

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Judges And Ruth: Personal Blessing Amid Group Apostasy

Part II: History Of The Era Of The Judges

B. The Record Of Specific Judges, Judges 3:7-16:31

6. Gideon's Leadership Self-Destruction: A Lesson In Following Scripture Closely To Lead Well (Judges 8:22-35)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

We live in an era when many leaders who begin to lead with some degree of promise are failing in their roles:

(1) The Wall Street Journal lead editorial, "Wake Up, Mr. President" (November 16, 2015, p. A18) reported after the November 13, 2015 "murderous assault in Paris" by Islamic terrorists that "President Obama . . . promised to 'redouble' U. S. efforts against Islamic State . . . But why should anyone believe him? After years of dismissing the rising terror threat, Mr. Obama needs an epiphany if he doesn't want to be remembered as the President who allowed radical Islam to spread and prosper."

(2) Former President Reagan's one time speech writer, Peggy Noonan, in her piece, "Republicans Are Ready to Rumble" (Ibid., November 14-15, 2015, p. A11) widened this critique to include politicians in general by writing: "American voters . . . think: Who gave us this world? . . . They realize: It was the most credentialed, acclaimed and experienced political professionals in both parties . . . They conclude: Maybe we have to expand our idea of 'credentials' . . . Maybe individuals with 'attainments' outside the political world . . . can get us out of this mess . . . But . . . reaching outside . . . might make things worse . . . Is it possible what we need right now isn't a nonpolitical but instead a brilliant and gifted politician to lead us through these times? (Yes, I know; Who? I don't know . . .)"

(3) This leadership problem exists in evangelical circles too: on our recent vacation, a relatively new convert to Christ told me of his conversation with a youth pastor who graduated from the same seminary I did, and this pastor told this new believer that though he works in a denomination that disobeys Scripture on a key issue, he feels God still wants him to minister in that denomination. The new convert told me, "That's not right: you cannot justify serving the Lord in a denomination that so clearly violates Scripture on such a key issue like that!"

I was stunned to realize that a new convert could discern the unholiness in a graduate of the same seminary I attended, but then I remembered how that seminary some time ago had made the decision to go in a direction that has contributed to this errant view among its later graduates! In effect, a relatively new convert to Christ has effectively and Biblically critiqued the direction the seminary I attended has taken!

Need: *So we ask, "What can we do to avoid the tendency of so many today to practice self-destructive leadership?"*

- I. **Right after his defeat of the Midianites, Gideon exercised excellent Biblical leadership, Judges 8:22-23:**
 - A. Since Gideon had defeated the Midianites, Judges 8:22 reports that the men of Israel approached him to ask that he set up a dynasty over Israel where he, his son and his son's son would rule over them.
 - B. Gideon emphatically refused this request, claiming that the Lord instead was Israel's King, Judges 8:23. He recalled that the Lord had called and equipped him to lead Israel to victory over Midian when he was fearfully threshing wheat in a winepress to hide it from the Midianites (Judges 6:11), that the glory of the triumph over Midian thus belonged to God so that Israel should view the Lord as her true King, cf. 1 Samuel 8:6-7.
- II. **However, Gideon then made a big mistake: he tried to exalt the Lord's rule with all good intent, but he acted independently of Scripture in doing so, and that led him to sabotage his initial excellent leadership:**
 - A. After claiming that God would rule Israel, Gideon asked a favor of Israel's men -- that each of the warriors who had fought with him might give him an earring of their spoils taken from the Midianites, Judges 8:24.
 - B. The men gladly heeded this request, donating 43 pounds of gold earrings (Bible Know. Com., O. T., p. 396), and from it Gideon made an image of an ephod and set it up in his hometown of Ophrah, Judges 8:25-27a.
 - C. Such action may initially seem idolatrous to us, but in light of Bible history, we can discern that idolatry was not Gideon's intent here, for he meant to honor God this way, *but only independent of Scripture authority:*
 1. When the Angel of the Lord had first called Gideon to lead Israel to victory over the Midianites, Gideon had complained that the God of Israel's Exodus had failed to keep helping Israel, Judges 6:12-13.
 2. Thus, the Angel of the Lord had graciously shown Gideon that He was the Angel promised by the God of Israel's Exodus (Exodus 23:20-23), and He proved as much by igniting Gideon's offering, what elsewhere had occurred only as a divine miracle back at Mount Sinai where Israel had just come out of Egypt in the Exodus, Judges 6:21-22 with Leviticus 9:24.

3. Gideon also recalled that the God of Israel's Exodus had given Israel an initial victory over the Midianites back in Numbers 31:1-10, and that Moses had then called Israel's warriors to give 1/500th of their battle spoil taken from Midian to Israel's high priest as an offering unto the Lord, Numbers 31:25-29.
 4. Thus, trying to honor God in his era, Gideon followed Moses' precedent in collecting an offering, *but instead of giving the collected gold to the high priest as Moses directed in Numbers 31, Gideon made an ephod from the collection, a replica of the high priest's outer garment*, Judges 8:27a; Exodus 28:6-29.
 5. His reason was clear: the ephod bore the breastpiece with its Urim and Thummin that were used to discern God's will (*Z. P. E. B.*, v. Two, p. 332), and Gideon appreciated God's guidance that had given him victory over Midian (Jud. 6:12-7:15), so he tried to honor God for this guidance in forming the gold into an ephod.
- D. However, this ephod did **not** lead Israel to honor **God**, for Israel's people came to bow down and worship the **ephod**, so the ephod turned into a snare even to Gideon and his household, Jud. 8:27b. *Gideon's functioning with good intent but apart from closely following Scripture led to his harming himself and all Israel!*
- III. Indeed, this ephod construction led to Gideon's actually dismantling his initial upright leadership stance that he had made with Israel's men, Judges 8:28-35:**
- A. On the one hand, the Midianites were subdued and Israel enjoyed forty years of peace, Judges 8:28.
 - B. However, with all of Israel coming to worship Gideon's ephod in his hometown, Gideon himself fell prey to viewing himself as a great deliverer, so he started to act like a king opposite his initial stance, Judges 8:29-31:
 1. Gideon, or Jerubbaal, living in his town where all Israel came to worship his ephod, became proud, and like many a king married many women and sired 70 sons, Judges 8:29-30; *Ibid.*, *B. K. C., O. T.*, p. 396.
 2. He also acquired a concubine in Shechem and she bore him a son, and Gideon called him "Abimelech," a name that means, "my father is king," Judges 8:31; *Ibid.*, *Zon. Pict. Ency. Bib.*, vol. One, p. 15.
 - C. In the end, though Gideon died in old age full of honor, and though he was buried in his father's tomb in his town (Jud. 8:32), after he died, his ephod idol opened the door for Israel to worship Baal-Berith, Judges 8:33a.
 - D. Israel then forgot the Lord Who had delivered her from all of her enemies, and she also failed to show kindness to the household of Gideon regardless of all the good that he had done for Israel, Judges 8:33b-35.

Lesson: *Though Gideon initially rightly led Israel to look to the Lord as her true King and Deliverer versus himself, in launching out on his own with all good intent to promote God's honor, but doing so at the failure of closely following Scripture's directives, he tripped up Israel and even himself, sabotaging his own good leadership.*

Application: *(1) May we trust in Christ to be saved, John 3:16. (2) If called of the Lord to lead in a divine institution like marriage, family, church, business or government, may we CLOSELY FOLLOW SCRIPTURE versus acting independently of the Lord even if we have the best of intentions, for only in closely heeding God's Word can we avoid the spiritual darkness that sabotages our leadership effectiveness, Psalm 119:105; Isaiah 8:20.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

(1) Last Sunday after our morning worship service, a married couple, members of our Church, told me in the Fellowship Hall how a relative of theirs in a Church in another state always hears messages from the pulpit on social issues instead of hearing Bible content. As a result, the relative's congregation is kept in a state of constant tension over such issues, tension reflected in the various political factions in the troubled secular world around us.

This couple's words led me to recall the Apostle Paul's directive in 2 Timothy 4:1-2 that pastors are to "preach the Word" in accountability to Christ. We are responsible to give the **content** of **Scripture** as **opposed** to promoting human ideas and views on social or political issues!

(2) Later that day in the Fellowship Hall, another Church member totally apart from this couple asked me if I was preaching through the Bible, specifically wondering if I was going to cover the book of Ruth after we finished Judges. I said, "Yes!" to her appreciation. Again, I saw an emphasis on the need to expound Scripture, and saw these two conversations as God's circumstantial signals to keep on with our verse-by-verse trek through the Bible. (We do take breaks from this trek to study books or biographies of special request, but we usually trek through the Bible!)

(3) We can discern God's purpose behind such guidance: verse-by-verse Bible exposition leads us all -- me as a pastor and all of us as a congregation -- to avoid getting caught up in the world's futile way of thinking and reacting to current events, for **God** then uses His **Word's content** to **direct** our **thoughts** and our **actions**. Instead of walking in the futile darkness of the world around us, we end up walking in the light of the Lord, Psalm 119:105; Isaiah 8:20.

May we who are assigned of the Lord to lead in some divine institution NOT launch out on our OWN initiative even with good intentions, but CLOSELY FOLLOW SCRIPTURE, that we sustain good leadership!