

GIDEON'S REFUSAL TO BE A KING

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Judges chapters 6-8 describe how God raised up Gideon to deliver the children of Israel from their oppression at the hands of the Midianites, and how Gideon utterly destroyed them with only a 300-man army. God said he only allowed Gideon to have 300 men “lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me” (Judg 7:2). Even so, after the great victory, instead of giving God all the glory, Israel gave the credit to Gideon himself and tried to make him their king: “Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son’s son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian” (Judg 8:22). But Gideon refused the offer. “*And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you*” (Judg 8:23). Gideon understood that God knew best how to rule over Israel, and it was *not* by having a king.

Israel’s rejection of God

When Israel demanded to have a king instead of judges, they were rejecting God’s reign over them. Many years later, Israel made the same demand, and God said they were rejecting him by doing so. “And the Lord said unto Samuel, Harken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, *but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them*” (1 Sam 8:7). God had chosen the system of government for the nation of Israel and that was the judges. Through the judges, God reigned over Israel. It is true that God rules in the kingdoms of men regardless of their system of government (Josh 3:13; 2 Chr 20:6; Ezra 5:11; Psa 2:6-12; 22:28; 47; 83:18; 103:19; 110:1-7; Dan 4:17,25-26,32,35; Matt 28:18; Acts 10:36; Rom 13:1-8; Rev 2:26-27; 12:5; 19:15). And, consequently, God is the one who chose Saul (1 Sam 9:15-17), David (1 Sam 13:13-14; 16:1-14), Solomon (2 Sam 7:12-16; 1 Kgs 1:11-40; 1 Chr 22:5-10; 29:1), and the other kings of Israel and Judah (see 1 Kgs 11:11-13,26-38; 12:15-25; 14:5-16; 15:25-30; 2 Kgs 9:1-10:11; 10:30; 15:8-12; Jer 22:10-30).

Two contrasting systems of government for Israel

But a monarchy is an entirely different system of government than the judges. For one thing, kings rule very differently than judges. God warned Israel about the absolute and arbitrary manner in which kings rule their subjects (Deut 17:14-20; 1 Sam 8:9-18). The judges did not rule in this way. It was a blessing to the people of Israel to be under the rule of judges rather than kings. Further, the nature of a monarchy is that the kingdom is inherited by a descendant when the king dies (see Judg 8:22-23; Dan 2:44). Such was not the case with the judges. With the judges, God chose from among the entire nation of Israel the very best and most righteous and capable leader for His people. First, God chose Moses to deliver Israel from Egypt and lead them to the promised land of Canaan (Exod 3; Num 12:1-9; 16:1-35,41-50; Acts 7:20-36). In Moses, God chose a man who was “*very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth*” (Num 12:3). Next, God chose Joshua as the successor to Moses, to lead the Israelite conquest of Canaan (Num 27:15-23; Deut 34:7-9). Joshua (along with Caleb) “*wholly followed the Lord*” unlike any other of his generation (Num 32:11-12). This was the pattern that God followed throughout the time of the judges. Whenever Israel departed from God and suffered punishment from Him for their sins,

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(continued)

“the Lord raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them” (Judg 2:16). God raised up righteous men as judges and these judges taught Israel to follow God’s commandments (Judg 2:17). “*And when the Lord raised them up judges, then the Lord was with the judge*” (Judg 2:18). After Joshua, the Lord raised up Othniel, the nephew and son-in-law of Caleb (Judg 3:9). God also raised up Ehud (Judg 3:15) and the other judges of Israel. God chose Gideon (Judg 6:14), Samson (Judg 13:5), and Samuel (1 Sam 1-3).

Our great cloud of witnesses

None of the judges are described as being wicked. Many of them are included in Hebrews chapter 11 as part of our “great cloud of witnesses” (Heb 12:1).

Hebrews 11:23-29 speaks of the faith and obedience of Moses: “By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king’s commandment. By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned.” Of Joshua, Hebrews 11:30 says, “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.”

Hebrews 11:32-34 then says, “And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.”

Israel’s spiritual decline under the kings

The judges were righteous men of faith whom God selected from among all the people to deliver and judge them. That is why we see judges selected by God from so many different tribes: Moses of Levi (Num 26:59; 1 Chr 23:14), Joshua of Ephraim (Num 13:8), Othniel of Judah (Num 13:6 + Judg 3:9), Ehud of Benjamin (Judg 3:15), Gideon of Manasseh (Judg 6:15), Jephthah of Gilead (i.e. the tribe of Manasseh; see Num 26:29; 32:39-42; Judg 11:1-11), Samson of Dan (Judg 13:2-5,24-25), and Samuel of Levi (1 Sam 1:1; 1 Chr 6:16-27). Therefore, with God’s system, Israel was guaranteed to always have righteous leaders. But that would not be the case with kings. Kings and their descendants were not always righteous. In fact, of 3 kings of united Israel, 19 kings of divided Israel, and 19 kings of Judah, only 6 of the 41 led their kingdom in righteousness all their days (David, Solomon, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah). That is the result of rejecting God’s system to follow the world’s system. When Israel rejected God’s rule over them in the days of Samuel, they embarked upon a 464-year downward spiral that resulted in the destruction of the Northern Kingdom by Assyria in 722 B.C. and the Southern Kingdom by Babylon in 586 B.C. Faithful Gideon refused to go this evil way.