

Judges Chapter 8

Judges 8:1 "And the men of Ephraim said unto him, Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst us not, when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites? And they did chide with him sharply."

“Ephraim” was the most prominent of the 12 tribes of Israel. The tabernacle was located in their territory, and Joshua was one of their descendants. Impressed with their own importance (Joshua 17:14), the men of Ephraim complained about not being included in the call to war.

It appears that, the pride of those of Ephraim has come forth, now that the battle is won. They are too proud of themselves. There could possibly be a little jealousy between the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh as well. They are acting offended, that they were not consulted before the war began.

Verses 2-3: Gideon’s diplomatic response, claiming that he had accomplished nothing compared to the Ephraimites, momentarily preserved the fragile cooperation between the tribes (Prov. 15:1). It also allowed him to stay focused on the mission: defeating the enemy. But this account reveals the resentment and jealousy that surfaced in the aftermath of victory. God’s people face the same danger today. Churches and Christian organizations break down when selfish concerns overshadow the cause. “Abi-ezer” was Gideon’s clan.

Judges 8:2 "And he said unto them, What have I done now in comparison of you? [Is] not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abi-ezer?"

“Gleaning of the grapes”: Ephraim resented being slighted in the call to battle but was placated by Gideon’s compliment. His figures of speech implied that Ephraimite capital punishment of the two fleeing Midianite leaders (7:25), was an image drawn from their grape horticulture. It played a more strategic role than taking part in the “the vintage of Abi-ezer”, the suicide of the enemy under Gideon’s leadership (compare verse 3).

It seems as though Gideon is a very humble person. He is explaining that their help in this matter was of utmost importance. Gideon is not looking for glory for himself. He is willing for Ephraim to get the credit for the victory.

Judges 8:3 "God hath delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb: and what was I able to do in comparison of you? Then their anger was abated toward him, when he had said that."

A high honor this that was conferred upon you, and with which you may be well contented.

"And what was I able to do in comparison of you?" What he had done in defeating and pursuing the army of Midian, in slaying and taking any of them prisoners, was nothing in comparison of

what they had done. Nay, he signifies that he was not capable of doing anything worth mentioning without them. The glory of finishing this conquest was reserved for them.

"Then their anger was abated towards him when he had said that": It being what gratified their pride and was pleasing to them. And this conduct of Gideon showed him to be a wise and humble man.

Gideon is a wise statesman as well as a great warrior. He has chosen his words of praise carefully. He reminds them that they killed Oreb and Zeeb. He is giving them full credit for what they have done. Gideon praised them instead of himself, and they enjoyed the praise. They were satisfied.

The residents of the various towns were reluctant to help "Gideon", lest his victory prove to be but partial and the enemy return and punish them.

Verses 4-7: Gideon pursued the enemy until they were completely destroyed, just as God had commanded, because as long as they remained, there would be no peace in Israel.

Judges 8:4 "And Gideon came to Jordan, [and] passed over, he, and the three hundred men that [were] with him, faint, yet pursuing [them]."

That river (see note on Judges 7:25). He and three hundred men that were with him, at the defeat of the Midianites in the valley of Jezreel. So that neither at that or in the pursuit of them, had he lost one man.

"Faint, yet pursuing them": They were faint with being up all night, and continually blowing their trumpets. And had been upon the pursuit of their enemies ever since the defeat. And yet, though they were so faint, they did not leave off the pursuit, but were eager at it.

This happened earlier, before Gideon's conversation with the Ephraimites. Gideon and his men pursued them all the way to Jordan.

Judges 8:5 "And he said unto the men of Succoth, Give, I pray you, loaves of bread unto the people that follow me; for they [be] faint, and I am pursuing after Zebah and Zalmunna, kings of Midian."

The name Succoth means "booths," and the place was so named, or re-named, because of the "booths" which had been erected there by Jacob on his return from Padan-aram (Gen. 33:17; Joshua 13:27). It was situated in the tribe of Gad. The "valley of Succoth" is mentioned in (Psalms 60:6; 108:7).

"Loaves of bread": The loaves are round cakes. His request was a very modest and considerate one. He did not "requisition" them for forces, or for intelligence, or for any active assistance. Because he might bear in mind that they on the east of Jordan would, in case of any reverse or

incomplete victory, be the first to feel the vengeance of the neighboring Midianites. But to supply bread to their own hungry countrymen, who were fighting their battles, was an act of common humanity which even the Midianites could not greatly resent.

"Unto the people that follow me": Literally, which is at my feet, as in Judges 4:10.

"Zebah and Zalmunna": These were Emîrs of higher rank than the Sheykh's Oreb and Zeeb. Though Josephus calls them only "leaders," while he calls Oreb and Zeeb "kings". They are called "kings of Midian" (malkai Midian) as in (Num. 31:8). Oreb and Zeeb are only called Sarim, the same title as that given to Sisera (Judges 4:2).

Gideon is asking for the bare necessities of bread, to keep his soldiers going in pursuit of the kings of Midian. "Succoth" is on the east side of the Jordan River. The men of Gideon have come a long way without food, and they are weak in their bodies.

Judges 8:6 "And the princes of Succoth said, [Are] the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thine army?"

The chief magistrates of the place made answer, one in the name of the rest. For the word said is in the singular number.

"Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hands": That is, are they taken prisoners, and handcuffed. Or their hands bound behind them, and put into the hands of Gideon, to do with them as he pleased? No, they were not; and they suggest they never would. With whom his little army would not be able to encounter, should they turn and fall upon them, which they supposed would be the case. And therefore, say they, when these are in thine hands, which they thought would never be, it will be time enough.

"That we should give bread to thine army?" For they feared, should they do that, these kings would hear of it, and they should suffer for it, and their bondage be harder than it was before.

They are not willing to help Gideon, because Gideon has not finished winning the war with the Midianites. They are afraid if they help them and they don't win, the Midianite kings will kill them.

Judges 8:7 "And Gideon said, Therefore when the LORD hath delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into mine hand, then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers."

"Briers": Gideon's threatened discipline of Succoth's leaders for refusing to help their brothers came due. He had them dragged under heavy weights over thorns and briers, which painfully tore their bodies. This was a cruel torture to which ancient captives were often subjected. He did it on his return, not wanting to delay the pursuit (verse 16).

This sounds to me that they will whip them severely with thorn switches. Notice Gideon does not say if, he says when the LORD delivers them in his hand.

Judges 8:8 "And he went up thence to Penuel, and spake unto them likewise: and the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered [him]."

A place not far from Succoth, and to which also Jacob gave name, from the Lord's appearing to him there face to face (Gen. 32:30). But here was nothing of God in this place now.

"And spake unto them likewise": Desired bread for his men, as he had of the inhabitants of Succoth.

"And the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered him": Denied him his request in the same jeering manner.

To go to Penuel from Succoth, he went up out of the Jordan valley to the mountains. They would not give Gideon's men any food either.

Judges 8:9 "And he spake also unto the men of Penuel, saying, When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower."

"Tower": They probably had defiantly boasted of their strength and defensibility because of the tower. He kept his promise and more (verse 17).

This tower possibly was some sort of lookout post. Penuel seemed to be a strategic place to the Jordan valley. Notice the punishment is against something they classify as very valuable to them.

Judges 8:10 "Now Zebah and Zalmunna [were] in Karkor, and their hosts with them, about fifteen thousand [men], all that were left of all the hosts of the children of the east: for there fell a hundred and twenty thousand men that drew sword."

Jerom under this word says, there was in his time a castle called Carcuria, a day's journey from Petra, which was the metropolis of Idumea. But whether the same with this is not clear.

"And their host with them, about fifteen thousand men": To which number Gideon and his three hundred men were very unequal. And yet, faint and weary as they were, closely pursued them, attacked and conquered them.

"All that were left of the hosts of the children of the east": The Arabians, who with the Amalekites joined the Midianites in this expedition. And perhaps the remainder of the army chiefly consisted of Arabians, the others having mostly suffered in the valley of Jezreel, and at the fords of Jordan.

"For there fell a hundred and twenty thousand men that drew sword": Besides infirm men, women, and children, which may reasonably be supposed. So that this host consisted of 135,000 fighting men.

In the previous battle with Gideon, they had lost 120,000 men and were now reduced to 15,000. This still would seem to be too many for this 300 men of Gideon. God fought for Gideon. God and this 300 men were plenty to take care of this army of the children of the east.

Judges 8:11 "And Gideon went up by the way of them that dwelt in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and smote the host: for the host was secure."

That is of the Arabians and Nabateans, who dwelt in tents for the sake of feeding their flocks, as the Targum and Jarchi. He did not pursue them in the direct road, but went a roundabout way, where these people dwelt. That he might surprise the host of the kings of Midian unawares. And he came upon them:

"On the east of Nobah and Jogbehah": The first was in the tribe of Manasseh, and the latter in the tribe of Gad, and both it seems were on the confines of those tribes (see Num. 32:35). Both words have the signification of height in them, this city very probably being built on an eminence. According to Bunting, Penuel was two miles from Succoth, Nobah two miles from Penuel, and Jogbehah four miles from Nobah and Karkor four miles from Jogbehah. Where he pursued the kings, and took them, after he had discomfited the army.

"And smote the host, for the host was secure": Having got over Jordan, and at night very probably, they thought themselves safe from Gideon's army. Who they could have no thought that they would come up with them so soon, on foot, weary, and fatigued.

"Nobah" was in the area of the half tribe of Manasseh, and "Jogbehah" was in the area of the tribe of Gad. The host they smote was the children of the east. They thought they were safe, but Gideon's men killed them.

Judges 8:12 "And when Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued after them, and took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and discomfited all the host."

Zebah and Zalmunna seem to have fled nearly due east to Karkor, which was probably an enclosure of some kind, perhaps a walled sheepfold (compare Num. 31:32). Its site is unknown; but it was near Nobah, in the half-tribe of Manasseh in Gilead (Num. 32:40). And Jogbehah was in the tribe of Gad (Num. 32:34-35). Gideon, perhaps taking a circuit so as to come upon them from the east, fell suddenly upon them, apparently at night, surprised them, and smote them.

The two kings leading them were Midianites. Gideon caught them when they fled from the battle.

Judges 8:13 "And Gideon the son of Joash returned from battle before the sun [was up],"

To Penuel and Succoth, to chastise them for their ill treatment of him and his men. By which it may be gathered that he came upon them in the night, which was most convenient for him. Who had so small a number with him. And most likely both to surprise and terrify them by the remembrance of the last night's sad work, and the expectation of another like it.

Some of this happened at night, because Gideon was back before daylight.

Judges 8:14 "And caught a young man of the men of Succoth, and inquired of him: and he described unto him the princes of Succoth, and the elders thereof, [even] threescore and seventeen men."

Just before he came to the city, he spied a young man which belonged to it, and laid hold on him, and inquired of him about the chief magistrates of the city. Who they were, what were their names, and their places of abode.

"And he described unto him the princes of Succoth, and the elders thereof, even seventy seven men": By which it appears that this was no inconsiderable city to have so many princes and elders in it. These the young man described to Gideon, what sort of men they were, what their names, and where they dwelt. Or "he wrote unto him"; 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.

The young man they caught told Gideon about the 77 princes of Succoth. He described them so Gideon would know who they were.

Judges 8:15 "And he came unto the men of Succoth, and said, Behold Zebah and Zalmunna with whom ye did upbraid me, saying, [Are] the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thy men [that are] weary?"

Entered the city, and bespoke the inhabitants of it in the following manner.

"And said, behold, Zebah and Zalmunna, with whom ye did upbraid me": As not in his hands, and never would be, he being with his three hundred men an unequal match to them with 15,000. But he had taken them, and brought them with him, and perhaps spared them for this very reason. To let them see they were in his hands. And now calls upon them to behold them with their own eyes, concerning whom they had flouted and jeered him.

"Saying, are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thy hand, that we should give bread unto thy men that are weary?" He delivers their own express words, which he had carefully observed and laid up in his memory, for their greater conviction and confusion. Only he adds the character of his men at that time that they were "weary". To expose their vile ingratitude the more, that they should refuse them a few loaves of bread. Who were faint and weary in the service of them.

They have brought Zebah and Zalmunna back with them to Succoth, to show them they have really caught them. The men above are speaking of the princes, and possibly the elders. Gideon gives them proof of his right to punish them.

Judges 8:16 "And he took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth."

All of them, especially those of them who had been most guilty. And had them taken to a proper place, where they might be made public examples of.

"And thorns of the wilderness, and briers; which were near at hand, and soon cut up, for which he gave orders to certain people.

"And with them he taught the men of Succoth": Either the inhabitants of the place, as distinct from the elders, whose punishment he taught them to be cautious not to follow such examples, or to behave ill to their superiors. Or the princes and elders of the city are meant by the men of it, whom Gideon taught or chastised with thorns and briers.

He switched them with thorn switches so they would remember this incident, and not make that mistake again.

Judges 8:17 "And he beat down the tower of Penuel, and slew the men of the city."

As he threatened he would (Judges 8:9). Whether this was before or after he had chastised the elders of Succoth, is not clear. One would think by the course he steered going from Succoth to Penuel, as he went, he should come to Penuel first at his return. However, he demolished their tower in which they trusted.

"And slew the men of the city": Perhaps they might, as Kimchi conjectures, resist when he went about to beat down their tower; on which a fight might ensue, in which they were slain. Or they might upon his approach, sensible of the offence they had given him, fly to their tower for safety. And then were killed in it when that was beaten down about them. In what manner this was done is not said; no doubt they had instruments in those days for demolishing such edifices.

This is exactly what he had said he would do. He tore down their tower. In addition, he killed the men of the city.

Judges 8:18 "Then said he unto Zebah and Zalmunna, What manner of men [were they] whom ye slew at Tabor? And they answered, As thou [art], so [were] they; each one resembled the children of a king."

Not at Penuel or Succoth, but when he had brought them into the land of Canaan, and perhaps to his own city Ophrah.

"What manner of men were they whom ye slew at Tabor?" Mount Tabor, to which these men had taken and hid themselves, in some caves and dens there, see (Judges 6:2). And these kings some little time before the battle had taken them, and slew them, of which it seems Gideon had notice. And some of his brethren being not to be found, he suspected they were the persons, and therefore asked this question.

"And they answered, as thou art, so were they": Very much like him in countenance and stature, stout, able bodied men, of a graceful and majestic appearance. As they died by the hand of the Midianites, so shalt thou. But the former sense seems best, and agrees with what follows.

"Each one resembled the children of a king": Being brought up in a delicate manner, as these persons seemed to have been. According to Jarchi and Kimchi, the sense is, they were like him, and had all one and the same form and lovely aspect, resembling kings' children. But according to Ben Gersom they were in general very much like Gideon, and one of them was like his children, who were then present. Particularly his eldest son, as appears from (Judges 8:20). It is said in the Misnah that all the Israelites are the children of kings.

Zebah and Zalmunna had killed Gideon's brothers at Mount Tabor. They tried to explain to Gideon, that his brothers looked like princes and they were afraid not to kill them. Gideon did not accept their excuses.

Judges 8:19 "And he said, They [were] my brethren, [even] the sons of my mother: [as] the LORD liveth, if ye had saved them alive, I would not slay you."

His brethren by his mother's side, but not by his father's side; or the phrase;

"The sons of my mother": Is added, to show that he did not mean brethren in a large sense, as all the Israelites were, but in a strict sense, being so nearly related as his mother's children.

"As the Lord liveth, if ye had saved them alive, I would not slay you": For not being Canaanites, he was not obliged by the law of God to put them to death. And by the law of nations, as they had surrendered themselves, and were made prisoners of war, they ought to have been saved. But as they appeared to be murderers, and had slain the Israelites in cold blood, they deserved to die. And the persons they had slain being Gideon's brethren, he was the avenger of blood, and it became him to put them to death.

Gideon was not a cruel man. If they had been compassionate on his brothers and not killed them, he would not kill them either. They did kill them though.

Verses 20-21: Asking a boy ("Jether his firstborn") to kill the two kings ("Zebah and Zalmunna") was an affront to them (Psalm 83:11). Jether's fear kept him from becoming the kind of man his father had become – a man of violence and brutality.

Judges 8:20 "And he said unto Jether his firstborn, Up, [and] slay them. But the youth drew not his sword: for he feared, because he [was] yet a youth."

"Jether ... slay them": Gideon desired to place a great honor on his son by killing the enemies of Israel and of God.

This is the right of the near kinsman to kill the slayers. That is what Gideon has told his son to do here. He was young and probably had never killed anyone. He could not do it.

Judges 8:21 "Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, Rise thou, and fall upon us: for as the man [is, so is] his strength. And Gideon arose, and slew Zebah and Zalmunna, and took away the ornaments that [were] on their camels' necks."

“Slew Zebah and Zalmunna”: The earlier Midianite scourge inflicted on Israel was the worst, so this victory lived long in their minds (compare Psalm 83:11).

Gideon himself killed them after they asked him to. The ornaments, such as these, were usually made of gold and made in the shape of a half moon. The men and women wore them and their animals as well. It is a sign of great worldly wealth, when the animals wear gold.

Verses 22-23: “Rule thou over us”: Israelites sinned by the misguided motive and request that Gideon reign as king. To his credit, the leader declined, insisting that God alone rule (compare Exodus 19:5-6).

Judges 8:22 "Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian."

The “men of Israel” credited “Gideon” for having “delivered” them from the Midianites rather than the Lord. Gideon not only neglected to build an altar in tribute to God’s deliverance, but he did not call the people to worship as others judges had done after their victories. Perhaps this omission accounts for Gideon’s eventual fall into the sins of pride and self-worship. When the glory goes to oneself rather than to God, pride and delusion are not far behind.

The men of Israel are full of gratitude for Gideon delivering them from the Midianites. They want this strong leader to be their king. They are also offering the kingship to pass down to his sons. Gideon is a humble man. He also knows that God does not want Israel to have a king. Gideon gives all the credit to God. He explains to them, that their only king is the LORD.

Verses 23-32: Gideon rightly refused the formal title of king, but he began to take on the accoutrements and mind-set of royalty when he asked for gold from the “prey”. Eventually, this request would lead to idolatry and polygamy. He also named his son “Abimelech”, which means my father is king” Gideon was call to be a judge and a deliverer. When he began to give ear to his friends’ flattery, he ran the risk of being something other than God had called him to be.

Judges 8:23 "And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you."

Not that he declined the government of them as a judge, to which he was raised of God, but as a king, for which he had no authority and call from God. The choice of a king belonging to the Lord, and not to the people.

"Neither shall my son rule over you": Which Abarbinel thinks he spake as a prophet, and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For after his death neither Jether his eldest son, nor any of the rest of his legitimate sons, ruled over them. For they were all slain by Abimelech, the son of his concubine, who was made king.

"The Lord shall rule over you; as he did": Their government was a theocracy, which they would have changed, but Gideon would not agree to it.

Gideon not only refuses to rule over them, but emphatically refuses to rule over them. They have no ruler but the LORD.

Verses 24-27: "Gideon ... made an ephod": This was certainly a sad end to Gideon's influence as he, perhaps in an expression of pride, sought to lift himself up in the eyes of the people. Gideon intended nothing more than to make a breastpiece as David did (1 Chron. 15:27 to indicate civil, not priestly rule. It was never intended to set up idolatrous worship, but to be a symbol of civil power. That no evil was intended can be noted from the subduing of Midian (verse 28), quietness from wars (verse 28), and the fact that idolatry came after Gideon's death (verse 33), as well as the commendation of Gideon (verse 35).

Judges 8:24 "And Gideon said unto them, I would desire a request of you, that ye would give me every man the earrings of his prey. (For they had golden earrings, because they [were] Ishmaelites.)"

Which he thought they would scarcely deny, and it was now a fair opportunity to make it, since they had offered him a crown, or to be king over them. And the favor he asked was;

"That you would give me every man the earrings of his prey": Or, "an earring of his prey"; for it is in the singular number. Every man one earring, as Abarbinel interprets it. For though they might have more, yet only one ear ring of every man is desired.

"For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites": So the Midianites and Ishmaelites are spoken of as the same. They being mixed and dwelling together, or very near each other (Gen. 37:25). And Kimchi accounts for it thus, why the Midianites are called Ishmaelites. Because they were the sons of Keturah, and Keturah was Hagar the mother of Ishmael. The Targum calls them Arabians, and who it seems used to wear earrings, as men in the eastern countries did (see Gen. 35:4). So Pliny says in the east it was reckoned ornamental for men to wear gold in their ears (compare Gen. 37:25, 28).

The Ishmaelites were descended from Ishmael, the son of Abraham by the servant girl. They were fleshly people. The descendants of Isaac were the spiritual people. The flesh and the spirit

have been fighting ever since. They adorned themselves (both men and women), with gold jewelry such as necklaces and earrings. The earrings of so many dead would be worth a tremendous amount of money.

Judges 8:25 "And they answered, We will willingly give [them]. And they spread a garment, and did cast therein every man the earrings of his prey."

Or, "in giving we will give". Give them with all their hearts, most freely and cheerfully.

"And they spread a garment, and did cast therein every man the earrings of his prey": Every man one, which would amount to no more than three hundred. Though perhaps those who joined in the pursuit might take many more, or otherwise the weight of them would not amount to what in the next verse they are said to weigh.

Verses 26-27: Taking the "gold" from the people (over 40 pounds' worth) and making some sort of an "ephod" (Exodus 28:29) with it, shows the extent of Gideon's pride. Gideon was a Benjamite, not a Levite. He had no business making items for worship or putting them anywhere other than the tabernacle in Shiloh. This ephod became a "snare" for Gideon and his family, they began to worship it. Gideon the idol-breaker became Gideon the idol-maker (Psalm 106:39).

Judges 8:26 " And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was a thousand and seven hundred [shekels] of gold; beside ornaments, and collars, and purple raiment that [was] on the kings of Midian, and beside the chains that [were] about their camels' necks."

Which, as Schuchzer computes, was eight hundred and ten ounces, five drachms, one scruple, and ten grains, of the weight of physicians. But as reckoned by Moatanus amounted to eight hundred and fifty ounces, and were of the value of 6800 crowns of gold. And, according to Waserus, it amounted to 3400 Hungarian pieces of gold.

"Besides ornaments": Such as were upon the necks of the camels (Judges 8:21), for the same word is used here as there.

"And collars": The Targum renders it a crown, and Ben Melech says in the Arabic language the word signifies clear crystal. But Kimchi and Ben Gersom take them to be golden vessels, in which they put "incense", or some distinctive smelling liquor, and so were properly smelling bottles.

"And purple raiment that was on the kings of Midian": Which it seems was the color that kings wore, as they now do. So Strabo says of the kings of Arabia, that they are clothed in purple.

"And besides the chains that were about their camels' necks": Which seem to be different from the other ornaments about them, since another word is here used. Now all these seem to have been what fell to his share, as the general of the army, and not what were given him by the people.

They gave them to him, and there were so many earrings, they weighed about 850 ounces. This was in addition to the ornaments, collars, purple raiment (of royalty), and the chains about the camel's necks.

Judges 8:27 "And Gideon made an ephod thereof, and put it in his city, [even] in Ophrah: and all Israel went thither a whoring after it: which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house."

The exact nature and form of the "ephod are unknown. Perhaps "Gideon" intended it as a means whereby the Israelites might know the will of God (compare Exodus 28:30; Lev. 8:8). How often religious objects become a means of idolatry rather than of spiritual perception! (Compare 32:4; 1 Kings 12:28).

An ephod was a garment of the high priest. It was a little like a vest. This was a sacred garment and was not to be worn except by the high priest. It was also not to be taken out of the tabernacle. This was part of the garment worn by the high priest, when God spoke to him through the Urim and the Thummim. It would have been forbidden for it to be in Ophrah first of all. It secondly, must not be publicly exhibited. Certainly, it should not be a thing of worship itself. This ephod could lead Gideon and all involved with this thing, into idolatry.

Judges 8:28 "Thus was Midian subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted up their heads no more. And the country was in quietness forty years in the days of Gideon."

By the hand of Gideon humbled and brought under, their power over Israel was broken, and they delivered out of their hands.

"So that they lifted up their heads no more": In a proud and haughty manner to insult them, and in a hostile way to invade and oppress them. Such a blow was given them that they could not recover themselves. Nor do we read of any effort of theirs ever after, or of their giving or attempting to give any disturbance to Israel, or any other nation.

"And the country was in quietness forty years in the days of Gideon": That is, the land of Canaan. It was free from wars with Midian, or any other people, and enjoyed undisturbed peace and tranquility. And that from here forward they had rest and quietness forty years. Which in all probability was the time Gideon lived after his victories.

God kept His Word. While Gideon was alive (40 years), there was peace for Israel. It seems, Midian would give no more trouble. They are defeated.

Judges 8:29 "And Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and dwelt in his own house."

That is, Gideon, Jerubbaal being another name of his (see Judges 6:32). Went and dwelt in his own house; which was at Ophrah, as appears from (Judges 9:5). The war being ended, he disbanded his army, and retired to his own house. Not that he lived altogether a private life there, but as a judge in Israel.

Remember Jerubbaal is speaking of Gideon. This is just saying, he went home to live.

Verses 30-31: "Many wives": Gideon fell severely into the sin of polygamy, an iniquity tolerated by many but which never was God's blueprint for marriage (Gen. 2:24). Abimelech, a son by yet another illicit relationship, grew up to be the wretched king in (Judges Chapter 9). Polygamy always resulted in trouble.

Judges 8:30 "And Gideon had threescore and ten sons of his body begotten: for he had many wives."

Not after his victories, for it is plain he had children before. Mention is made of Jether, his firstborn, as a youth able to draw a sword, and slay with it (Judges 8:20). But this was the number of all his sons, both before and after, and a large number it was. And the phrase "of his body begotten", or "that went out of his thigh" is used to show that they were his own sons, begotten in wedlock. And not sons that he had taken into his family by adoption, or that he was father-in-law to, having married a woman or women that had sons by a former husband. But these were all his own.

"For he had many wives": Which, though not agreeable to the original law of marriage, was customary in those times, and even with good men. And was secretly allowed; and this is a reason accounting for his having so many sons.

Gideon had 70 sons. Gideon was Judge over Israel for forty years. We know the spoils had made him rich. He lived richly with many wives.

Judges 8:31 "And his concubine that [was] in Shechem, she also bare him a son, whose name he called Abimelech."

"Abimelech was the ruler of the city of Shechem during the period of the judges (8:30 – 10:1). He was the son of Gideon by a concubine from Shechem. Abimelech tried to become king and managed to reign three years in Shechem (9:22). To eliminate all possible rivals, he killed the 70 sons of Gideon, his own brothers and half-brothers, who were potential successors to his father (9:5). Only the youngest son of Gideon, Jotham, escaped this massacre. Ultimately, Abimelech was killed in a battle when he went too close to the city's walls and a woman dropped a millstone on his head. He commanded his armor-bearer to kill him, so no one could say the he died at the hands of a woman (9:50-54 and Chapter 9).

"Abimelech" means father of a king.

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

Having lived it seems forty years after his war with Midian, blessed with a large family, much wealth and riches, great credit and esteem among his people. And in favor with God and men.

"And was buried in the sepulcher 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. And where there was a family vault, in which he was interred.

Gideon began and ended in this place. He did many wonderful things that he is remembered for.

Judges 8:33 "And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again, and went a whoring after Baalim, and made Baal-berith their god."

They went from God, and the pure worship of him, to idolatry.

"And went a whoring after Baalim": The gods of the Phoenicians and Canaanites, the several Baals of other nations, the gods were many of which they served. These they committed spiritual whoredom with; that is, idolatry: and particularly;

"Went whoring after Baalim": This was the general name, including all their idols. Whereof one here follows.

"And made Baal-berith their god": I.e., The lord of the covenant, so called. Either from the covenant wherewith the worshippers of this god bound themselves to maintain his worship, or to defend one another therein. Or rather, because he was reputed the god and judge of all covenants, and promises, and contracts, to whom it belonged to maintain them. And to punish the violators of them. And such a god both the Grecians and the Romans had.

This is the very same story we have heard with every judge. The people are relatively faithful to God as long as the judge is alive. The minute the judge dies, they begin to worship false gods again. They go the way of the rest of the world. Believers must not be part of the world. We live in the world while we are in the flesh, but we must not be partakers of the world and its ugliness.

Verses 34-35: Despite all his achievements, Gideon made no permanent spiritual difference in Israel. His story is inspiring, but his small concessions to evil eventually disgraced himself, his family, his people and Yahweh.

Judges 8:34 "And the children of Israel remembered not the LORD their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side:"

Or, as the Targum, the worship of the Lord their God. They forgot him, and forsook him, which showed base ingratitude.

"Who had delivered them out of the hands of their enemies on every side": Not only out of the hands of Midian, but all other nations round about them, such as Edom, Moab, Ammon, etc. Not one who were attempting to oppress them.

When things are going well, they soon forget that it is the blessings of God upon their lives that brings the great blessings. They have forgotten that God took 300 men, and put 135,000 Midianites to flight.

Judges 8:35 "Neither showed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, [namely], Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had showed unto Israel."

But, on the contrary, great unkindness and cruelty. Slaying his seventy sons, as related in the following chapter.

"According to all the goodness which he had showed unto Israel": In exposing his life to danger for their sake, in delivering them out of the hands of their oppressors. In administering justice to them, and in protecting them in their civil and religious liberties, and leaving them in the quiet and peaceable possession of them.

Gideon (Jerubbaal), through the power of the LORD, had led them to victory against their enemies. They had been delivered from the bondage of serving these evil leaders. They forget they did not have enough to eat until God moved upon Gideon to lead them against these people. They not only have forgotten God, but have forgotten Gideon and his family as well.

Chapter 8 Questions

1. What are the men of Ephraim complaining about in verse 1?
2. What is their problem?
3. Verse 2 indicates that Gideon is a very _____ person?
4. What two princes had God delivered into the hands of the Ephraimites?
5. What condition were Gideon and the 300 men in, when they came to the Jordan and passed over?
6. What did he ask of the men of Succoth?
7. Who was Gideon chasing?
8. Where is "Succoth" located?
9. How did the princes of Succoth answer him?
10. What does Gideon say, he will do to them after the battle is over?
11. Where did he go next, for some food for his men?
12. What did they say to Gideon?

13. What did Gideon promise to do to them, when the war was over?
14. Where did Gideon find Zebah and Zalmunna?
15. How many men were with them?
16. How many had been killed in the first battle?
17. Where was "Nobah" located?
18. Where was "Jogbehah" located?
19. What happened to the men with the two kings of Midian?
20. Where did Gideon take the two kings, after he caught them?
21. How did he punish the leaders of Succoth?
22. What punishment did Penuel get from Gideon?
23. Who had Zebah and Zalmunna killed that Gideon loved?
24. What happened to these two kings?
25. Why was Gideon's son not able to kill them?
26. Who actually killed them?
27. What did the men of Israel ask Gideon to do?
28. Did he accept?
29. What did Gideon desire of them?
30. What did Gideon do with the gold?
31. How long did they live in peace?
32. What happened, when Gideon died?