

Day 246 - SUNDAY: September 3rd

Judges 8

Judges 8:1-35 NKJV

Now the men of Ephraim said to him, "Why have you done this to us by not calling us when you went to fight with the Midianites?" And they reprimanded him sharply. So 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 vintage of Abiezer? God has delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. And what was I able to do in comparison with you?" Then their anger toward him subsided when he said that. When Gideon came to the Jordan, he and the three hundred men who were with him crossed over, exhausted but still in pursuit. Then 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 Zebah and Zalmunna, kings of Midian." And the leaders of Succoth said, "Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in your hand, that we should give bread to your army?" So Gideon said, "For this cause, when the LORD has delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers!" Then he went up from there to Penuel and spoke to them in the same way. And the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered. So he also spoke to the men of Penuel, saying, "When I come back in peace, I will tear down this tower!" Now Zebah and Zalmunna were at Karkor, and their armies with them, about fifteen thousand, all who were left of all the army of the people of the East; for one hundred and twenty thousand men who drew the sword had fallen. Then Gideon went up by the road of those who dwell in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah; and he attacked the army while the camp felt secure. When Zebah and

Zalmunna fled, he pursued them; and he took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and routed the whole army. Then Gideon the son of Joash returned from battle, from the Ascent of Heres. And he caught a young man of the men of Succoth and interrogated him; and he wrote down for him the leaders of Succoth and its elders, seventy-seven men. Then he came to the men of Succoth and said, "Here are Zebah and Zalmunna, about whom you ridiculed me, saying, 'Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in your hand, that we should give bread to your weary men?' " And he took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taunted the men of Succoth. Then he tore down the tower of Penuel and killed the men of the city. And he said to Zebah and Zalmunna, "What kind of men were they whom you killed at Tabor?" So they answered, "As you are, so were they; each one resembled the son of a king." Then he said, "They were my brothers, the sons of my mother. As the LORD lives, if you had let them live, I would not kill you." And he said to Jether his firstborn, "Rise, kill them!" But the youth would not draw his sword; for he was afraid, because he was still a youth. So Zebah and Zalmunna said, "Rise yourself, and kill us; for as a man is, so is his strength." So Gideon arose and killed Zebah and Zalmunna, and took the crescent ornaments that were on their camels' necks. Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, "Rule over us, both you and your son, and your grandson also; for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian." But Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you." Then Gideon said to them, "I would like to make a request of you, that each of you would give me the earrings from his plunder." For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites. So they answered, "We will gladly give them." And they spread out a garment, and each man threw into it the earrings from his plunder. Now the weight of the gold earrings that he requested was one thousand seven hundred shekels of gold,

besides the crescent ornaments, pendants, and purple robes which were on the kings of Midian, and besides the chains that were around their camels' necks. Then Gideon made it into an ephod and set it up in his city, Ophrah. And all Israel played the harlot with it there. It became a snare to Gideon and to his house. Thus Midian was subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted their heads no more. And the country was quiet for forty years in the days of Gideon. Then Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and dwelt in his own house. Gideon had seventy sons who were his own offspring, for he had many wives. And his concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, whose name he called Abimelech. Now Gideon the son of Joash died at a good old age, and was buried in the tomb of Joash his father, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites. So it was, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals, and made Baal-Berith their god. Thus the children of Israel did not remember the LORD their God, who had delivered them from the hands of all their enemies on every side; nor did they show kindness to the house of Jerubbaal (Gideon) in accordance with the good he had done for Israel.

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading program states: “Though Gideon’s little band completely routed the Midianites and their allies, nevertheless he called to the men of Ephraim to come down and aid in completing the victory (Judges 7:24). The Ephraimites were quick to the task, taking the territory pointed out by Gideon, and capturing and executing two of the leading Midianite princes, Oreb and Zeeb, whose heads they proudly brought to Gideon (verses 24-25). But the meeting with Gideon was not entirely pleasant. The men of Ephraim sharply upbraided Gideon for his refusal to call them to the initial engagement, feeling that they had been denied their rightful part in a great battle (Judges 8:1). Gideon’s reply

astutely appealed to the vanity of the Ephraimite men. “Though you were called to aid in the mopping-up activity, yet you have done far better than I,” he basically told them, “for you have taken and killed two Midianite princes—and how shall my little skirmish compare to that!” (compare verses 2-3). Thus said, the Ephraimites’ anger was assuaged. As Gideon and his men returned to the land of Israel, exhausted and faint with hunger, they came to Succoth and asked the elders of the city for provision to continue their pursuit of other Midianite leaders. The elders of Succoth refused, saying that it looked to them like Gideon hadn't captured anyone. The men of Penuel, upon the same request, made a similar reply. In both cases Gideon promised to return and punish the cities for their impertinence. According to the culture of the day, Gideon had every right to make the request, for he was a fellow countryman who was warring against Israel’s foes. The actions of the Succothites and Penuelites showed disloyalty and cowardice. When Gideon captured the two Midianite kings, he returned to Succoth and Penuel and carried out his threats, whipping the elders of Succoth with thorns and breaking down a defensive tower in Penuel. The victory achieved by Gideon was so stupendous that the men of Israel were intent on making him king. But Gideon refused—God was Israel’s king, and Gideon made sure to impress that point on the men of Israel. Gideon did take a reward, however, which was also his due according to the standard of the day. But Gideon behaved foolishly, for he took his reward of gold and made an ephod—a ceremonial religious garment—of it. It became an object of veneration by the Israelites and, sadly, even proved a snare to Gideon and his family (verse 27). When Gideon died, the people went back into total idolatry, even building a temple to Baal (verses 33-35; Judges 9:4).

Gideon’s story presents the first signs of a yearning for kingship in Israel. As previously stated, most of the real governmental power in

Israel at the time was in the hands of the elders of the various tribes, and the tribes tended to look to their own interests, even when the national fortune or honor was at stake. The repeated cycle of servitude and deliverance began to expose the weakness of the tribal confederacy as it then existed and to awaken a desire for a more powerful central government. Sadly, the repeated cycle of servitude and deliverance did not impress on the Israelites the need for fidelity to God and the covenant. That was the lesson they should have learned. But men seldom blame their own evil hearts, preferring rather to blame “the system.”” [END]

Verse 5 – This is the area where Jacob had erected both a house and booths for his livestock (see Genesis 33:17).

Verse 6 – The JFB commentary states: “an insolent as well as a time-serving reply. It was insolent because it implied a bitter taunt that Gideon was counting with confidence on a victory which they believed he would not gain; and it was time-serving, because living in the near neighborhood of the Midianite sheiks, they dreaded the future vengeance of those roving chiefs. This contumelious manner of acting was heartless and disgraceful in people who were of Israelitish blood.” [END]

Verse 14 – John Gill’s commentary states: “wrote down their names, and what part of the city they dwelt in; or Gideon took down in writing for himself their names and places of abode from the young man, that he might not forget: and in this Gideon showed great wisdom, and strict justice; being desirous to punish only the delinquents, and not the innocent with the wicked, the people with their rulers; for though he asked bread of the men of Succoth, the answer was returned in the ill natured manner it was by the princes.” [END]

Verse 20 – John Gill’s commentary states: “Being the near kinsman of his father's brethren, whom these kings had slain, was a proper person to avenge their blood on them; and the rather Gideon might order him to do it, for the greater mortification of the kings, to die by the hand of a youth; and for the honour of his son, to be the slayer of two kings, and to inure him to draw his sword against the enemies of Israel, and embolden him to do such exploits:” [END]

Adam Clarke’s commentary adds: “By the ancient laws of war, prisoners taken in war might be either slain, sold, or kept for slaves. To put a captive enemy to death no executioner was required. Gideon slays Zebah and Zalmunna with his own hand. So Samuel is said to have hewn Agag in pieces, 1Sa 15:33. Benaiah slew Joab, 1Ki 2:25. Saul orders his guards to slay the priests who had contributed to the escape of David, 1Sa 22:17; and David caused one of his attendants to slay the Amalekite who pretended to have slain Saul, 2Sa 1:15.” [END]

Verse 21 – John Gill’s commentary states: “the Targum calls them chains, as in Jdg 8:26 no doubt of gold; so the horses of King Latinus had golden poytrels or collars hanging down their breasts. They were, according to Jarchi, Kimchi, and Ben Gersom, in the form of the moon; see Isa 3:18 some have thought that these were worn in honour of Astarte, or the moon, the goddess of the Phoenicians, from whom these people had borrowed that idolatry.” [END]

Verse 23 – When God chooses a leader, He sees what men cannot. Here we see the humility and reliance on God that made Gideon a great judge of Israel.

Verse 27 – JFB commentary adds: “That no idolatrous use was in view, nor any divisive course from Shiloh contemplated, is manifest

from Jdg_8:33. Gideon proposed, with the gold he received, to make an ephod for his use *only* as a civil magistrate or ruler, as David did (1Ch_15:27), and a magnificent pectoral or breastplate also. It would seem, from the history, that he was not blamable in making this ephod, as a civil robe or ornament merely, but that it *afterward* became an object to which religious ideas were attached; whereby it proved a snare, and consequently an evil, by *perversion*, to Gideon and his house”

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