

Deeper Discoveries

Judges



Lesson 6: Judges 8:22–35

Success Goes to His Head, and Gideon Acts Like a Canaanite King

Gideon's need for respect and honor—and his violent, bitter rage when he fails to be given what he thinks he deserves—shows that his success in battle has been the worst thing for him. He has become addicted to and dependent on his success...Back in 7:15, when Gideon knew his own weakness and understood that victory could only be by grace, he worshiped and honored God. But that is the last time we see him doing that. Now, he worships success and the honor it will bring him. He has entirely forgotten who it is that called him, equipped him, reassured him, and won the battle for him.

Now Israel ask Gideon to be a king: “Rule over us—you, your son and your grandson—because you have saved us” (Judges 8:22). Just as Gideon has begun to forget who it was who gave victory over Midian, so have the rest of Israel. *Gideon, you should be our king because you beat Midian*, is their reasoning.

Israel wants to reject God's method of ruling his people. A judge is anointed by him, to deal with the crisis at hand and to lead the people back to living under his rule. But if Gideon says “yes,” Israel will have a king appointed by humans, and rule will pass on down to others automatically.

Gideon discerns the underlying motive for asking for a king—they want to be ruled by a man, not by God (v 23). With a king, they would not need to look to God for salvation, and wait for him to send them a savior. The desire for a king is actually another effort at self-salvation. Gideon turns down their request: “I will not rule over you ... the LORD will rule over you” (v 23). They don't need a king to obey; they need to obey the King they have!

Verse 23 is really the last time that Gideon remembers who God is and who he is. Ironically and tragically, he almost immediately contradicts what he has just said. He has refused to be their king, because that position and honor belong to God alone—but then he starts to assume the honor due to a king. He asks for a financial reward for their deliverance (v 24), and becomes a very rich man (v 25–26—there are echoes of Israel making a golden calf to worship at the foot of Mount Sinai on the way to the promised land, see Exodus 32:1–4). Then “Gideon made the gold into an ephod, which he placed in Ophrah, his town” (Judges 8:27).

What is going on here? The ephod was worn by the high priest in the tabernacle, the tent where God was present among his people, which at this point was sited in Shiloh (18:31). On its front were the Urim and Thummim—two stones that were used to receive “yes” or “no” answers from God (they may have been like coins, which were flipped; likely, two upsides meant “yes,” two

downsides meant “no,” one of each meant “no answer”). The ephod designated the true place of God’s dwelling, and was a way to discern God’s will in times of crisis.

In making his own copy, Gideon essentially sets up his home town as a rival place of worship. He wants to encourage people to come to him for guidance, to see his home town as the place where God can be found. Gideon has used God to consolidate his own position, instead of using his position to serve and be used by God. (Timothy Keller, *Judges for You*, 96–98)

8:22–23 Gideon’s refusal reflects the belief that only the Lord was to rule over Israel, but Gideon does not correct their error by attributing Israel’s victory over the Midianites to the Lord. Theologically, Gideon is accurate: the Lord should rule over Israel (see Introduction: Theology). Unfortunately, Gideon’s subsequent actions reveal his hypocrisy, since he is seduced by the lures of being king (vv. 23–32). (*NIV BTSB*)

Rule over us ... the LORD will rule. These verses demonstrate a major antithesis in the book: the people desire a human king to rule over them, yet the Lord is their true king. This conflict finds its climax in 1 Sam. 8. These verses also show Gideon’s inner conflict regarding whether he should be king. (*Ref SB*)

8:26 Despite Gideon’s protest that he would not become a king (see v. 23), the ornamentation of the Midianite kings—**the crescent ornaments and the pendants and the purple garments**—was now Gideon’s. (*ESV SB*)

8:27 ephod. The genuine ephod of the high priest is employed for seeking the Lord’s will (1 Sam. 23:9–11; 30:7, 8).

whored after it. Gideon, the greatest of the judges until Samuel, gives the people occasion to sin (2:17 and notes).

a snare to Gideon and to his family. Gideon’s father was an idolater (6:25), and now Gideon falls into the same sin. (*Ref SB*)

8:28–32 The narrative ends where it started—at **Ophrah**—suggesting that nothing had changed. Baal had changed his shape, but the idolatry continued. The oppressive Midianite kings had been replaced by Gideon, who was acting like the worst kind of king. Along with supporting idolatry, Gideon married many wives and had **seventy sons**, a family structure forbidden to kings in Deut 17:17. He also intermarried with the local population, taking a concubine from Canaanite **Shechem**, with a son named **Abimelech**, which literally means “my father is king.” (*CSB SB*)

Note that Gideon’s having many wives stands in great contrast with the first Judge, Othniel, who was a righteous man who married just one woman who was from his tribe, in accordance with the LORD’s instructions to Israel. In fact, Gideon’s son Abimelech, born to his unwisely chosen Canaanite wife, caused enormous damage and evil for Israel (Judges 9), even destroying Gideon’s family after Gideon’s death—until his head got crushed by a woman (9:53), much as was Sisera’s fate. And the next Judge we study is even farther removed from Othniel’s example of righteousness...