*08*STUDY OF JUDGES 2019

Gideon made an Ephod

Judges 8:1-35

“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.” (8:27)

Today’s passage is a continuation of last Sunday’s passage. Do you still remember what happened? The Midianites, the Amalekites and all the other eastern peoples had settled in [a] valley, thick as locusts. All together they numbered about 135 000 soldiers. Their camels were like grains of sand on the seashore—too many to count! (7:12) Yet despite being vastly outnumbered, Gideon and his 300 men by faith surrounded the Midian camp; each with only a trumpet, an empty jar and a torch in their hands. At Gideon’s instruction, they blew their trumpets and smashed the jars. Then the LORD caused the Midianites soldiers in the camp to fight against each other with their swords. However 15 000 soldiers, along with Zebah and Zalmunna (two Midian kings) managed to escape and cross the Jordan River. Today’s passage, starts with Gideon’s pursuit of these soldiers.

Look at verse 4. Gideon and his three hundred men, exhausted yet keeping up the pursuit, came to the Jordan and crossed it. Gideon was absolutely determined to catch up with the Midianites and kill every last one of them. But he faced two big obstacles! Firstly, the Midianite kings were moving much faster with their camels than they were on foot. Secondly, Gideon and his men were very very tired. They were exhausted! Especially, they were so hungry, because they were fighting and running after the Midianites since late evening the previous day. Fortunately, they came to an Israelite town, called Succoth.

**Look at verse 5. [Gideon]** humbly asked them, *“Please give my troops some food. They are worn out, but we have to keep chasing Zebah and Zalmunna, the two Midianite kings*.” One would expect the men of Succoth to surely help their brothers in their time of need. Especially, since they were fighting a battle to deliver all Israel from the Midianites; including the men of Succoth. But surprisingly, the officials of Succoth not only refused to help Gideon and his men, but they even taunted them. Look at verse 6. [T]he officials of Succoth said, “Do you already have the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna in your possession? Why should we give bread to your troops?” Gideon could hardly believe his ears. In that desperate situation, and in the pursuit of a common enemy, the officials of Succoth were completely indifferent to Gideon and his men’s cry for help. In fact, these officials seemed to side with the enemy (Zebah and Zalmunna) who, according to the officials, were still their rulers. Not Gideon!

At this, Gideon burst with anger! Look at verse 7. 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 briers.” Have you ever been so angry with someone that you want to tear their flesh with desert thorns and briers? That is exactly, how Gideon felt at the officials’ faithless and heartless response to His desperate cry for help. And who can blame him? From there he went up to another Israelite village called Peniel and made the same request of them. But shockingly, they too refused to give Gideon and his hungry men food. (8) This was completely unacceptable! So with an empty stomach and in the heat of the moment, Gideon again reacted angrily and threatened them saying: “When I return in triumph, I will tear down this tower.

Look at verse 10. Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor with a force of about fifteen thousand men. By this time, they thought they put a long enough distance between themselves and Gideon, and that Gideon gave up the pursuit. So they stopped fleeing to take a much needed break. But despite the men of Succoth and Peniel’s betrayal, Gideon did not give up the pursuit. Finally, he caught up with them and with his 300 men fell upon the unsuspecting army. Zebah and Zalmunna, the two kings of Midian, fled. But [Gideon] pursued them and captured them. He also routed their entire army. And with this final battle, the victory over the Midianites were finally completed. Look at verse 28a. Thus Midian was subdued before the Israelites.

Wow! What an intense pursuit! What great commitment showed by Gideon and his men; even when they were so hungry and tired! What a great victory for Gideon and all Israel. During the preceding 7 years, *the power of Median was so oppressive, the Israelites hid themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds*. (6:2) During this time, *the Midianites stole Israel’s food, sheep, cattle, and donkeys. They ruined the land wherever they went and took almost everything that belonged to the Israelites.* (6:3-6) However, with this victory God delivered Israel from their oppressors. God completely destroyed Median so that it did not raise its head again. In fact, during Gideon’s lifetime, the land enjoyed peace forty years. (7:28)

Here it is important to stand still for a while. To remember, that this victory was not a result of Gideon’s greatness or ability. In fact, when we look back at chapters 6 and 7, we see that initially Gideon was a very fearful young man with very little faith. When God first approached him, Gideon was hiding from the Midianites, while shamefully threshing wheat in a winepress. (6:11) At that moment, when God told Gideon that He was with him (6:12) and would deliver the Midianites into his hands (6:14), Gideon talked back in unbelief at God and asked Him for a sign. (6:12-18; 22). Moreover, when God told Gideon to tear down his father’s altar to Baal, Gideon was afraid of his family and the men of the town. So he did it secretly at night rather than in the daytime, so that no one would know that it was he who did it. (6:25-27) Even when the Spirit of the Lord came upon him (6:34), and despite all that God had done for Gideon up to that moment, Gideon still asked God for two consecutive signs to be sure that God would save Israel by his hand. (6:36-40) And if these signs were not enough, God had to send Gideon down to the Midianite camp to overhear a Midianite soldier telling his friend his dream, of how they were to be defeated by Gideon. Only THEN, and after God’s great patience and help, did Gideon finally muster enough faith to hold his position around the Midian camp, while God destroyed them. **Without God’s help, Gideon would still have been threshing wheat in the winepress. Yet, by God’s grace and powerfully leading, God transformed Gideon from a fearful and unbelieving boy into a Mighty Warrior of faith. Also, without God’s intervention, Israel would still have been oppressed by the Midianites. Yet, by God’s grace and powerful intervention, God delivered His people through the hands of His servant Gideon. Therefore, after this battle, both Gideon and all of Israel had sufficient grace to newly worship God. And to once and for all, stop worshipping the gods of the Amorites. (6:9-10)**

**Look at verses 13-16. (Read)** After the war with Midian, and on his way home, Gideon remembered how the officials in Succoth and the men of Peniel treated him. Now that he had a full stomach and tasted the sweetness of victory, it was a great opportunity to return to them and tell them of God’s goodness. So that they could stop worshipping the gods of the Amorites, to instead worship God who delivered them from their enemies. But sadly, Gideon rather plotted to take revenge on them. He first went out of his way, to catch a young man of Succoth and questioned him. Then, after the young man wrote down for him the names of the seventy-seven officials of Succoth, Gideon came to them (this time with the two Midianite kings by his side) and said (verse 15-16): “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?’” Then he took the elders of the town and taught the men of Succoth a lesson by punishing them with desert thorns and briers. Actually, the men of Succoth was no different from Gideon, when God first called him. Just like Gideon, they too did not have the necessary faith to stand up against the Midianites. They too worshiped Baal and Asherah, instead of God. Just like Gideon used to (6:25) Therefore, now that Gideon had tasted the goodness and power of God, he was in an ideal position to turn their hearts back to God. So they too could personally experience God and worship Him. Sadly, however, Gideon did the complete opposite. Instead of using God’s victory as an opportunity to restore the worship of God in Succoth – Gideon used it as an excuse to take personal revenge on them. He did the same thing with the men of Peniel. Look at verse 17. This time, he did not only pull down their tower as he threatened he would, but he went further by even killing the men of the town. **In this way, Gideon absolutely abused God’s grace upon his life. God called Gideon and raised him as a Mighty Warrior of faith, so that through Gideon God could help people to worship Him, the living God, instead of the gods of the Amorites. But instead, Gideon misused it as a means of justifying his selfish and sinful desire for revenge on people, Sadly, Gideon made everything about himself. And so instead of helping the men of Succoth and Peniel worship God, Gideon drove them deeper into the arms of the god of the Amorites. What a tragedy! What a missed opportunity!**

Look at verses 18-19. Gideon then turned his attention to the two Midianite kings. 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.” 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. Zebah and Zalmunna were enemies of Israel and therefore also enemies of God. And for this, for opposing God and oppressing His people, they deserved to die. However, Gideon yet again made it all about himself. Instead of using God’s grace and victory over Midian to execute God’s righteous judgment over His enemies, Gideon turned their execution into another opportunity to take personal vengeance on his enemies. Look at verse 21. Gideon turned to Jether, his oldest son, and said, “Kill them!” But Jether did not draw his sword, because he was only a boy and afraid. Zebah and Zalmunna said, “Come, do it yourself. ‘As is the man, so is his strength.’ So Gideon stepped forward and, like a worldly king execute his enemies, so Gideon killed them himself. Not as an act of worship to God. But to **settle personal scores**. **What a great shame!** And Gideon’s self-centered attitude didn’t stop there. It produced more bad fruits.

Look at 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.” How was it, that the Israelites thought that Gideon, and not God, saved them out of the hand of Midian? It was because, Gideon the servant of God, failed to worship God personally after the victory. As we have seen in the preceding verses, instead of expressing reverence and adoration for God, for of what He had done, Gideon went around settling personal scores. Gideon made everything about himself. He used and abused God’s wonderful grace and victory over his life, as a means to worship himself, instead of helping people to know and worship God.

Look at 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.” This was the right answer! But sadly, what Gideon said here with his mouth was different from what he truly believed in his heart. Look at verses 24-25. “I do have one request, that each of you give me an earring from your share of the plunder.” This didn’t seem like much to ask for, yet after they spread out a garment, and each man threw a ring from his plunder onto it, it amounted to about 20 kilograms of gold. Today, and with the Rand and Dollar exchange rate, this would be valued at around R147 000 000.[[1]](#footnote-1) In other words, Gideon used God’s grace and victory over his life to make a fortune for himself! In addition to the R147 million rand, Gideon also took for himself (look at verse 26b) the ornaments, the pendants and the purple garments worn by the kings of Midian and the chains that were on their camels’ necks. Gideon not only took revenge on people like a king, but now was as rich as a king and also dressed and decorated like a king. Wow! How sinful Gideon was! That he used God’s grace and the victory God gave him over the Midianites, to worship himself. To the point where for all purposes, he stood in God’s place as king over Israel.

Let’s look at today’s key verse, verse 27. Can we read it all together? 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. (Slide 1) An ephod was part of the attire that God’s high priest wore. (Exodus 28:4) God gave Moses very specific instructions on how to make the ephod. *The ephod was to be made of gold, and of blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and of finely twisted linen—the work of skilled hands. It had to have two shoulder pieces attached to two of its corners, so it can be fastened. Its skillfully woven waistband was 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. Then the names of the sons of Israel was to be engraved on two onyx stones in the order of their birth—six names on one stone and the remaining six on the other. God specifically told Moses to engrave the names of the sons of Israel on the two stones the way a gem cutter engraves a seal. Then he had to mount the stones in gold filigree settings and fasten them on the shoulder pieces of the ephod as memorial stones for the sons of Israel. The High Priest was to bear the names on his shoulders as a memorial before the Lord. Lastly, gold filigree settings were to be made and two braided chains of pure gold, like a rope, was to be attached to the chains to the settings*. (Ex 28:6-14) As we can see, an ephod was a sacred garment, designed by God and given only to the High Priest, to wear while he served God. Yet Gideon, without any fear of God, and with the gold he received, made his own ephod. It looked shiny and very glorious. It even looked as if it might be holy. Yet, it was a fake. A mere a human counterfeit of the original, a fake version of what God provided and ordained for Israel to worship him. Sadly, Gideon took this fake ephod and placed it in **Ophrah, his town** – for all Israel to come and see. Then they prostituted themselves by worshiping it there. This was not what God intended when he called Gideon and delivered Midian into his hands. From the beginning, God’s plan was for Gideon to reveal God’s glory so that they might turn away from idol worship. To instead, worship God as their God and deliverer. (6:9-10) But instead, after all that God did for Gideon. After all the grace and victory over his life, Gideon made an ephod that lead people further into idol worship. It was also a snare to Gideon and his family. **Here the ephod Gideon made, symbolizes anything of God that we misuse as if it is from God, yet is a twisted or fake version of the original. A very broad and good example is the prosperity gospel that is preached now a days. It appears to be a message of hope. It also seems very exciting and promising, even more so than the original gospel message – yet it is fake and lead people into worshipping money instead of worshipping God.**

**As I conclude, let’s think about why Gideon (a servant of God and judge in Israel) ended up making an ephod that led Israel deeper into idol worship? In context of today’s passage, it was because Gideon misused and even abused God’s grace and presence in his life to worship himself instead of worshipping God. Instead of telling the officials in Succoth and Peniel of what God has done on the battlefield, Gideon used God’s grace as justification to take revenge. Instead of revealing God’s righteous justice when he executed the two Midian kings, Gideon used God’s grace to settle personal scores. Instead of using God’s grace and presence in his life of telling people of who God is, Gideon used it to enrich himself and live like a king. Finally, his self-absorbed attitude culminated in the making of an ephod that led all of Israel deeper into idol worship. The question, therefore, that you and I must ask ourselves this morning is: how are we using the grace and presence of God in our lives? Do we use it like Gideon? Or do we use it like God intended Gideon to use – to tell people of who God is and what He has done for us? So that we can lead them to worship God; as God wants. These days, it is so easy to keep God’s grace and presence in our lives for ourselves. To even use it to settle personal scores, gain material prosperity and recognition from people. Yet, through this passage, we are warned to watch out! So that we can use what God has given us, not for selfish motives, but to lead people around us to know and worship God. This is only possible if we remember and hold God’s grace in our lives. Jesus loved us so much, that He died for us on the cross while we were still in our sins. Now, by His blood, our sins are forgiven and we have peace with God. Moreover, God has given us His Spirit, by which we call out to God as “Abba, Father.” For this we must worship God only! Then, unlike Gideon, we will be men and women that God can use to lead others to also worship God. Amen!**

1. 1 kg of gold = $48 120. Times 20 = $962 400.4. Times 15.25 to the Dollar. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)