

Gideon Pt 7, Ending Well.

Judges 8:22-32

Sunday afternoon, May 22, 2011.

I. "Rule over us" Judges 8:22.

- A. In the aftermath of the victory over the Midianites the men of Israel came to Gideon and asked him to be a ruler or king over them. Not only he, but his son and grandson. They were ready to make him into a royal dynasty.
- B. It is unlikely that all of the tribes were involved in this, after all, neither the tribes in the South, nor the far North, had not suffered from the invading Midianites. Only 5 of the tribes, Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, Naphtali and Ephraim, had any involvement in the events surrounding Gideon.
- C. Gideon's reply:
 1. Gideon's words of reply are: "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you." What was the intent of these words?
 2. Many have understood these words to mean a flat out refusal of Gideon to be any kind of a ruler over God's people. According to this view Gideon preferred to see himself as a man who was used of God in a particular event to deliver the Lord's people, and now that was over, he preferred to go back to his winepress and wheat field.
 3. The text has some indications however that this may not have been entirely true
 - Gideon goes on, not to dismiss Israel and to send every man back to his own house, but he acts like a leader, collecting some 43 pounds of gold from the spoils, and fashioning it into an ephod which he set up in his own city.
 - Gideon's life goes on as that of a wealthy man; a ruler of sorts, having many wives, 70 sons and perhaps as many daughters; clearly an expensive household.
 - Gideon names the son he fathers with a concubine Abimelech, which means "My father is king."
 - Ch. 9:1-5 makes it clear that it was at least Abimelech's expectation that one of Gideon's sons would continue to rule over Israel following Gideon's death.
 4. Taking these matters into consideration Gideon's words could take on a different meaning. In saying, "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you," Gideon is acknowledging that it is ultimately not a human instrument, but the Lord himself who is the Ruler of His people, and Gideon does not want Israel to miss that point. He directs the people's attention back to the Lord God.

At the same time Gideon's actions seem to say that he stood ready and was willing to take the role of that human instrumentality upon himself should Israel desire that.

As such Gideon's words could be taken as a qualified acceptance of Israel's offer. One way or another, that seems to have been the outcome.

II. Ending well.

- A. This qualified acceptance of being the ruler of God's people was certainly a good

- beginning of that rule. We always do well to acknowledge that the things we have in this life are not ours but ultimately belong to the Lord for “Of Him and to Him and through Him are all things.”
- B. It is no easy matter however, to bring our practice in line with our theology. No sooner is Gideon the ruler of God’s people or he asks them for about 43 pounds of gold from the spoils of the Midianites, and he fashions it into an ephod.
 - C. An ephod was sort of a vest that the high priest wore over his priestly garments when performing his duties in the tabernacle / temple. In the front of it was the breastplate in which twelve stones were set in four rows of three stones, representing the twelve tribes of Israel. In it also was a pouch containing two stones, the Urim and the Thummim, which were used to reveal the Lord’s will and give His and guidance in particularly difficult and weighty matters.
 - D. The ephod was set up in Gideon’s hometown of Orah in the tribe of Manasseh. No longer did the Lord’s people have to go to Shiloh to consult with the high priest at the tabernacle, they now could do so right in Gideon’s hometown of Orah. The fact that it is said to have become a snare to Gideon and to his house may indicate that Gideon took it upon himself to wear the ephod in order to determine the Lord’s will in behalf of His people.
 - E. Thus Gideon desired to have more, and he took more to himself, of the Lord’s provisions for His people, than the Lord had allotted to him. And all Israel loved it with an ungodly passion. They now had an alternative way of drawing near to the Lord and to seek His presence and guidance.
 - F. Seeing Gideon end his life and ministry in this manner should sober us. Many start well, but relatively few end well. Kings like Asa, Jehoshaphat, Uzziah and Hezekiah all started well, but did not finish well. So in the NT. Demas, Alexander and Hymanaeus among many others. Let us humble ourselves before the Lord, and look to Him for the grace enabling us to finish our course with joy.

Application:

Gideon was not alone in his discontent with the ordinary means for drawing near to the Lord and seeking His will by way of Urim and Thummim at the tabernacle in Shiloh. And Gideon was not alone in his desire for extraordinary and enriched experiences with the Lord, leading him to wearing an ephod like the high priest did. For our drawing near to the Lord; our seeking of His help and guidance; our re-dedicating ourselves to Him again, and entering into, or restoring, a right relationship with Him, the Lord has given us the Lord’s table. Yet we have invented a host of substitute activities to facilitate this. Revivals and retreats; seminars and encounters; music to affect people’s emotions; raising a hand or walking an aisle; taking your place on the sinners or anxious bench as was done a century ago, to name but a few. Yet all these things can not provide us with any other blessings than those which the Lord would bestow upon the worthy worshipper at His table.

III. The land had rest for forty years.

This is the last time God provided rest for His people through the ministry of a judge, indicating the progressive nature of the Lord’s judgments as Israel persists in her sins.