

## GIDEON'S EPHOD - JUDGES 8:22-28

### STUDIES IN THE JUDGES #9

Jim was working as an apprentice grocery man in Hamilton, Missouri. The owner of the grocery store liked Jim, and talked with him often about becoming his permanent store manager. Jim enjoyed dealing with the public, and felt very naturally inclined to settle into this career position. But one day, all of Jim's dreams and direction in life changed around the dinner table.

20 year old Jim was eating with his family when he casually told a story about his clever employer at work. Jim laughed as he told how his boss mixed the expensive brand of coffee with lower quality beans, thus increasing the profit. But as Jim was finishing his story, he noticed that his father hadn't cracked a smile. "Tell me," his father asked. "if your boss found someone else palming off an inferior article on him for the price of the best, do you think he would consider that to be a clever practice and laugh about it?" Jim's father then advised his son to collect whatever money was due him the next day, and resign from his position, saying that he could not commit himself to go into business with a dishonest grocery owner.

Jim wrestled with his father's counsel all night long. But in the morning, he knew that his father was right. It was his respect for his dad that gave Jim the strength to follow his advice. It appeared at first to be a foolish decision for work was scarce in Hamilton, Missouri. And the crooked grocer used his influence to blackmail Jim so that he couldn't find another job. But his father's advice changed the course of Jim's life. For instead of spending the rest of his

life as the manager of a grocery store owned by a dishonest man, Jim moved into another line of retail - dry goods. God blessed Jim's commitment to integrity and honesty. Within 2 decades after Jim's decision to leave the Hamilton Grocery Store, he owned almost 200 retail stores. The first one, he named The Golden Rule. But eventually, Jim's stores became named after him. Today, we simply call them J.C. Penny's.

It is hard to overstate the potential of a godly parent's influence on the direction of his children in life. When children see a consistent example in the home of integrity and honesty, they cannot help but have a strong moral sense of right and wrong instilled within them. But the opposite pattern is true as well. When children see inconsistency and dishonesty and hypocrisy, they become confused and their moral compass can become distorted.

We have been spending several weeks looking at the 4th major judge in the Bible - a man named Gideon. We have already looked at Gideon as a judge. We have seen his call of God to be a judge. We have seen the miraculous battle that he was involved in where deliverance from the Midianite oppression was achieved. And, last time, we saw Gideon's masterful handling of the criticism that he received as a judge from the tribe of Ephraim.

Now, this evening, we want to look at an area where Gideon was not always spiritually consistent in his life. And this had a dramatic effect on his sons and family. Now it's interesting that the Bible presents both the good and the bad in people's lives. Unlike many biographies that just seem to paint the rosier pictures, the Bible presents people as they really were. And this is

extremely important for us for we all have struggles in our lives. Perhaps this is the reason we all seem to be able to identify with Gideon so easily.

\*We identify with his lack of self-esteem and his doubts concerning his abilities to fulfill the calling of the Lord.

\*We identify with his weak faith that prompted him to ask the Lord for a sign again and again,

\*We identify with his fears in facing combat with the Midianites.

\*But we would also like to identify with the courage that Gideon had. For Gideon did face those fears successfully, and he brought about a great deliverance for the Israelites. This gives each of us hope. For in our hearts, we all want to believe that we too can face our doubts and weak faith and fears with courage to accomplish what God has called us to do. And we can as we rely upon God the way that Gideon did.

\*So as we come to Gideon's example as a parent, we find that it is easy to identify with him here as well. For Gideon is not presented as the perfect parent in the Bible. Gideon is presented as a man who did some things well, and some things poorly. As such, he really is a representative parent. For most parents do some things well. But all parents also make mistakes and do some things poorly. The good parent is one who does more things well than poorly, and is quick to admit failures and mistakes when they come.

NOW WE SEE IN THIS LAST SNAPSHOT OF HIS LIFE, GIDEON AS BOTH A NOBLE AND AN IGNOBLE MODEL OF PARENTING. AND WE WANT TO LOOK TOGETHER AT WHAT GIDEON DID WELL, AND

## WHAT GIDEON DID POORLY IN RELATIONSHIP TO HIS FAMILY.

Let's read together the last segment of Gideon's life that is recorded in Judges 8:22-32:

JDG 8:22 The Israelites said to Gideon, "Rule over us--you, your son and your grandson--because you have saved us out of the hand of Midian."

JDG 8:23 But Gideon told them, "I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The LORD will rule over you." <sup>24</sup> 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.)

JDG 8:25 They answered, "We'll be glad to give them." So they spread out a garment, and each man threw a ring from his plunder onto it. <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> 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.

JDG 8:28 Thus Midian was subdued before the Israelites and did not raise its head again. During Gideon's lifetime, the land enjoyed peace forty years.

JDG 8:29 Jerub-Baal son of Joash went back home to live. <sup>30</sup> He had seventy sons of his own, for he had many wives. <sup>31</sup> His concubine, who lived in Shechem, also bore him a son, whom he named Abimelech. <sup>32</sup> Gideon son of Joash died at a good old age and was buried in the tomb of his father Joash in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

1. WHAT DID GIDEON DO RIGHT? AND THE ANSWER IS SIMPLY THAT HE RESISTED THE PRESSURE TO ASSUME THE POSITION OF KING THAT WOULD HAVE PUT HIS FAMILY AND ESPECIALLY HIS SONS OUTSIDE OF THE WILL OF GOD AND

## EVENTUALLY IN A POSITION OF PUBLIC PRESSURE.

After the victorious battle, the Israelites presented Gideon with a rather heady request. Notice it in verse 22: "The Israelites said to Gideon, 'Rule over us - you, your son and your grandson - because you have saved us out of the hand of Midian'."

Now this request placed both Gideon's family and the Israelites in a very critical position. In essence, the Israelites were asking Gideon to become king and set up a dynasty. Following the 3rd major cycle of oppression, the people had tired of this pattern of being dominated by a foreign power. So in the euphoria of victory and deliverance, they were now offering Gideon an unprecedented opportunity. Gideon - we ask you to become our king. And we invite you to pass the dynasty of ruling down to you son and grandson after you. The request shows that this movement towards a monarchy was already beginning in the nation of Israel over 100 years before Saul was anointed to be king. The battle against the Midianites in the valley of Jezreel took place in 1162 B.C. Saul would not be anointed to be king until about 1050 B.C. When the Israelites demanded a king from Samuel so that they could be like the other nations, this was not a spur of the moment request. This desire had been building and brewing for over 100 years - the request to Gideon shows us this fact.

But to Gideon's credit, he recognized 2 facts which helped him make the right decision for himself and his family.

a. first, Gideon spotted the motivation for their request. It is given in the

last part of verse 22 - "because you have saved us out of the hand of Midian." Now isn't this an amazing statement? God had gone out of his way to reduce the size of the army so that He would receive all of the glory. Gideon had started with 32,000, but God had whittled it down to 10,000 and then to just 300. The Israelites with 300 unarmed men had gone into battle against the Midianites who had some 135,000 - 450 to 1 odds. How could anyone possibly say that it was Gideon and his brilliant strategy that gave the Israelites the victory? But that is exactly what the Israelites did. Because you have saved us out of the hand of Midian, we want you to be our king, Gideon.

To Gideon's credit, he did not fall for this subtle temptation. It would have been so easy for him to have accepted some of the credit. "I did do a pretty good job, didn't I? It took a lot of courage to go against those Midianites with just 300 men. And the strategy was brilliant, if I do say so myself." No, Gideon realized that all the credit and glory belonged to God for the victory. He also realized that if the Israelites were asking him to be king based upon his military genius, he would have to continue that genius or fall out of favor with them. And Gideon knew where he would be if God's favor and grace left him.

b. But Gideon also recognized God's intended plan during the judges period - this is revealed in his answer in verse 23: "But Gideon told them, 'I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. the Lord will rule over you'."

God had designed the perfect government for the Israelites in the law that he had given Moses from Sinai. We have many today who are saying that

democracy is the perfect government. I hate to burst any bubbles, but democracy is not the perfect government. Democracy is probably the best government available in our world today because of the sinful conditions in which we live. The freedom that we have is precious and the checks and balances that have been set up among the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government are extremely important because of the inherent sinful condition of the human race. We are seeing some of the struggles for power among the branches of the government in the confirmation hearings of the Supreme Court nominee, Samuel Alito. Democracy is probably the best form of government around today – I certainly prefer it over any other form in the world. But it is clear from the Bible that a theocracy is the perfect government.

A theocracy is the benevolent rule of God himself over man. \*Today we have to pay taxes. In fact, we work well into May each year for the government before we start to make any money for ourselves. In God's theocracy, there were no property taxes, no sales taxes, no school taxes - just tithe - 10%.

\*Today we have to support a standing army to protect our national interests. In God's theocracy, there was no standing army. God promised as his people would obey his laws, He would personally protect them. If needed an emergency force could be mustered, but God would bring about a miraculous deliverance.

\*Today we have class struggles between the rich and the poor. And the rich seem to get richer and the poor never seem to be able to get out of the

quagmire of their poverty. In God's theocracy, everyone would have adequate means to live. Every family would have their own land. Everyone would have equal opportunity. There would be no reason for poverty - rather, there would be bounty for everyone. As long as God was honored, He guaranteed prosperity to all. And if a family fell into hard times because they failed to honor God, there still was the year of jubilee when their land would be restored to them once again.

\*Today we have a judicial system that is filled with inequities and corruption. If you have enough money, it seems like you can find some loophole in the law to your advantage. The enforcement of the law can often be harder on the victims than on the offender. In God's theocracy, there was swift and fair punishment for crimes. The kinsman-redeemer concept gave the authority to families to execute swift justice. And if there were a question of guilt or innocence, the Levites in the Levitical Cities provided havens of refuge and could seek God to give perfect justice in every case.

\*And we could go on and on giving examples of the perfect, utopian government that God had given his people in the law. We often emphasize the moral sections of the law, forgetting that the vast majority of the O.T. law was the state constitution of the nation of Israel. What a blessing it would have been to live in such a wonderful environment! We are going to have to wait now until the Millennial Reign of Christ to have this opportunity again. That's when the perfect government will finally be realized on this earth.

\*Gideon recognized God's intended purpose during this time. He realized

that it was God's intent for the Lord to rule directly over his people. He also realized that the Israelites had corrupted God's intended program, and had so distorted His design that they had brought chaos instead of blessing. So Gideon tried to point the Israelites back to the direction that God intended. Gideon tried to allow God his rightful place in the life of his family and country. And this was to Gideon's credit. Gideon would not assume the position of being King. He knew that God alone deserved that position.

One of the greatest blessings that any parent can bring to the family is a personal recognition and a leading of the family in the recognition that Christ is really the head of the home. By giving God his rightful position in the family as King and Lord, a parent puts the family in a position of great blessing. Perhaps the best thing that a father can do for his family is make it very clear to all members that Christ is the ultimate head of the house, and that he as father had placed himself under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. But now we need to move question to answer the question WHAT DID GIDEON DO WRONG? And the answer to this question can be stated very simply HE MANIPULATED HIMSELF INTO THE POSITION OF PRIEST. Whereas Gideon refused the request to be King, he coveted the position of unlawfully being a priest and it severely hurt his family.

READ 8:24-27.

<sup>24</sup> 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.)

JDG 8:25 They answered, "We'll be glad to give them." So they spread out a garment, and each man threw a ring from his plunder onto it. <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> 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.

Now in order to understand the significance of Gideon making this ephod, we first have to understand what an ephod was. Exodus 28 tells us all about the ephod. Listen to the description of it found in Exodus 28:1-14:

EX 28:1 "Have Aaron your brother brought to you from among the Israelites, along with his sons Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, so they may serve me as priests. <sup>2</sup> Make sacred garments for your brother Aaron, to give him dignity and honor. <sup>3</sup> Tell all the skilled men to whom I have given wisdom in such matters that they are to make garments for Aaron, for his consecration, so he may serve me as priest. <sup>4</sup> These are the garments they are to make: a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a woven tunic, a turban and a sash. They are to make these sacred garments for your brother Aaron and his sons, so they may serve me as priests. <sup>5</sup> Have them use gold, and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and fine linen.

EX 28:6 "Make the ephod of gold, and of blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and of finely twisted linen--the work of a skilled craftsman. <sup>7</sup> It is to have two shoulder pieces attached to two of its corners, so it can be fastened. <sup>8</sup> Its skillfully woven waistband is to be like it--of one piece with the ephod and made with gold, and with blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and with finely twisted linen.

EX 28:9 "Take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel <sup>10</sup> in the order of their birth--six names on one stone and the remaining six on the other. <sup>11</sup> Engrave the names of the sons of Israel on the two stones the way a gem cutter engraves a seal. Then mount the stones in gold filigree settings <sup>12</sup> and fasten them on the shoulder pieces of the ephod as memorial stones for the sons of Israel. Aaron is to bear the names on his shoulders as a memorial before the LORD. <sup>13</sup> Make gold filigree settings <sup>14</sup> and two braided chains of pure gold, like a rope, and attach the chains to the settings.

The ephod was the elaborate vest that the high priest wore. It was woven with blue, purple and scarlet yarn - with gold threads woven all through it. It had 12 precious gems woven into the front of it - representing the 12 tribes of Israel. It had chains of pure gold hanging from it all over. And there were 2 pockets in the ephod, in which were the Urim and the Thummim - these were used by the high priest when he inquired of the direct will of God. So the ephod was the garment that distinguished the high priest from not only the rest of the Israelites, but also from the rest of the priests and Levites as well. When Gideon requested these 1,700 shekels that would be roughly 42 pounds of gold for the making of an ephod, Gideon was preparing to make a garment that would distinguish him as the high priest. And the indication is that the people allowed him that position. For all Israel began to come to Gideon and worship where he was recognizing him to be the high priest.

Now, we can perhaps understand why Gideon was tempted to do this. Very likely, the ordained high priest in the line of Aaron was not functioning very well at this time. Perhaps, he was not even a spiritually minded man at all.

We know that just a couple of generations later there was great corruption in the temple at Shiloh because of Eli's wicked sons, Hophni and Phineas. Perhaps there was a great deal of corruption in the tabernacle at this time as well, and Gideon was just trying to reform the nation. But whatever the motivation, Gideon did not do the right thing here. God had made it very clear who was to be the high priest. Whereas a judge could be called by God at any time, from any family and tribe, God had already specified that the high priest was to be chosen only by family lineage. He must come out of the tribe of Levi and out of the lineage of Aaron. So whereas Gideon allowed the Lord the position of being King, he tried to take this matter of reforming the high priestly function into his own hands, bringing disastrous results.

\*The Israelites were diverted from their rightful worship of God at the tabernacle. That was where the brazen altar was. That was the place where the sacrifices were to be made. But Gideon tempted the Israelites to come to his house instead by the ephod that he made.

\*It is interesting the wording that God uses as he describes how he looked at the consequences of Gideon's actions. God simply says "All Israel prostituted themselves" - that is how God looks at worshiping other gods or worshiping in a way contrary to his revealed way.

\*And it is also important for us to note how Gideon's making this ephod and assuming the role of high priest severely hurt his family. The Bible simply says, "it became a snare to Gideon and his family."

\*There is an important application that we must close with this evening.

Whenever a parent sets up an idol in the household or allows a different god to infiltrate the household, he puts a snare before his family. There is nothing that will confuse children faster than inconsistency. Inconsistency is devastating to a family. Children are amazingly pliable and resilient. They seem to have the ability to adjust to almost any kind of living situation. But when there is inconsistency - when one thing is said and another is done, or when something is done with conviction one time and then reversed the next time - this is very confusing to children.

When Gideon refused the offer to be king saying that the Lord must rule, he was making a statement to his family as well as to the nation of Israel. But then when he made an ephod and took over the position of high priest in violation of the law of God, he was making a contradictory statement. And this became a snare to his family. We don't have time this evening to look at the disastrous end to Gideon's family that is recorded in the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of Judges. Let me just summarize by saying that the nation did not treat Gideon's family kindly after Gideon's passing. And Gideon's family basically ended up being wiped out by treachery and deceit.

So it is in our households when we say that Christ is the head of our home, but then allow another god to infiltrate the house as well. It is confusing to our children. And while it usually doesn't end up physically killing our children, it will be a spiritual snare to our families.

Patrick Henry is remembered as one of the courageous pioneers of our independence. It was his famous statement, "Give me Liberty, or give me

death" that became a motto for our forefathers. The final paragraph of Henry's will reveals what he considered to be most important in life - more significant even than the national liberty that he was willing to die for. Let me read it for you. "I have now disposed all my property to my family. There is one thing more I wish I could give them, and that is my Christian faith. If they would have that, and I had not given them one shilling, they would be rich; but if they have not this, and I had given them all this world, they would be poor."

Parents are all human. No matter how dedicated they are, no matter how concerned for their families, all of us will make mistakes. Like Gideon, we generally will do some things well; and we will do other things poorly. But parents have the unique privilege of leading their families to honor the Lord. As parents, let's make sure that what we do well is that which is most important in life. That we make the Lord Jesus Christ to be head of our homes and that we are consistent in this mission, not allowing other gods to infiltrate our households.