**Zebah and Zalmunna**

At the end of chapter 7, Gideon’s small army had led the battle against the Midianites and men were called from the tribes of Naphtali, Asher and Manasseh to pursue elements of the retreating enemy army. The men of Ephraim were called to assist by blocking their escape across the Jordan River. At the beginning of chapter 8, the Ephraimites complained that they had not been called at the beginning of the battle. Gideon mollified their complaint by saying that their tribe was much superior to his own and that they had captured the Midianite leaders Oreb and Zeeb.

Gideon and his 300 men continued their pursuit of the Midianites, 15,000 of whom had escaped by crossing the Jordan River ahead of the men of Ephraim. When Gideon reached Succoth, he asked the people there to feed his army. They refused, saying that they had not captured Zebah and Zalmunna, the 2 Midianite kings who were still at large. They probably had little faith that Gideon’s small army could capture them and were afraid of retribution by the Midianites. Gideon promised to return to punish them and then moved on to the town of Peniel where the people responded just as the people of Succoth had. Gideon promised to return there and tear down their tower.

Gideon and his men attacked the fleeing army at Karkor, defeating them and capturing Zebah and Zalmunna. On their return march towards Canaan, Gideon punished the 75 leaders of Succoth as promised. He then went on to Peniel where he torn down the tower and killed the men of the town. While it is not stated why he inflicted more severe punishment at Peniel, they may have actually aided the Midianites in their escape. Gideon then turned his attention to the 2 kings, asking them whom they had killed. They defiantly told Gideon they had killed members of his family. Because his son was too timid to execute the kings, Gideon did it himself.

After the Midianites were completely defeated, the Israelites asked Gideon to be their king and to establish his rule which would extend to his descendants. Gideon declined telling them that God would rule over them. He then requested a reward for his services which they were glad to provide. He asked each man in the army for an earring from the plunder they collected from the Midianites. While that may seem a modest amount, the men from whom he asked that were not just the 300 he had led but all the thousands of men who joined in rounding up the last of the enemy army. I read that the weight of the gold may have been as much as 50 pounds which today would be worth $1.6 million dollars. Gideon used the gold to make an ephod which he kept in Oprah which was his home town. The ephod became an idol worshipped by the Israelites and thus became a snare to Gideon and his family.

The final verses state that Midian did not rise again to trouble Israel and the land had peace for 40 years. Gideon retired to his home town and had 70 sons by his many wives and also a son named Abimelech by a concubine. After Gideon’s death, the Israelites again worshipped Baals.

Some things Gideon got right:

While he showed weak faith at the beginning of his call, once he committed to follow God, he carried out His instructions no matter how unusual they would have seemed to him.

When confronted by the Ephraimites in their anger, he did not respond in kind, choosing instead the abasement of his own tribe in deference to Ephraim. Gideon held the spiritual high ground and recognized there was nothing to be gained by arguing (see Prov. 15:1 and 26:4). The Ephraimites were well aware of the Midianite threat and could have volunteered before being called. In both the secular and church modern world, many make similar complaints. Some are easily offended and indeed, it seems that the demand for some offensive behavior exceeds the supply. James wrote that we should be quick to listen and slow to speak. I think we need to be slow to anger and quick to forget.

When called upon to rule over Israel, Gideon demurred saying that God would rule over them. The siren call of power can be hard to resist but Gideon did at least in word. David Guzik wrote that while he said he did not want to be a king, his actions proved otherwise. He even named his son Abimelech which means son of a king.

What Gideon got wrong:

While he may not have wanted power, he did seek great wealth. Guzik also wrote: A general rule of thumb is that Christian leaders who make their living from the gifts of God’s people should live at the level of their own people – not below or above.

He had multiple wives and a concubine. While this practice may have been prevalent at the time, the only marriage ordained by God is between one man and one woman.

Finally, Gideon made the gold into an ephod. His motivation may have been rooted in a sort of competition between the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. While Manasseh was the first born of Joseph’s sons, Ephraim received the priority blessing of Jacob. It became the most dominant tribe outside Judah to the point that the northern tribes collectively were often referred to as Ephraim. Significant Ephraimites included Joshua, Deborah, Abdon and Jereboam while Gideon is the only noteworthy man from Manasseh. The tabernacle was located in Shiloh, an Ephraimite town. Gideon may have sought to establish a competing place of worship using the ephod as the high priest would have. While it may not have initially been meant as an idol, it devolved into that as the Israelites came to worship it.