

Exegetical Notes – Judges 8:22-27
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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 8:22-27

Verses 22-23

The Israelites said to Gideon, “Rule over us—you, your son and your grandson—because you have saved us from the hand of Midian.”

²³ But Gideon told them, “I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The LORD will rule over you.”

- After Gideon had defeated the Midianites, the people of Israel approached him inviting him to become their king. They promised that they would establish his household as the dynastic rulers of Israel. In so doing, the people of Israel were rejecting the concept of theocracy. They were rejecting the role of YHWH in favor of a human king.
- Gideon rejected Israel’s proposal for himself and for his descendants. He told them that YHWH would be Israel’s king and that YHWH would rule over the people of Israel.

Verses 24-26

²⁴ And he said, “I do have one request, that each of you give me an earring from your share of the plunder.” (It was the custom of the Ishmaelites to wear gold earrings.)

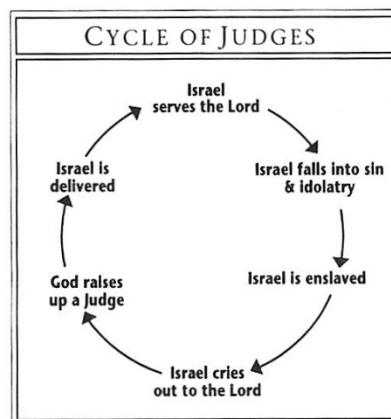
²⁵ They answered, “We’ll be glad to give them.” So they spread out a garment, and each of them threw a ring from his plunder onto it. ²⁶ The weight of the gold rings he asked for came to seventeen hundred shekels, not counting the ornaments, the pendants and the purple garments worn by the kings of Midian or the chains that were on their camels’ necks.

- Gideon did have a request of the people of Israel. He asked that they each give an earring (probably more correctly translated “nose ring”) from their share of the plunder taken from the destruction of Midian. (The term translated “Ishmaelites” means “nomadic wanderer” and refers to the Midianites.) One ear/nose ring seems a small request for delivering Israel. However, the victory was the Lord’s and not Israel’s nor Gideon’s.
- The people of Israel agreed to give Gideon one ear/nose ring each.
- It is estimated that Gideon received 42.5 pounds of gold from this offering. In today’s dollars the offering in gold alone would equal \$1,236,444. Gideon also received other gifts from the plunder of the Midianites. His share of the plunder was close to \$2m in today’s dollars.

Verse 27

27 Gideon made the gold into an ephod, which he placed in Ophrah, his town. All Israel prostituted themselves by worshiping it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and his family.

- Gideon took the gold and had it made into an “ephod.” The High Priest of Israel wore an “ephod” as part of his priestly vestments. However, in other than Israeli cultures an “ephod” was a symbol which people worshipped. The word has the second meaning here. Gideon fashioned an object the nature of which is not known to us. He put it on display at Ophrah, his hometown. Whether at Gideon’s command or not, we do not know, the people of Israel began to come to Ophrah to worship the ephod. What is clear is that Gideon did nothing to stop people from coming to Ophrah to worship his ephod. (If Gideon is the prophet which the Lord sent in Judges 6:7-11, which it is NOT clear that he is, he did not act in accord with his prophetic office but let the people of Israel disobey the word of the Lord by worshiping the ephod.)
- The ephod became a snare to Gideon and other members of his family. The meaning of the phrase is not entirely clear. How was Gideon “snared” by Israel’s worship of his ephod? Did he begin to “think more highly of himself than he ought”? Did he and his family always worship the ephod in addition to, or in place of, YHWH? Was he more attracted to money than to YHWH? Did he reject his prophetic office and allow Israel to wander from the truth of YHWH? Or was it all of these things together? What is certain is that this act pulled Gideon and his children in the wrong direction. It led them away from YHWH and YHWH’s word.



(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled Gideon’s Ephod. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship*, Coatesville, Pennsylvania, & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. They are used here by permission.)