

Gideon's Temptations of Power and Wealth

Judges 8:22-35

Judges 8:22-25 - *"Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, "Rule over us, both you and your son, and your grandson also; for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian."*

²³ *But Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you."* ²⁴ *Then Gideon said to them, "I would like to make a request of you, that each of you would give me the earrings from his plunder." For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.*

²⁵ *So they answered, "We will gladly give them." And they spread out a garment, and each man threw into it the earrings from his plunder.* ²⁶ *Now the weight of the gold earrings that he requested was one thousand seven hundred shekels of gold, besides the crescent ornaments, pendants, and purple robes which were on the kings of Midian, and besides the chains that were around their camels' necks.* ²⁷ *Then Gideon made it into an ephod and set it up in his city, Ophrah. And all Israel played the harlot with it there. It became a snare to Gideon and to his house.*

²⁸ *Thus Midian was subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted their heads no more. And the country was quiet for forty years in the days of Gideon.*

²⁹ *Then Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and dwelt in his own house.* ³⁰ *Gideon had seventy sons who were his own offspring, for he had many wives.* ³¹ *And his concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, whose name he called Abimelech.* ³² *Now Gideon the son of Joash died at a good old age, and was buried in the tomb of Joash his father, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.*

³³ *So it was, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals, and made Baal-Berith their god.* ³⁴ *Thus the children of Israel did not remember the LORD their God, who had delivered them from the hands of all their enemies on every side;* ³⁵ *nor did they show kindness to the house of Jerubbaal (Gideon) in accordance with the good he had done for Israel."*

Background Notes

After Gideon's victory over the Midianites, the people of Israel asked Gideon to be their king. Gideon refused this offer because he knew that God did not intend Israel to have a king like the other nations. Why not? Because **God was their King!** In the Law God had said, "...you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel." Now we know that Israel eventually did have kings, and became like the other nations that had kings, but that was not God's original intention. So Gideon rightly responded: *"I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you"* (v23).

That was the good news, but now comes the bad news. The sad news. Gideon asked for part of the plunder or booty that had been taken from the Midianites. He asked for the golden earrings that the soldiers had taken: *"I would like to*

make a request of you, that each of you would give me the earrings from his plunder. For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites” (v24). Ishmaelites are mentioned here because the Midianites had intermarried with the Ishmaelites.

Well, the people not only gave Gideon the earrings, but a lot of other plunder as well. The weight of the gold alone was 1700 shekels = about 43 pounds of gold! Gideon took the gold and had it molded into a golden ephod. An ephod was one of the outer garments worn by the high priest under his breastplate.

Why did Gideon make a golden ephod? A number of answers have been suggested. Maybe he had a guilty conscience about taking so much gold. Maybe he had a secret desire to be the high priest, and was not satisfied with just being the Judge. On the other hand, he may have done it with good motives, because the high priesthood had become corrupt during the time of the Judges. Maybe he did this to remind the people that they were not to have a king, but to be a nation directly led by God. Or maybe it was just to be a memorial of the great victory over the Midianites. In any case, Gideon's golden ephod actually became an **idol** in Israel! *“Then Gideon made it into an ephod and set it up in his city, Ophrah. And all Israel played the harlot with it there. It became a snare to Gideon and to his house.”*

Notice that the ephod became a “snare” - even to Gideon! When we come to the end of the chapter, we see that Gideon lived like a king, even though he never became a king of Israel. He had a harem, with many wives (v30). He named one of his sons Abimelech, and Abimelech means “my father a king.” And when Gideon died, the people of Israel cycled back to idolatry and Baal worship. How sad!

Doctrinal Points

1. Mature believers are not immune to temptation.

Gideon was a mature believer. Gideon had been tried and tested in the “school of God,” and he had passed the test. Gideon had faithfully led God's people against the enemy. He had persevered when the going was tough. **But Gideon was not immune to temptation** - in spite of his maturity in faith. In fact, Gideon was a **target for temptation!**

Some Christians have the idea that temptation becomes less and less of a problem when you become a mature believer. Not so. When I was a young Christian, I thought that that when believers got older and more mature in the faith, temptation would affect them less and less. I would look at older, mature godly men and women and conclude that they never faced temptation. But nothing could be further from the truth!

Temptation doesn't get less and less as we become more mature -- and mature believers are **not immune** to temptation! In fact, in many ways **mature believers are targets of temptation**. Satan knows that if he can get a mature believer to fall, many others will be stumbled in the faith and be hindered in their growth as believers.

Notice that Gideon's temptations came right after a major victory. Have you ever noticed that this is often the pattern with temptation? Satan knows that we are especially vulnerable after a major spiritual victory. Why? Because we begin to think that we can win spiritual battles ourselves, in our own strength. Right after Israel's major victory over Jericho, for example, Israel was defeated at little Ai (Joshua 6-7). Why? Because they were overconfident, and thought that they could win battles in their own strength.

So watch out, mature believers! Watch out - especially after a major spiritual victory in your life. Mature believers are not immune to temptation.

2. Mature believers are not immune to failure.

It's one thing to be tempted; it's another thing to fail. Temptation and failure are not synonymous. Failure is when we yield to temptation. Our Lord was tempted, but He never yielded. He never failed.

Gideon resisted the temptation to become king, but he couldn't resist the temptation for gold! In fact, as time went on, Gideon couldn't resist other temptations of the flesh. He began to live as if he were king, and had a harem with many wives and concubines, even though Gideon was a mature believer!

What's the lesson here for us? It's obvious. Mature believers are not immune to failure. Notice the areas where Gideon was tempted – money, power, and sex. Sadly, I could give you example after example of mature believers who have fallen in one of these areas. I'm sure you know of many examples as well.

One of my seminary professors - a great and mature student of God's Word - left his wife and left the seminary so he could continue an affair with a seminary secretary. It was almost unbelievable. A mature believer - failed! Watch out! Mature believers are not immune to failure.

Practical Applications

1. Beware of golden earrings!

I know a lot of Christian women who wear golden earrings, but don't worry - I'm not referring to you and your earrings! I'm referring to Gideon's apparently small request - and where it led. *"Then Gideon said to them, 'I would like to make a request of you, that each of you would give me the earrings from his plunder.' For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites" (v24).* That was the beginning of Gideon's downfall.

How often this "golden earring syndrome" is repeated in the lives of Christians! They may rationalize: "I'll just yield a little bit. I'll just try this little area of temptation. It doesn't look dangerous. It's so small. And it doesn't affect other people."

Just a little materialism, just a little secret sin, just a little dabbling in this tempting area is sometimes all it takes. Listen to this warning: *"...those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which*

drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:9-10.) This truth is illustrated in the life of Gideon. Don't forget! Beware of golden earrings!

2. Beware of golden ephods!

If you had told Gideon that his golden ephod would become an idol in Israel and a snare to him and his household, he would have said, “You're crazy!” But that's exactly what happened. The problem was that Gideon departed from the Word of God.

Gideon may have made that golden ephod with good motives. Maybe he thought it would direct the peoples' attention to God. But even if the ephod was made out of good motives, it was the wrong method. Why? Because it didn't line up with the Word of God. Only priests were to be involved with ephods, and Gideon was not a priest. And ephods were not to be made of gold. And ephods were not to be kept in places like Ophrah. They were only to be kept at the location of the Tabernacle. Gideon knew all this, but he departed from the Word of God.

Beware of golden ephods! **Anything**, even something that starts with good motives, **can become a golden ephod!** For example, the “divinity schools” at Harvard and Yale were set up to prepare men of God for the ministry. Today, they have become “golden ephods.” In fact, today these seminaries criticize and tear down the Word of God, and hinder the work of the Lord!

Emmaus Bible College, where I teach, could become a golden ephod if we were to depart from the Word of God. Your church could become a golden ephod, if your church departs from the truths and teachings of Scripture. Many churches that began as shining lights for the Lord have become golden ephods because they no longer teach the Word of God. They departed from true message of Scripture.

The life of Gideon doesn't have a happy ending, but it's important to remember that it can happen today! Beware of golden ephods!