

September 8

Scriptures: Read Judge 8

Key Verse: "... I will not rule over you, nor shall my son... the Lord shall rule over you."
(8:23)

Overview

The proud and selfish Ephraimites were angry because Gideon had not called upon them earlier that they might share in the glory of the victory (which belonged totally to the Lord), as well as in the spoils of war. It seems they were habitual complainers (e.g.12:1-4; Josh.17:14), but Gideon was wise and knew how to deal with them in order to turn away their wrath and keep the peace. He used a soft and gentle answer which lifted them up to seem better than himself (vv.1-3; Prov.15:1; Phil.2:3-4).

Gideon and his band of 300 men were not yet finished their battle with the Midianites until their kings (of two different tribes) were captured. Their pursuit took them across the Jordan to the territory of their fellow Israelites in Socoth and Peniel (where Jacob once wrestled with the Angel, Gen.32:30-31). Because of national disunity, these tribes had become separated and indifferent, as is evident in their refusal to give Gideon and his hungry men bread, possibly for fear of Midianite reprisal. They probably thought the Midianites, who were still great in number (even after losing the majority of their men—v.10), would easily defeat the small band of Israelites. When they were proven wrong, Gideon punished them just as he said he would (v.16-17).

Possibly the Midianites did not think Gideon would pursue them that far, for they felt secure and relaxed their guard, but Gideon once again attacked by surprise and was victorious (v.11). When the kings were captured, Gideon became not only their conqueror, but also a blood-avenger (Deut.19:6). It was his duty to kill them. They were responsible for the deaths of his brothers.

As a result of Gideon's conquest, the Israelite tribes, for the first time, expressed the desire for a king, as Moses had anticipated (Deut.17:14-15), and asked Gideon to rule over them. This was not in God's timing, and Gideon refused since he rightly believed, like Samuel, that Israel's only King and Sovereign was their Lord God (1 Sam.8:4-7).

Immediately after Gideon had shown great strength of faith, however, he asked for gold from the plunder, and without inquiring of the Lord, he crafted it into an ephod weighing about 31 kilograms. The reason he made it is unclear, but we know that an ephod was part of the high priest's attire, as God had instructed Moses, and attached to its breastplate were the Urim and Thummim which were somehow used to discover the will of God (Ec.28:6; 1 Sam.23:9-12; 30:7-8). It seems that counterfeit ephods were fashioned after the one that God had ordained. They became associated with "household idols" (17:5) and possibly with divination. Gideon may have made it in an attempt to bring Israel closer to God, but he failed, for it became an attempt to bring Israel closer to God, but he failed, for it became a stumbling block to Israel's weak and immature faith and developed into an object of idolatry. We read that this ephod "became a snare to

Gideon and to his household” (v.27), meaning they suffered because of it (e.g. the death of most of his sons, 9:5).

Surely Gideon was grieved by what had happened, and he must have repented. In his generation, he was considered a hero of faith (Heb.11:32), for he believed and obeyed God, and by faith he conquered a terrible foe, bringing a generation of peace to Israel (v.28).

Prayer

Please God, keep us from any “Ephod”, or religious thing which would turn our eyes from You alone to something man-made.