

Episode #526 Judges 8 Part 2 – Gideon 5: Gideon’s Snare

I. In the book of Judges, we have a brief record of the early history (the first centuries) of the history of the land of Israel. We see the leaders God chose, judges, who ruled under Jehovah, the King. Through the lives and work of these judges, we can learn about God’s works and ways.

II. We have been considering the career of Gideon, the fifth judge. Gideon and his three hundred soldiers had caught up with and captured the two captains Zebah and Zalmunna of the invading Midianite army. They had returned to punish the two Israelite cities that had refused to help them and had mocked them instead. Now, Gideon must decide what to do with his two, noble prisoners of Midian.

III. The End of Zebah and Zalmunna. Judges 8:18-21.

- A. Verse 18. He asks Zebah and Zalmunna about the kind of mortal men they slew at Tabor (Mound)? They say they looked like Gideon: All of them looked like sons of a king. This tells us something about Gideon’s appearance, not like his cowardly words! We did not read about this earlier, a common thing in the Bible.
- B. Verse 19. They had killed his brothers at Tabor. Sons of his mother = in a time of polygamy, this means full brothers, not half-brothers. He swears by the LORD that if they had spared his brothers he would not have slain them.
- C. Verse 20. He tells his firstborn Jether (Abundance) to execute them. But he was a boy (twenty or less) and was afraid to execute someone.
- D. Verse 21. They goad him to do it himself. If one was to be killed in war, one would want it to be by a mighty man or hero. So Gideon does execute them himself. He removes the ornaments (crescents) on their camels’ necks (as trophies?).

IV. Gideon’s Judgeship. Judges 8:22-32.

- A. Verse 22. The men of Israel want to make Israel a king, rather than just a judge. This was a big difference: king’s sons reigned after them.
- B. Verse 23. Gideon refuses the crown. He knows that the LORD is the true King, and it would not be right for him to claim any such thing.
- C. Verse 24. Gideon requests the earrings (or nose rings) from the spoil. The Midianites were Ishmaelites (probably Midian married the daughter of his half-brother, and was included in Ishmael’s tribe). Ishmaelites wore earrings, apparently.
- D. Verse 25. They are happy to grant his request. They throw the earrings into a cloth.
- E. Verse 26. The weight is over 65 pounds of gold. This does not include the crescent ornaments, pendants, purple robes, and chains on the camels, which were also part of the spoil.
- F. Verse 27. He makes an ephod (priestly garment) with the gold. Gideon perhaps knew the priests were lax in restoring the true worship of God, so thought to do it himself. This was not according to God’s command, so a snare to him and his entire household. God considers this a rival to His true worship, so prostitution! A sad blight on Gideon’s judgeship.
- G. Verse 28. Midian was totally subdued by all this. The resulting peace lasted forty years during Gideon’s judgeship.
- H. Verse 29. He (remember Zerubbabel was another name for Gideon) ruled from his own house (in Ophrah).
- I. Verse 30. Gideon’s house grew very large with sons because he had many wives. As many rich noblemen did at the time, he indulged in polygamy.

- J. Verse 31. He has a concubine (a slave wife) from Shechem (Shoulder, in Manasseh). She bears him a son Abimelech (My Father is King). An ambitious name for the son of a slave. Her idea, not his? This was setting up trouble!
- K. Verse 32. His death: at an old age. He is buried in his father's tomb in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

V. Israel Turns Downward Once Again.

- A. Verse 33. After his death Israel again turned from Jehovah to act the prostitute with the Ba'als. They made Ba'al Berith (Lord of the Covenant) their new god.
- B. Verse 34. The sons of Israel did not remember Yahweh their God Who had rescued them from the enemies who surrounded them. Major ingratitude!
- C. Verse 35. They also forgot any gratitude to Jerubba'al's (Gideon's) family, even after all he had done for Israel.

VI. Gideon's victory over the Midianite forces was complete. Yet he also had the victory over temptation when the people offered him the throne and he refused it. Still, his self-guided attempts to establish a form of worship was a snare to him and his family. This is an example of the theme of judges: what happens when you do what is right in your own eyes, rather than what is right in the sight of God. When Gideon died, the people turned right back to idolatry. Do we only serve God faithfully when we have strong leadership that tells us to, or do we truly serve Him from the heart? These are important questions we can all ask ourselves from the lessons in the book of Judges.