

JUDGES

4. How many were fearful and returned home?
5. To what number was the army finally reduced?
6. What was the name of Gideon's servant?
7. What was destroyed by the barley cake in the soldier's dream?
8. What was the battle cry of the soldiers of Israel?
9. What were the names of the two princes of Midian slain by Gideon's men?
10. What other people were with the Midianites in the battle?

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 8

- Vv. 1-9 *Gideon's pursuit of the Midianites.* The men of Ephraim asked why they had not been called to help in the beginning of the battle. Since they had rendered valuable service in holding the fords of the Jordan, Gideon complimented them; and their anger subsided. The men in Succoth and the men in Penuel, sites beyond the Jordan, refused to aid Gideon; and he threatened them as he continued his pursuit of the fleeing armies of Midianites, Amalekites, and the children of the East.
- Vv. 10-21 *The slaughter of the armies of Midian.* The two kings, Zebah and Zalmunna, were caught in Transjordan and put to death. The men who had refused to aid Gideon's cause were punished. Spoils of war were obtained, and Gideon returned to his home in victory.
- Vv. 22-35 *Israel's continued idolatry.* Gideon asked for the gold of the spoils to be given to him. He made an ephod of it. Whether it was worn or not has not been made clear, but one thing

STUDIES IN JOSHUA-JUDGES-RUTH

is clear—Israel turned the ephod into an idol. Not only did they give worship to this object, but they turned their backs on God after Gideon's death and worshiped the Baalim, especially Baal-berith.

LESSONS FOR LEARNING

1. "*Faint, yet pursuing*" 8:4b. Gideon's three hundred men had routed the armies of the Midianites, Amalekites, and the children of the East; but they did not stop with an initial victory. They pursued the men across Jordan. Their condition is described tersely in the words, "faint, yet pursuing." Such is often the case with Christian soldiers. We are told that we shall reap if we do not faint (Galatians 6:9). We are encouraged to be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord (I Corinthians 15:58), even though we may be faint while pursuing.
2. "*The Lord shall rule over you*" 8:23. Gideon's reply to those who wanted him to rule over them shows that he believed all powers are ordained of God. There is no power, but what has been ordained of Him (Romans 13:1). The government in Gideon's day was truly a theocracy, and God was not ready for the people to have a king. Later, He selected a man after his own heart to rule over them. Earlier in the days of Saul, the people wanted a king "like all the other nations" (I Samuel 8:5, 20). Such a reason was invalid. God's people are to be separate; He is to rule over them.
3. *The sin of ingratitude.* Many sins are entered against the record of the people of Israel. It was especially regrettable that they should not show kindness to the house of Gideon according to all the goodness which he had

shown to Israel. The sin of ingratitude is one of mankind's worst crimes. The people of Israel should have shown more respect to the memory of their great judge than to turn their backs on the ways in which he had led them.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Gideon Captures and Slays Midian's Kings 8:1-28

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.

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 Abiezer?

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.

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

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.

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?

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

13 And Gideon the son of Joash returned from battle before the sun was up,

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 three score and seventeen men.

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?

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.

17 And he beat down the tower of Penuel, and slew the men of the city.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.)

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.

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.

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.

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.

1. *What was the complaint of the men of Ephraim?* 8:1

The men of Ephraim spoke sharply to Gideon because he had not called them at first when he went out to attack the Midianites. Gideon had been assisted by men out of Naphtali and Asher, as well as those of his own tribe, Manasseh. Issachar was involved since it was in their territory that the Midianites had encamped. Manasseh was Gideon's own tribe, and it is said that his own family of Abiezer followed him. The other two tribes, Asher and Naphtali, were neighbors to the north and west and might have been expected to participate in the battle. When Gideon needed help to guard the fords of the Jordan, however, he finally asked Ephraim to assist (7:24). The men of Ephraim evidently felt they were an important tribe and should have been called earlier.

2. *What was the meaning of Gideon's answer?* 8:2

They had won honor by what they had done. The help which Ephraim gave was sorely needed and came at a crucial time. Gideon told them that their assistance was of even greater importance than the work he had done. He made this clear through a figure which was meaningful to the men of his day. He compared the full bunches of grapes which would have been gathered in Manasseh to the few remaining bunches which may have been left on the vines in Ephraim. He said that the gleanings in Ephraim were better than the main crop in Manasseh. In other words, the things left over in Ephraim were better than the main part of Manasseh. This lofty view of the goodness of Ephraim seemed to satisfy those who had chided him.

3. *Where was Succoth?* 8:5

Succoth is the place where Jacob built booths of tree branches, grasses, and reeds when he returned from Haran. The name, *Succoth*, (Genesis 33:17) means "booths." A ruin, named Sakut, lies ten miles south of Beisan, on the west bank of the Jordan; but this is on the wrong side, for Succoth belonged to Gad (Joshua 13:27). The name may have been transferred across the river and Succoth should be located east of the Jordan and north of the Jabbok River.

4. *Where was Penuel?* 8:9

Jacob gave this name to the place where he wrestled with the angel (Genesis 32:30). The word means "the face of God" for Jacob thought he had seen God face to face. No mention is made of the place from the time when Jacob was there until the time when Gideon asked for help from the men who lived there. This spot is on the north bank of the Jabbok River since Jacob waited there alone after having sent the rest of the people across the river when he returned from Haran.

5. *Where was Karkor?* 8:10

Karkor was the place where Gideon surprised the two kings of the Midianites, Zebah and Zalmunna, who felt that they were safe with their army and out of the reach of Gideon. The place is not identified with certainty, but it must have been somewhere on the Mishor or Plain of Gilead. There is a tableland which rises east of the Jordan and is oftentimes referred to as the highlands of Gilead and Moab. A reference is made in Joshua 13:9 to the plain of Medeba. The Revised Version speaks of this as being the tableland. Some suggest that it corresponds to Karkar mentioned by Shalmaneser II, but this place is identified only as being south of Hamath. It is clear from the narrative that the Karkar here was east of the Jordan.

6. *Where were Nobah and Jogbehah?* 8:11

This site was one fortified and occupied by the tribe of Gad (Numbers 32:35). A spot four miles north of Amman in Jordan is now called Jebeiha, and some think this is the spot where Gideon finally defeated the Midianite kings. A passage in the Pentateuch says Nobah, the Manassite, "went and took Kenath, and the villages thereof, and called it Nobah, after his own name" (Numbers 32:42). Ancient Kenath is represented by the modern Kanawat, where there are traces of the architectural magnificence which Rome lavished on her colonies. The tanks, bridges, and many houses here are solidly built. Some do not think this site is the one where Gideon finally defeated a band of the Midianites because it is not especially close to Jogbehah, but no other site with a name resembling this has yet been discovered.

7. *What is the meaning of "taught"?* 8:16

He "disciplined" them. When he asked them for help, they refused. At that time, he threatened, therefore, to tear their flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers. When he came back, he caught a young man from their number. He gave him information which enabled him to carry out his threat. He taught them with "thorns of the wilderness and briers." Evidently he carried out some kind of corporal punishment. There is no mention here of his slaying these men, but he did slay some of the men of Penuel.

8. *When were Gideon's brothers slain?* 8:18, 19

They were probably slain in battle. The Midianites had oppressed the people of Israel for a long time before Gideon arose to avenge Israel of her adversaries. He made inquiry about the activities of the Midianites in his territory and especially at the battle of Mount Tabor. When the Midianites described those whom they had slain on this occasion, he knew they were his own people. Since they

had admitted their killing of these men, he deemed the kings of Midian worthy of death. Since his own son, Jether, was so young that he refused to carry out his father's order to kill them, Gideon, himself, slew the kings.

9. *Why did Israel want Gideon to rule over them?* 8:22

Later on, the people of Israel came to Samuel and asked him to appoint a king over them. At that time, they said they wanted a king similar to those who ruled over all the other nations. God had warned them in Deuteronomy 17 that they should not put a king over them as other nations had, but that he was to be a man carefully chosen. In one of his speeches Samuel also indicated that the people of Israel had wanted a king to deliver them from the oppressing Ammonites. In the account in Judges Israel appears to have confidence in Gideon. They wanted him to rule over them since he was a man in whom the Spirit of God dwelt. It is also possible they feared the constantly recurring attacks from the surrounding peoples, and thus felt they needed a king.

10. *Why did Gideon refuse to be a king?* 8:23

The government of the times has been called a theocracy. It was a government in which God was the omnipotent power. Such a form of government brought the people into a very close relationship to God. If they had a king who sat on a throne and he symbolized the highest power among them, they would be more likely to forget that God was their ruler. On this occasion, Gideon said, "the Lord shall rule over you."

11. *Why did Gideon call the Midianites Ishmaelites?* 8:24

The Midianites were descendants of Midian, who was a son of Abraham by Keturah. The Ishmaelites were descendants of Ishmael, who was a son of Abraham by Hagar. Since both groups of people were direct descendants of sons of Abraham, they were very closely related. Both were nomadic tribes and both engaged in commerce. When

Joseph was sold by his evil brethren, the Midianites and Ishmaelites were identified (Genesis 37:28): "There passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver." Throughout the years, these people were looked upon as being rather identical.

12. *How much was the value of the gold earrings?* 8:26

The Scripture says the weight of the golden earrings which the people gave to him was a thousand and seven hundred shekels of gold. The word, *shekels*, does not appear in the original text. The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* indicates that a gold shekel was worth about ten dollars. Since this volume was copyrighted in 1939, we get an idea of the worth of a dollar at that particular time. In any time, seventeen thousand dollars is a sizable amount of money, and this is the value which would be placed on the earrings which were surrendered. The ephod which was made from the gold must have been of value similar to that of some of the great crowns prepared for heads of states in modern European countries.

13. *Why were there so many ornaments?* 8:26b

It was typical of these Oriental nomads to measure their worth by the number of jewels of silver and gold which they possessed. They did not stop to own land and build houses. They did not count their net worth in flocks and herds alone. Even those droves of camels were adorned by the chains which they put around their necks; and in every case, they displayed their wealth through the gold and the silver which they owned.

14. *How did he make an ephod?* 8:27

The ephod was a royal and priestly garment and he evidently formed one in the fashion of a coat of mail. It is not stated that he wore this ephod. It is possible he did wear it since other notable figures wore such garments (II Samuel 6:14). If he did not wear it, it must have

stood in some prominent place where people could admire it and remember the victory which had been won.

Gideon's Children; His Death 8:29-32

29 And Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and dwelt in his own house.

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

31 And his concubine that was in Shechem, she also bare him a son, whose name he called Abimelech.

32 And Gideon the son of Joash died in a good old age, and was buried in the sepulchre of Joash his father, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

15. Why does the narrator mention Abimelech? 8:31

Abimelech was the son of Gideon and his concubine who dwelt in Shechem. Since most of the history recorded in chapter nine deals with Abimelech's abortive attempt to be king over Israel, mention is made of him at this point. The closing verses of chapter eight are a summary of the closing days of the life of Gideon and make special reference of his family. He had seventy sons, and it is not clear whether Abimelech is counted among the seventy or is in addition to them. At any rate, special mention is made of him because of the importance of his role in later history.

16. What is said of the character of Gideon? 8:29-32

He was a good and venerable leader. We are told specifically that he did not erect a palace but went and dwelt in his own house. Mention is made of his seventy sons and his many wives. Special note is also made of Abimelech, the son of Gideon by a concubine in Shechem. We are finally told that he died in a good old age, and was buried in the tomb of Joash, his father, in their home Ophrah, a settlement of the Abiezrites.

Israel Turns from God 8:33-35

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.

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:

35 Neither showed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely, Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had showed unto Israel.

17. *What was Baal-berith and where was his temple? 8:33*

Baal-berith was the god of Berith, where his temple was located. He was worshiped in Shechem, where the covenant was made. After Gideon died, the Israelites turned their back on God. They worshiped many false gods, but they evidently made Baal-berith their chief god. The word signifies the "covenant Baal." In Judges 9:46 the name is changed to El-berith, "the covenant god." The covenant was an agreement made by the god with his worshipers and Baal-berith was probably known among the Canaanites as a covenant-keeping god. The form of worship must have been vile, as the people went "whoring after Baalim."

18. *What was the special notice made of Israel's attitude toward Gideon? 8:35*

The children of Israel not only forgot their covenant with Jehovah who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side; but in addition to this, they also forgot the good work of Gideon. They should have remembered how good Gideon had been to them and been faithful to the ways in which he had taught them to go. When men turn their backs on righteousness, their lives

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are out of harmony both with God and with man. They lower their standards of morals and ethics as well as lose their reverence for that which is holy.

TEN QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 8

1. What tribe chided Gideon for failing to call them at first?
2. What two kings of Midian did Gideon defeat?
3. What two cities east of Jordan refused to help Gideon?
4. How many Midianites remained with their kings?
5. How many had already been slain?
6. Who was Gideon's oldest son?
7. What did the men of Israel want Gideon to do for them?
8. What did Gideon make of the gold spoils of war?
9. How many sons did Gideon have?
10. What was the name of the false god Israel worshiped after Gideon died?

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 9

Vv. 1-6 *Abimelech made king.* Gideon refused the office when the people of Israel came to him and offered to make him their king. At that time, he said God was to be their ruler. Gideon's son, Abimelech, born of a concubine of Gideon's, accepted the opportunity to usurp the role of leadership in Israel. He slew the seventy sons of Gideon so that no one could dispute his being Gideon's sole heir. It was an abortive attempt to establish a monarchy in Israel and was ill-fated.

Vv. 7-21 *Jotham's fable.* Jotham told a story in the form of a fable which illustrated the folly of the people in making Abimelech their king.