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Judges 8

(2020)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



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Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

Judges 8

Topics.

- Ephraim complain against Gideon for going to war without them.
- Gideon and his 300 men cross over the Jordan river.
- Men of Succoth and Penuel refuse to give bread to Gideon and his men
- Gideon destroys the tower of Penuel and kills Zebah and Zalmunna.
- Gideon makes an ephod and put it in his city Ophrah.
- Midian is subdued, the land had rest forty years all the days of Gideon.
- Gideon died and Israel made Baal-berith their god.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF JUDGES

The Israelites forgot the LORD, and worshipped false gods, so the LORD removed His protection and blessings from them, which resulted in them being oppressed by their enemies and crying to the LORD for deliverance. In answer to their prayer the LORD raised up twelve Judges to deliver them, but not Judges as we think of Judges today or preachers of righteousness, but rather military leaders and fighters, that led Israel to triumph over their enemies and delivered them from their wicked behaviour. Most suppose that Samuel (considered by some to be the last Judge) wrote some parts of the book, while other parts were written at a later time by someone of his generation or a later generation. The primary purpose of the Judges is best articulated in the following words, "The LORD raised up Judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. (Judges 2:16). For an overview of the entire book see the title:

- Overview of the Book of Judges (at the beginning of the index).

THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER

At the word of the LORD Gideon reduced his army of thirty-two thousand down to three hundred so Israel could not boast, "we have delivered and saved ourselves." Gideon, with his three hundred men defeat an army of one hundred and thirty-five thousand.

EPHRAIM REBUKES GIDEON

JUDGES 8:1-3

- **Judges 8:1-3:** Then the men of Ephraim said to him (Gideon), "What is this that you have done to us, not to call us when you went to fight against Midian?" And they accused him fiercely. ² And 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 grape harvest of Abiezer? ³ God has given into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. What have I been able to do in comparison with you?" Then their anger against him subsided when he said this.

Even though the Ephraimites benefited as much as the other neighbouring tribes, by Gideon's great success and victory, it wounded their pride, being the chief tribe that they were not asked to join Gideon's forces prior

to calling Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, especially since they were closely allied with Gideons tribe Manasseh, being both the descendants of Joseph, and the tribe that Jacob, by God's direction exalted above Manasseh (the firstborn):

- But his (Joseph) father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He (Manasseh the firstborn) also shall become a people, and he also shall be great. Nevertheless, his younger brother (Ephraim) shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations." ²⁰ So he (Jacob) blessed them (Ephraim and Manasseh) that day, saying, "By you Israel will pronounce blessings, saying, 'God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh.'" Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh. (Genesis 48:19-20).

When Ephraim brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon across the Jordan (Judges 7:25), they fiercely rebuked Gideon saying, "Why did you not call us when you went to fight against Midian?" Following are five reasons Ephraim may have taken this as a reproach:

1. The other tribes were smaller and weaker.
2. They could not share in the glory of the victory.
3. They felt that Gideon gave his own tribe Manasseh preference above them and by this advanced the glory of his own tribe.
4. Ephraim were a proud and jealous people (Isaiah 11:13) and feared God would advance Gideon's tribe above theirs.
5. Ephraim was puffed up with conceit, because of their number and strength.

This question manifests the deep-seated feeling of jealous and rivalry that existed between the Ephraim and Manasseh (Isa 9:21). The tribe's discontent was not only groundless, but extremely foolish, for when Jacob blessed the tribes he was acting according to God's divine direction.

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Gideon humbly replies to the fierce jealousy of his kindred tribe with a mild and truly modest answer, which manifests strong self-control and his noble and godly character. For though he had brought about a most glorious victory, in which he was the chief instrument, yet he for the sake of the common good, and so that there would be no dissension, he receives their reproaches without anger, and soothes their wounded pride by confessing that even though they joined him much later, they had done more, than he had during the whole campaign.

He confers great honour upon them by highlighting the fact they brought to him the heads of the two princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. In this way he makes himself of no account in comparison to them, by magnifying their service as greatly superior to his own. By this godly wisdom he disarms their insolence, by his humility, and their anger, by his meekness

Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the grape harvest of Abiezer? (v2) (of which family Gideon was). Following are the most common ideas of what this statement implies:

- Ephraim, by a simple pursuit had achieved more than Gideon himself had done
- The two bloody heads which were their "gleaning" were better than the "vintage" of obscure thousands.
- Whereas Gideon began the fight, which may be called the vintage, and Ephraim finished it, which was like gleaning, yet what Ephraim did last, was superior to what was done by Gideon at first.
- The princes of Midian, that Ephraim had taken in the pursuit, was like gleaning after a vintage, and superior to all the camp of Midian.

- Are not the weak of the house of Ephraim better than the strong of the house of Abiezer?
- This last act (the gleaning) of the whole tribe is more famous, than the whole enterprise of one man of one family (the vintage).

NOTICE: Gideon modestly ascribes the honour of the victory, to the Abiezrites, not to himself as generals commonly do.

Their anger was abated towards him: (v3) Gideons soft answer turned away their fierce wrath according to the following proverb:

- A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. (Proverbs 15:1).

GIDEON ASKS SUCCOTH FOR BREAD

JUDGES 8:4-5

- **Judges 8:4-7:** And Gideon came to the Jordan and crossed over, he and the 300 men who were with him, exhausted yet pursuing. 5 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 am pursuing after Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian." 6 And the officials of Succoth said, "Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hand, that we should give bread to your army?" 7 So Gideon said, "Well then, when the LORD has given Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, I will flail your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers."

Gideon came to Jordan, and passed over: (v4) or rather, had passed over, for he went over the Jordan river prior to Oreb and Zeeb being taken, but it is not mentioned until now so that the things that concerned the Ephraimites would be spoken of all together, without any interruption.

The three hundred men: (v4) that were with Gideon at the defeat of the Midianites in the valley of Jezreel. This shows that at the Midianites defeat and in their pursuit of them Gideon had not lost one man. The fact they want to continue on manifests the same zealous spirit as Gideon had, for even though they were faint with hunger and fatigued, they were still eager to continue on against the enemies dwelling in their country and continued to pursue them.

Gideon said to the men of Succoth: (v5) the name Succoth means "booths/tents," and the place was so named, or re-named, because of the "booths" which had been erected there by Jacob on his return from Padanaram (Gen. 33:17). It was a place beyond Jordan in the tribe of Gad and inhabited by Israelites and on his path as he was pursuing the Midianites on the other side Jordan in their flight to their own country.

Please give loaves of bread: (v5) being engaged in the common cause of all Israel, Gideon had a right to expect support and encouragement from all his countrymen, and patriotism should have ruled at such a time, but instead there was civil discord as the following shows. Gideon asks the men of Succoth to give his men some loaves of bread. He was not asking them to leave their families and join him in pursuing his and their enemies (which was common to do), but only to give him some loaves of bread for his fatigued and hungry men.

To supply bread to one own hungry countryman, who were fighting their battles, was not only the right thing to do, but also an act of compassion and common decency. Some suspect that one of the reasons the men of Succoth refused to give Gideon bread, was fear that should the Midianites on the east of the Jordan river overcome Gideons men, and they heard that the inhabitants of Succoth had given Gideons army food, they would be the first to suffer the wrath and vengeance of the neighbouring-Midianites and their bondage would be made harder than it was before. Rather than risk any danger, they not only acted selfishly and indifferent

to the men's hunger and fatigue, but also showed a total lack of compassion and ungratefulness toward the men risking their lives to deliver them from the bondage of their enemies. Upon seeing such a lack of compassion and ungratefulness, Gideon's humble and good spirit was greatly offended and stirred to great resentment.

I am pursuing after Zebah and Zalmunna: (v5), to persuade the men of Succoth to give his weary troops some bread, Gideon tells the men of Succoth that:

- He is pursuing the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, for as yet the Midianites were not fully crushed.
- His goal was to complete the conquest, and thoroughly deliver Israel from their bondage of the Midianites on both sides of the Jordan river.
- By doing this the bravery of his men would greatly benefit the people of Succoth as it would many other Israelites.

The men of Succoth respond, saying, "Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in your hand?" (v6) The general meaning seems to be, "Are you absolutely sure you will be completely victorious, that we would be secured from their vengeance if you do not utterly destroy these kings?" We cannot know whether the tone of the men of Succoth was one of scorn or one of cowardice, but it matters little, for in either case, they were guilty of a lack of compassion, of faith, of courage and of patriotism. Especially since Gideon and his men were risking their lives to deliver them and the rest of their country from a cruel bondage of the Midianites. At this time the army of Zebah and Zalmunna was around 15,000 men. This was all who were left of the entire army of the people of the East, for Gideon and those with him had destroyed 120,000. (v10). The fact Gideon had destroyed such a vast number of Midianites, should have inspired the men of Succoth with faith and trust in God, rather than fear.

I will flail (tear in KJV) your flesh: (v7) in answer to the princes of Succoth lack of compassion and support Gideon, says, "when the LORD has delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand," notice, there is no doubt in Gideon's statement, that the LORD will give him the victory over these two kings and their army of 15,000. (v10). Contrasting Gideon's great faith and trust in the LORD, and his courage and passionate concern for his brave men, against the men of Succoth total lack of faith and compassion for his courageous men who were risking their lives to free the Israelites, including the people of Succoth, from the cruel bondage of the Midianites, it's understandable why Gideon would respond to them, with such fierceness.

To better understand Gideon's extremely harsh response, it helps to understand, that everyone is largely influenced by the spirit and culture of the age in which they live. During these ancient times there was mass killing on battlefields, and thousands slaughtered by hand held swords, often in one day. Surviving warriors would return to their tents, hardly recognisable because of the thick mass of blood covering their bodies. For these reasons there was far greater indifference and less value placed on human life and far greater insensibility to the infliction of pain than there is today in civilised countries that have a deeper sense of humanity. Succoth was near a wilderness that abounded with thorns and briars, so it was natural that Gideon would refer to this type of punishment. This is an extremely cruel torture, that captives were often subjected to in ancient times. It is said that prisoners were laid naked on the ground, and then thorns and brier branches were placed over them and pressed down or dragged over them, or cartwheels would be driven over them tearing their flesh, and crushing them to death.

- **Judges 8:8-9:** 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. ⁹ And he said to the men of Penuel, “When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower.”

From Succoth Gideon went up to Penuel, which was also in the tribe of Gad, on the heights above the Jordan valley, on the southern bank of the Jabbok. The name means “face of God,” from Jacob’s vision.

- Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, “For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered.” (Gen. 32:30).

It is again mentioned in (1 Kings 12:25), but the exact site has not been identified. The men of Penuel answered Gideon as the men of Succoth had answered him, denying his request in the same uncompassionate manner. Gideon, threatens that he will break down their tower. It maybe that the men of Penuel trusted in their fortified tower to protect them from the Midianites, and this trust strengthened their uncompassionate and strong stance in refusing to give Gideon’s fainting warriors bread, which would explain why Gideon made such a specific threat. His confident anticipation of a triumphant return evidences the strength of his faith

GIDEONS ATTACKS ZEBAH AND ZALMUNNA ARMIES

JUDGES 8:10-12

- **Judges 8:10-11:** Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor with their army, about 15,000 men, all who were left of all the army of the people of the East, for there had fallen 120,000 men who drew the sword. ¹¹ And Gideon went up by the way of the tent dwellers east of Nobah and Jogbehah and attacked the army, for the army felt secure. ¹² And Zebah and Zalmunna fled, and he pursued them and captured the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and he threw all the army into a panic.

Karkor: (v10) means, “a safe enclosure.” It was a city on the east side of the Jordan river, and the place where Zebah and Zalmunna and the 15.000 men of war fleeing Gideon rested, and the scene of Gideons third battle (the first being in the Jezreel plain and the second at the fords of the Jordon River). The exact location is unknown, but it was somewhere near Nobah, in the half-tribe of Manasseh in Gilead.

That drew the sword: (v10) this expression refers to fighting men that were expert and skilled in war.

Nobah: (v11) was in Gilead, and belonged to the tribe of Manasseh. (Num. 32:42).

Jogbehah: (v11) was a fortified city in the tribe of Gad (Num. 32:34-35), the exact location has not been identified.

There fell one hundred and twenty thousand men: (v10) that drew a sword (i.e., skilled men of war), of the Arabians (the forces of the east), the Amalekites and the Midianites that camped against Israel in the Jezreel valley and who fled to the fords of the Jordan river that were slain and 15.000 that survived (Judges 8:10), which means that this host originally consisted of 135,000 fighting men. The execution of 120,000 men being slaughtered by hand held swords, is a terrible and horrific massacre, that gives us some insight into the bloodthirsty times and culture of this ancient era.

Zebah and Zalmunna: having put a great distance between the place of battle in the Jezreel valley, and arriving safely across the Jordan river, Zebah and Zalmunna were now resting from their long journey, for it is almost certain they now thought themselves out of all danger, supposing Gideon’s men, to be so tired after the great slaughter that, they would have neither strength nor will to pursue them for such a long period of time and great distance.

Gideon, being a master battle tactician avoided the main road, that ran through Nobah and Jogbehah, and instead took a wide circuit, through some nomad land and crossed the mountain range of Gilead to the northeast of Jabbok, where Zebah and Zalmunna were resting secure among their own nomadic tribes, and from here he came upon them unexpectedly, from the rear. It is certain that like before he attacked at night while they were fast asleep and captured the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and threw all the army into a panic.

GIDEON CAPTURES A MAN OF SUCCOTH

JUDGES 8:13-16

- **Judges 8:13-16:** Then Gideon the son of Joash returned from the battle by the ascent of Heres (before the sun was up in KJV). ¹⁴ And he captured a young man of Succoth and questioned him. And he wrote down for him the officials and elders of Succoth, seventy-seven men. ¹⁵ And he came to the men of Succoth and said, "Behold Zebah and Zalmunna, about whom you taunted me, saying, 'Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hand, that we should give bread to your men who are exhausted (weary in KJV)?" ¹⁶ And he took the elders of the city, and he took thorns of the wilderness and briers and with them taught the men of Succoth a lesson.

Verse thirteen is given different interpretations, the English Standard Bible translates it in the following way:

- Gideon the son of Joash returned from the battle by the ascent of Heres.

Here the Hebrew word (סרן cheres) is translated "Heres," which refers to the name of a mountain pass (i.e., the ascent of Heres), which means that Gideon took a wider path through the mountains rather than take the main road to Karkor which is what he did, so he could take Zebah and Zalmunna and their host (v10) by surprise.

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However, the King James Bible translates it in the following manner:

- Gideon the son of Joash returned from battle before the sun *was up*,

Here the Hebrew word (סרן cheres) is translated "sun" which means that Gideon came upon the host at Karkor during the night, which is what he did to take them while asleep and by surprise. Which raises the question, which translation is correct, the simple answer is, both for Gideon did travel through the mountains and did attack at night, added to this, the Hebrew word (סרן cheres) can be translated, "the heights of Heres, the sun-hills."

He captured a young man of Succoth: (v14) just prior to Gideon arriving in the city, he noticed a young man who belonged to it, and questioned him about the city's chief officials, asking who they were, what was their names and the places of their abode, the young man describes to him the princes of Succoth and seventy elders living in the city while Gideon writes a list of their names and addresses etc. Gideon was desirous to punish only the guilty, which is why a written list was needed, for it would enable him to punish only those who he had received such inhospitable treatment from.

It seems Succoth was governed by a sort of local Sanhedrin of seventy with their presiding princes/chief leaders/elders.

- Then the LORD said to Moses, "Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them, and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you. (Num. 11:16).

The number seventy plus chief leaders shows that Succoth was a place of considerable importance. The fact the men of succoth had said, "should we give bread to your men who are exhausted (weary in KJV)?" (v15)

enhances their guilt, and exposes their vile ingratitude even more, especially since refusing a few loaves of bread, to those who are risking their lives to enhance theirs shows an extreme lack of compassion and gratitude, and their sin against the laws of humanity choosing to follow the path of fear rather than trust in God and help their brethren.

God saw the people of Israel and God knew (God had respect unto them in KJV) (v25), some think the word "knew" implies a certain level of mercy, meaning:

- Gideon did not punish all the men of that city, only those who were guilty.
- Gideon tore their flesh with briers and thorns but not unto death.
- And he took the elders of the city, and he took thorns of the wilderness and briers and with them taught the men of Succoth a lesson. (v16).

He taught the men of Succoth: (v16), their unworthy behaviour and lack of godliness warranted public chastisement for the following two reasons:

1. It could prove to be contagious amongst others, and bring to ruin all the good effects of Gideon's government.
2. For the instruction and warning of future princes, elders and others of the city not to act in the same uncompassionate way toward their fellow brethren, especially when they are risking their own lives to enhance the well-being of theirs.
3. To terrify and place fear in the inhabitants of the city that they would shun such ungenerous behaviour in the future.

For the punishment Gideon took them to a proper place, where they might be made public examples of.

SNAPSHOT: the Midianites at Succoth were Israelites in name, but not in heart, as Gideon was, likewise, today there are Christians in name, but not in heart. Those who are Christians in heart, must like Gideon pursue and endure until the enemies of their faith are conquered and the purposes of God come to pass, even when they feel weak or faint as the armies of Gideon were because of the battle against the enemies of God, all the time holding fast to their faith, trusting in God, and knowing that as God enabled Gideon, He will enable all the faithful to persevere to the end, where victory and glory will be theirs.

GIDEON BREAKS DOWN THE TOWER OF PENUEL

JUDGES 8:17-21

- **Judges 8:17-21:** And he broke down the tower of Penuel and killed the men of the city.¹⁸ Then he said to Zebah and Zalmunna, "Where are the men whom you killed at Tabor?" They answered, "As you are, so were they. Every one of them resembled the son of a king."¹⁹ And he 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."²⁰ 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.²¹ Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, "Rise yourself and fall upon us, for as the man is, so is his strength." And Gideon arose and killed Zebah and Zalmunna, and he took the crescent ornaments that were on the necks of their camels.

The tower: (v17) the importance of this tower and its location led to its re-fortification by Jeroboam.

- Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim and lived there. And he went out from there and built Penuel. (1 Kings 12:25).

He beat down the tower: (v17) when the men of Penuel refused to give Gideon's tired and hungry men bread, he told them he would return and demolish their tower (v9), there is no mention of Gideon returning to kill the men, which leads many to suppose that they were killed for one of the following reasons:

- As Gideon approached to demolished their tower which he threatened, he would the men attempted to stop him and, in the fight, they were killed.
- Upon Gideon's approach the men fled to the tower for safety, and were killed when it was beaten down.
- He killed only the rulers who, had possession of the tower for from it they tyrannized the people.
- Though there is no mention of Gideon returning to kill the men, the writer presumes the reader would suppose that slaying the men that were guilty of refusing Gideons men bread was a given.

Where are the men Zebah and Zalmunna killed at Tabor? (v18), the men Zebah and Zalmunna killed were Gideons brothers, which means his question here is an expression of grief and a taunt, because he already knows that his brothers have been killed, and now intends to act as the blood-avenger of his brothers. Since we are not given any details concerning his brothers being killed, it is not possible to pin-point when they may have been killed, however, it was no doubt during one of the countless atrocities which the Midianite chiefs had perpetrated during their seven years of cruel oppression of the Israelites.

Like you, everyone resembled the son of a king: (v18), from this statement we learn that Gideons countenance was stately, commanding and authoritative, and his countenance carried weight as a king's presence does. Gideons, brothers appeared as kings, not because of royal robes or garments or by any type of outward splendour, but because they carried themselves with the same kind of stately countenance as Gideon did. Zebah and Zalmunna answered Gideons question by flattery and by complementing him and his brothers, perhaps hoping to soothe his wrath.

They were my brothers, the sons of my mother: (v19) his brothers by his mother's side, but not by his father's side. In all countries where polygamy and concubines were accepted, "the son of my mother" implies a closeness of relationship and a warmth of affection). At this time Gideons eldest son, Jether was standing alongside him. (Judges 8:20).

If you had saved them alive: (v19) by the universal law of nations, prisoners who had surrendered themselves, were to be made prisoners of war, not killed, which means Zebah and Zalmunna ought to have been saved, and since they were not Canaanites, Gideon was not obliged by any command of God to put them to death. However, they may have slain his brothers in cold blood. This is supported by the following two facts:

1. Jether was Gideons eldest son, and he is spoken of as being a young man (yet a youth in KJV) (v20), which means his brothers that were killed, would have been even younger.
2. We are told Jether did not kill Zebah and Zalmunna, because he was still a young man. (v20).

These facts imply that Gideons brothers were not at an age to go to war (20 years old) and therefore should have been taken captive, not killed, which would mean that that Zebah and Zalmunna deserved to die and as the avenger of blood, it became Gideon to put them to death.

He said unto Jether, "up, and slay them." (v20) the name Jether is another form of Jethro and means "pre-eminence." Following are some reasons Gideon may have told his son to slay Zebah and Zalmunna:

- To encourage his son to use weapons of war to kill Israel's enemies.
- To put the honour of the victory on his son, by having him slay two great enemies of Israel.
- So, the death of Zebah and Zalmunna would be more shameful, being put to death by the hand of a youth.
- To train Jether, in his youth, to be fearlessness against the enemies of Israel and give him prestige amongst the men of Israel. Much like Jael became a woman of renown, because she drove a tent peg through Sisera's head, (the commander of Jabin the king of Canaan), army, even though she was never involved in the battle. (Judges 4:21).

NOTE: when there were no public executioners it was not unusual in ancient times, for great men to sentence the guilty to death and carry out their execution.

- King Saul commanded his guards to kill the priests of the LORD, but they would not do it, so Saul commanded Doeg to kill them which he did. (1 Sam. 22:17-18).
- David called one of his young men and said, "Go, execute him," (the man who killed king Saul), and he struck him down so that he died. (2 Samuel 1:14-15).
- Samuel himself hacked Agag to pieces, because he had made women childless. (1 Sam. 15:32-33).
- When King Solomon was told that Joab had fled to the tent of the LORD, and was beside the altar, Solomon sent Benaiah to go and strike him down. (1 Kings 2:29).

Jether refused to kill Zebah and Zalmunna: (v20) Jether refusal to kill Zebah and Zalmunna was not an act of disobedience to his father, and not for fear of the kings doing him any harm (being bound), for verse twenty, tells us it was because he was still a youth, and being a youth, he most likely found it against his nature to kill two men, that could not defend themselves as most young people would.

For as the man is, so is his strength: (v21) this expression signifies, that as Gideon was a valiant man of strength skilled in war, he had strength and skill to slay Zebah and Zalmunna in a manner that their death would be instant, which skill his son being a young man (yet a youth in KJV) (v20), would not have, which means it would be very likely they would die a lingering and painful death.

Zebah and Zalmunna said, "rise and fall upon us." (v21) they knew they were guilty and must die, so they chose rather to die by the hand of Gideon the greater man, eminent for his strength and a valiant commander, which would be more honourable than to die by the hand of a youth of no renown, so Gideon rose and slew Zebah and Zalmunna.

Gideon took the ornaments on the necks of their camels: (v21) it was the custom to adorn the necks of their camels with little moons and crescent-shaped ornaments of gold and silver, and with collars of gold chains and strings of emeralds. These types of ornamental decorations prevailed among the Arabs as late as the time of Mahomet. Considering how large a camel's neck is, these gold and silver ornaments would be of great monetary value. However, (v24-27), show that these valued ornaments became a snare to Gideon, to his family and to Israel.

- **Judges 8:22-23:** 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.”²³ Gideon said to them, “I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the LORD will rule over you.”

On one level Gideon's refusal to be exalted to the head of the kingdom, manifests his noble character, but on another level his establishment of ungodly worship spoken of in the following chapter manifests an enormous lack of godly wisdom.

Rule over us: (v22) not as a judge, for he already ruled over them in this way, but as a king whose royal throne would be passed onto his son and his grandson so that the kingdom would be hereditary to his offspring. Gideon's great success had shown them the advantage of a United Kingdom under one great leader. But Gideon's regard for God's divine honour would rather sacrifice personal and family ambition and worldly riches than take the role of king and accept a royal dynasty, for his faith, was that the LORD alone was the King of Israel so he refused the offer choosing rather to remain as a Judge of Israel.

GIDEON MAKES AND EPHOD IN THE CITY OF OPHRAH

JUDGES 8:24-27

- **Judges 8:24-27:** 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.)²⁵ And they answered, “We will willingly give them.” And they spread a cloak, and every man threw in it the earrings of his spoil.²⁶ 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.²⁷ 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.

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A thousand and seven hundred shekels of gold: (v26) it is said that this would amount to around 20kg of gold that Gideon collected from the people and from the ornaments and gold collars around the camels' necks (v21, 27).

EPHOD: The Ephod was worn by the high priest it was an elaborate ceremonial robe that went from his shoulders to his knees. Another blue garment (called the robe of the Ephod) was worn under the Ephod that went to his feet. The entire Ephod was woven with gold, blue, purple and scarlet threads, and made of fine linen skilfully embroidered with gold thread. It was worn with a wide sash (called a girdle) tied around the waist. The breastplate containing the Urim and Thummin and the twelve gemstones with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel engraved upon them rested over the Ephod. The breastplate was square, measuring one span by one span (the width of an outstretched hand from little finger tip to out stretched thumb tip), on each of its corners it had four golden rings attached to it.

A golden ring was also fixed to each of the two straps worn over each shoulder with six names of the twelve tribes of Israel engraved on one stone and the other six tribes engraved upon the other stone. The breastplate was fastened to the shoulder straps by golden chains fixed to the golden rings in each of the shoulder straps and the two golden rings fixed in the top of each corner of the breastplate (Exod. 28:6-14) (Exodus. 39:2-5).

The high priests' garments may symbolize many things, following are a few suggestions:

- Jesus' glory and beauty and the truth that all who are in Christ our High Priest are continually before his heart.

- Its shoulder straps that hold the two pieces of the ephod together very likely symbolize the love and grace of God that cements the faithful to each other in the bond of brotherly and sisterly love.
- The gold, blue, purple, scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen, symbolize the multitudes of different and individual personalities and characters in the body of Christ.
- Skillfully worked and woven together symbolizes the work of the Holy Spirit molding and shaping those in Christ's Kingdom together for his glory.

Gideon made an ephod: (v27) it appears that Gideon being the civil ruler, desired to have a copy of the original ephod made and kept in his own city Ophrah. Following are the three most common ideas amongst scholars why Gideon would want an Ephod made:

1. To be hung up in a specific place built for it to act as a memorial of the great deliverance and victory God by His mighty hand had brought about for Israel. But this is hardly so, for if Gideon desired a memorial to be built for remembrance of their great victory, he would have built a memorial altar of stones, for this was the common practise.
2. For a high priest he would appoint for his city, so that they did not need to travel to Shiloh. This idea could be supported by the fact that Gideon may have been as zealous as Jeroboam was to keep the ten tribes' worship of LORD in his territory, and since at this time, the national sanctuary was in Shiloh which was in the region of the fierce tribe of Ephraim, Gideon like Jeroboam, wanted to keep the worship of the LORD in his own territory and city Ophrah.
3. In Judges chapter six we read of the Angel of the LORD visiting Gideon (v22) and after this visit, Gideon built an altar in Ophrah to the LORD and called it, "The LORD Is Peace," and that very night the LORD told him, "to build an altar to the LORD, with stones and take a bull and offer it as a burnt offering (v25-26), so Gideon did as the LORD had told him (v27). With this in mind it is also very likely Gideon intended to offer further sacrifices to the LORD, and therefore felt the need to have an Ephod for a high priest he appointed.

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Whatever the reason Gideon desired to have an Ephod made, it is unlikely he had any intention of idolatry or any other type of pagan worship, but rather (though unauthorised by God) desired to maintain the worship of the LORD as close as possible to what God had established with Israel. However, the land had rest forty years in the days of Gideon (v28) and he lived to a good old age (v32), which means that sometime during those forty years and prior to his death the Ephod became a snare to the people. Though Gideon did this with good intentions desiring to set up Israel's religion in his own city and family, the following shows that it did involve various sins:

1. Worshipping God by a device of his own making, which (no doubt brought about a form of superstitious worship), which was clearly forbidden.
2. Causing other priests to wear a copy of the true ephod, would cause them to think they had communion with God because of the Ephod when they didn't, which would result in them speaking false oracles in the name of the LORD, for it was only God's appointed high priest wearing the true Ephod with the Urim and Thummim in the breastplate of the high priest at the tabernacle that had this gift.
3. Transgressing God's command, to worship at a place he chose, rather than the place God chose.
4. Unintentionally laying a stumbling-block, and a step toward unlawful worship, before a people, who he knew to be prone to such corruptions.

Though Gideon, was guilty of these sins and had many wives (v30), it is unlikely he had sunk completely into idolatry, especially since verse thirty-three states, "As soon as Gideon died, Israel turned again to Baals and made Baal-berith their god," and he is listed in Hebrews chapter eleven, known as, "the Hall of Faith" with others of great faith (Heb 11:32).

ISRAEL HAD REST FORTY YEARS

JUDGES 8:28

- **Judges 8:28:** So Midian was subdued before the people of Israel, and they raised their heads no more. And the land had rest forty years in the days of Gideon.

This invasion of the Midianites and Arab hordes into Canaan was one of the severest scourges ever inflicted upon Israel; and both it and the deliverance under Gideon lived for centuries in the minds of the people, as the following shows.

- Make their nobles (of God's enemies and those who hate Him) like Oreb and Zeeb, all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna, (Psalm 83:11).

They raised their heads no more: meaning the people of Midian stood no longer in pride, arrogance and as being superior to Israel. Their defeat was so great that they had no hope of recovering their former strength or courage to rise up and conquer and oppress others. After this defeat we do not read of any effort of the Midianites attempting to afflict trouble and disruption to Israel, or any other nation:

The country was in quietness forty years: in the days of Gideon the land of Canaan was free from wars with Midian, and others and enjoyed undisturbed peace from the beginning of the Midianitish oppression to the death of Gideon.

12

GIDEON LIVES IN HIS OWN HOUSE

JUDGES 8:29-31

- **Judges 8:29-31:** Jerubbaal (Gideon) (Judges 1:1) the son of Joash went and lived in his own house.³⁰ Now Gideon had seventy sons, his own offspring (of his body begotten in KJV) for he had many wives.³¹ And his concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, and he called his name Abimelech.

Gideon had seventy sons, not all after his victories, for mention is made of Jether, his firstborn (v8), but this was the number of all his sons, both before and after his victories. The expression, "his own offspring" (of his body begotten in KJV) (v30) is used to show that they were his own sons, from his many wives and not sons that he was father-in-law to, having married a woman or women that had sons by a former husband. Having many wives was customary during these times amongst kings and rulers, even though it was against the word of the LORD. (Deut. 17:17).

His concubine in Shechem: (v31) in (Judges 9:18) she is called his female servant (maid servant in KJV). Generally, Concubines were looked upon as a secondary or half wife and as such were not held in the same esteem as proper wives, neither did they have authority to manage household affairs, but rather shared in the bed only and their children did not inherit. It appears that this concubine did not live in Gideon's house with his other wives, but lived at Shechem and Gideon met with her in Shechem when he went as a judge to try the people's causes.

She also bore him a son: (v31) this son whose name was Abimelech was one over and above the seventy and not counted in that number. (Judges 9:24).

Abimelech: is formed from Hebrew words for "father" and "king," and may be interpreted in a variety of ways, including "father-king", "my father is king," or "father of a king." Gideon may have given him this name because his concubine, desired it, so her son would be exalted, by name at least, above the other sons.

GIDEON DIES

JUDGES 8:32

- **Judges 8:32:** And Gideon the son of Joash died in a good old age and was buried in the tomb of Joash his father, at Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

The words, "good old age," carry the idea that he had a peaceful and prosperous life. He lived forty years after his war with Midian, with a large family, much wealth and riches and was esteemed among his people, and in favour with God and men, but the seeds of idolatry were growing, and came to full fruition after his death.

He was buried in the sepulchre of Joash his father, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites; a city which belonged to the family of the Abiezrites, who were of the tribe of Manasseh, in which Gideon lived, and his father before him.

ISRAEL TURNED AGAIN TO BAALS

JUDGES 8:33-35

- **Judges 8:33-35:** As soon as Gideon died, the people of Israel turned again and whored after the Baals (Baalim in KJV) and made Baal-berith their god.³⁴ 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,³⁵ and they did not show steadfast love to the family of Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) in return for all the good that he had done to Israel.

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Though not intending to, Gideon at some level had prepared the way for this apostasy by having an unauthorized ephod made.

Remembered not the Lord their God: (v34), this statement does not mean that they utterly forget the Lord their God, in the sense they had no longer had any memory of Him, but that they chose to serve and worship other gods rather than the Lord God of Israel, and in this sense, they forgot Him. Forgetting and forsaking the Lord their God and the worship of Him, showed an extreme lack of gratitude, especially since He had delivered them from the hands of Midian, and not one of the nation's round about them, as Edom, Moab, Ammon etc., were attempting to oppress them while Gideon lived.

Whored after the Baals (Baalim in KJV) and made Baal-berith: (v33) the name Baal means "owner" or "lord," it was a chief male god of the Canaanites, in the plural it is Baalim. Each locality had its own special Baal often summed up under the name of Baalim, or lords. Their statues were commonly built on high places and their worshippers offered them burnt offerings. (Jer. 19:5).

Baal-bereth: means, the Lord of the Covenant, it carries the idea, the God of covenants or sworn treaties. It was the name of one or two local gods worshiped in the earliest Israelite period. The centre of this apostasy was at Shechem in ancient Canaan.

Jerubbaal: on the day Gideon was saved from being put to death for breaking down the altar of Baal and the Asherah beside it, he was called Jerubbaal," meaning, "Let Baal contend against him," because he broke down his altar. (Judges 6:30-33). From this point onward Gideon is mostly referred to as Jerubbaal.

Neither showed they kindness to the house of Gideon: (v35) it is shocking that they did not show kindness to Gideon and his family, especially since he had:

- Put his life in great danger for their sake.
- Delivered them out of the hands of their cruel oppressors.
- Administered justice to them and protected them in their civil and religious freedoms.
- Bought peace to their land, that they could raise their families in safety and without fear.

Even though Gideon had done all these good things, it should not surprise any of us that the people were so ungrateful to Gideon and his family, since the heart of anyone who turns from the God who had done so much for them, to worship other gods has truly become ice cold, utterly selfish and empty of gratitude and thankfulness and their mind wholly depraved and blind to what is morally right.

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.

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