

Exegetical Notes – Judges 8:1-21  
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Background: When Joshua died, the conquest of The Promised Land was only partially completed. In large part, Israel had followed the instructions of YHWH regarding the taking of the land and the destruction of the indigenous population who lived there, but Israel had not followed God completely. Large sections of the indigenous population remained and were not under Israeli control.

From the time of the occupation (around 1380 BC) until the beginning of the Monarchs (1050 BC) Israel was a THEOCRACY, a nation whose king was God. Israel was supposed to listen to and follow the word of the Lord, but as we have already seen, Israel was not good at following the instructions of YHWH. Her failure to do so left her in trouble time and again. Partial obedience to the word of the Lord is disobedience to the word of the Lord and always leads to disaster. “Judges provides many examples of the principle that OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW BRINGS PEACE, WHEREAS DISOBEDIENCE MEANS OPPRESSION AND DEATH” (Charles Ryrie). This is the constantly repeated lesson of the Book of Judges. Judges is the story of the time in Israel’s early history when “Every man did what was right in his own eyes” (17:6 and 21:25). This always results in chaos and disaster.

In the Book of Judges a recurrent theme emerges: Step one - The people are following the will of YHWH; Step two - The people stop obeying the word of the Lord; Step three - An enemy arises that oppresses the people of God; Step four - The people cry out to God for help; Step five - God answers Israel’s prayer by sending them a deliverer (a judge to lead her, a Messiah); Step six - The people repent and return to the Lord. Then, the process begins again. Judges simply repeats this pattern over and over again. God’s people are “stiff necked and disobedient.” God is forever faithful. If God’s people would follow God’s word, they could save themselves hardship, worry, pain, etc. But they choose to do what seems right in their own eyes.

## Judges 8:1-21

### Verses 1-3

***Now the Ephraimites asked Gideon, “Why have you treated us like this? Why didn’t you call us when you went to fight Midian?” And they challenged him vigorously.***

***<sup>2</sup> But he answered them, “What have I accomplished compared to you? Aren’t the gleanings of Ephraim’s grapes better than the full grape harvest of Abiezer? <sup>3</sup> God gave Oreb and Zeeb, the Midianite leaders, into your hands. What was I able to do compared to you?” At this, their resentment against him subsided.***

- (See 7:24b-25). After the rout of the Midianites, Gideon called on the tribe of Ephraim to help defeat the Midianites by holding the Jordan River, which they did. They captured Oreb and Zeeb who were Midianite leaders and brought them to Gideon for judgment.
- But the Ephraimites were not satisfied. They thought that they should have been called into the battle sooner. So, they criticized Gideon sharply for not having called them sooner.
- Gideon responded to their criticism with a soft answer (see Proverbs 15:1). He told them that Ephraim was far more important than was the clan of Abiezer from which he came and that their part in the battle was more impressive than what he had done.
- Resultantly, the Ephraimites stopped complaining about Gideon.

### Verses 4-7

***<sup>4</sup> Gideon and his three hundred men, exhausted yet keeping up the pursuit, came to the Jordan and crossed it. <sup>5</sup> He said to the men of Sukkoth, “Give my troops some bread; they are worn out, and I am still pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian.”***

***<sup>6</sup> But the officials of Sukkoth said, “Do you already have the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna in your possession? Why should we give bread to your troops?”***

***<sup>7</sup> Then Gideon replied, “Just for that, when the LORD has given Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, I will tear your flesh with desert thorns and briars.”***

- Gideon and his little band of soldiers continued to pursue the Midianites. They crossed the Jordan in the pursuit.

- Sukkoth was a town on the east side of the Jordan. Gideon demanded that the people of Sukkoth feed his men, but the people would not aide Gideon’s tired and hungry men.
- Gideon told the people of Sukkoth that he would thrash them with desert thorns after he had dealt with the Midianites.

### Verses 8-9

***<sup>8</sup> From there he went up to Peniel and made the same request of them, but they answered as the men of Sukkoth had. <sup>9</sup> So he said to the men of Peniel, “When I return in triumph, I will tear down this tower.”***

- At Peniel, Gideon again requested food for his men. Again, he was denied.
- He told the people of Peniel that after he had captured the Midianites he would return and tear down their tower.

### Verses 10-12

***<sup>10</sup> Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor with a force of about fifteen thousand men, all that were left of the armies of the eastern peoples; a hundred and twenty thousand swordsmen had fallen. <sup>11</sup> Gideon went up by the route of the nomads east of Nobah and Jogbehah and attacked the unsuspecting army. <sup>12</sup> Zebah and Zalmunna, the two kings of Midian, fled, but he pursued them and captured them, routing their entire army.***

- Zebah and Zalmunna, the Midianite kings who Gideon pursued, were held up at Karkor. The Midianite army, once 135,000 strong, had been reduced to only 15,000 men. This force was still much larger than Gideon’s which was only 300 soldiers strong. Gideon approached the Midianites by an unusual route. They caught the Midianite army off guard and routed them.
- The Kings of Midian, routed by Gideon, fled. He pursued them and captured them, and the army of Israel routed the Midianites.

### Verses 13-17

***<sup>13</sup> Gideon son of Joash then returned from the battle by the Pass of Heres. <sup>14</sup> He caught a young man of Sukkoth and questioned him, and the young man wrote down for him the names of the seventy-seven officials of Sukkoth, the elders of the town. <sup>15</sup> Then Gideon came and said to the men of Sukkoth, “Here are Zebah and Zalmunna, about whom you taunted me by saying, ‘Do you already have the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna in your possession? Why should we give bread to your exhausted men?’” <sup>16</sup> He took the elders of the town and taught the***

***men of Succoth a lesson by punishing them with desert thorns and briars. <sup>17</sup> He also pulled down the tower of Peniel and killed the men of the town.***

- After capturing the kings of the Midianites, He caught a young man from Succoth who told him the name of the Elders of that town. After destroying the Midianites, Gideon returned to Succoth with Zebah and Zalmunna in chains.
- He then punished both Succoth and Peniel, according to his prediction.

### **Verses 18-21**

***<sup>18</sup> Then he asked Zebah and Zalmunna, “What kind of men did you kill at Tabor?”***

***“Men like you,” they answered, “each one with the bearing of a prince.”***

***<sup>19</sup> Gideon replied, “Those were my brothers, the sons of my own mother. As surely as the LORD lives, if you had spared their lives, I would not kill you.” <sup>20</sup> Turning to Jether, his oldest son, he said, “Kill them!” But Jether did not draw his sword, because he was only a boy and was afraid.***

***<sup>21</sup> Zebah and Zalmunna said, “Come, do it yourself. ‘As is the man, so is his strength.’” So Gideon stepped forward and killed them, and took the ornaments off their camels’ necks.***

- Gideon then asked the Midianites kings what kind of men they killed at Mt. Tabor. They replied that the men they had killed look much like him. Gideon announced that the men the Midianites had killed were his brothers. He told Zebah and Zalmunna that he would have spared them if they had spared his brothers. He told his oldest son, Jether, to kill the kings. But Jether did not obey his father because he was just a boy and because he was afraid.
- Zebah and Zalmunna mocked Gideon because of his son’s failure. They taunted him to do the deed himself. They assumed that, like his son, Gideon would not have the strength or courage to kill them
- But Gideon struck them dead. He took ornaments of protection worn by their camels off of their camels as a sign of his conquest.



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