¹ In other words, less than three-fourths of any given seminary class would retire as pastors. In small groups, brainstorm some factors for why so many pastors have resigned from ministry.

Gideon's Call

4:11–24

Gideon objected to how the Lord addressed him as a “mighty warrior” (v. 12). Complete the implied thought in his mind, “If I am a mighty warrior and the LORD is with me, then ...”

Agree/disagree: “It was bad that Gideon acknowledged his weakness and was hesitant to be called as Israel’s judge. When I attend a pastor’s installation today, I want to meet a confident leader who trusts the Lord, not a hesitant softy who doubts himself.”

Imagine if a young person was encouraged to think about pursuing public ministry in your congregation, only to say, “But I’m not a very good speaker. I’m not confident around people. I don’t know the Bible as well as I could. I’m never going to make it as a pastor or teacher. It’s not even worth it to try.” How would you respond?

¹ Email from Prof. Brad Wordell, director of continuing education at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 10 February 2026.

Gideon's Battle with the Midianites

7:1-21

Geographic Note: Midian was a tribe located east of the Gulf of Aqaba, the eastern arm of the Red Sea, south of Edom and very much south of Israel. The battle took place in the Valley of Jezreel, which is located in the north of Israel. The very fact that Midian had traveled so far north shows how powerful they were and how oppressed the Israelites were (see also Othniel and the Aramean king in 3:7-11).

Contrast the two methods of fighting this battle below. What was the point of the surprises?

If you would go by the book in fighting this battle, then it would happen like this ...

If the Lord is writing the book about fighting this battle, then it would happen like this ...

Pursuit of Zebah & Zalmunna after the Battle

8:1-9

Context: At the end of chapter 7, Gideon killed Oreb and Zeeb, Midianite military leaders. That left two Midianite kings, Zebah and Zalmunna, along with the remaining forces of the eastern peoples (8:10). Only the northern tribes of Israel assisted Gideon in the battle (7:23). His own people from the tribes of Ephraim and Gad responded to his victory with criticism.

Analyze the response Gideon gives when he hears the personal criticism from his own people after the battle. Is he being humble? confident? bitter and sarcastic? something else?

Gideon's Ephod & Death

8:22-35

At the end of his life, Gideon was at his finest, and he was at his worst. How so?

Conclusion

Imagine if your pastor was close to resigning. "I came out of school so excited for ministry, but years later, I'm so sick of it now. I know about all my personal sins no one else in the congregation knows about. They would be shocked if they know what my wife knows and see what my children see. I feel so unworthy to be leading this congregation. I'm so weak and tired. I've tried to start new things, but the congregation doesn't want to change. I've tried to share the gospel, but people ignore me. I've tried to confront people about their sin, but they get defensive. It's all been a chaotic mess. I'm ready to give up." What would you say to him?