Shoftim 25: The Second National Decline

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Summary thus far

- Midian Agent of division, immorality and idolatry
- Gidon A complex figure in the story, and more so in the words of our sages.
- Gidon is selected for reasons which are unclear, but there are parallels to Avraham and Moshe, suggesting that old salvations can recur.
- Gd sends miracles for multiple purposes
 - o To show Gidon that He is going to carry out His promises
 - To win over the Jews to faith
 - To encourage Gidon to act miraculously
- Gd's signs, Gidon's missions
 - o Burning his food offering leads to Gidon destroying the altar and 7-year sacrifice
 - Wetting/drying the wool leads to Gidon culling his army
 - o The Midianite dream leads to Gidon leading the nation into war
- The Jews are ready to believe; they follow Gidon when he rejects idolatry. But we retain flaws, like ingratitude.

8:4-21 The Second Decline: Division

1. Succot and Penuel Bereishit 33:17, Bereishit 32:31-32

2. Rashi to Shoftim 8:4

3. Abarbanel to Shoftim 8:6

האחת להיותם עייפים והקל יתברך צוה (ישעי' נ"ח ז') "הלא פרוס לרעב לחמך" "ונפש נענה תשביע". והסבה השנית להיותם עדיין רודפים האחת להיותם עייפים והקל יתברך צוה (ישעי' נ"ח ז') "הלא פרוס לרעב לחמך" ונפש נענה תשביע". והסבה השנית לפניהם לאכול...

One reason was that they were tired, and G-d commanded, "Split your bread for the needy," "and satisfy the oppressed spirit." The second reason was that they were still pursuing their enemies to save all of Israel, and so it would be appropriate to give food to those who were fighting on their behalf, to save them...

4. Abarbanel to Shoftim 8:7

....מולח המלחמה.... הוא אצלי כדי שלא תתעכב תשועת המלחמה.... Why didn't Gidon punish them immediately, instead conditioning their punishment on capturing the kings? It seems to me that this was lest they delay the military victory...

5. Metzudat David to Shoftim 8:9

לפי שבטחו להשגב במגדל עוז אשר היה להם לזה אמר שינתוץ אותו:

Because they trusted that they would be safe in their strong fortress, he said he would destroy it.

6. Ralbag to Shoftim 8:8

והתפעל מזה התפעלות רב לרוע תכונתם עד שלא הסכימו לעזור בזאת המלחמה, אפילו זה העזר המעטי. ולפי שנסכמו כל אנשי פנואל במעשה אמר לנתוץ המגדל ולהרוג יושביו אבל קצר בדבריו ונמנע מלגלות להם שיהרגם.

He was moved powerfully to action by this, because of their wickedness such that they would not aid in this battle even in this small way. And because all of Penuel agreed to this course of action, he said he would destroy the fortress and kill the residents. But he abbreviated his words and did not reveal that he would kill them.

7. Malbim to Shoftim 8:9

כי הם אין להם תירוץ שיראים מפני אויב אחר שבוטחים במגדל עוז, ולכן יתוץ את המגדל מדה כנגד מדה:
Because they lacked the justification of fearing the enemy, since they placed their trust in their strong fortress. Therefore he would smash the fortress, measure for measure.

8. Ralbag to Shoftim 8:12

:שהיו חושבים שיהיה חיל גדעון רב מאשר אתם כי לילה היה. ויתכן שקראו ג"כ חרב לד' ולגדעון להחרידם:
They thought Gidon's forces were greater than theirs, for it was night. Perhaps they also called "The sword for Gd and Gidon" to frighten them.

9. Malbim to Shoftim 8:13

שנפל על המחנה בלילה כמו שבפעם הראשון החרידם בלילה, ובעת שעלה החרס על הארץ שב, ור"ל ששב מסבה שעלה החרס כי אנשיו היו מועטים, ולא יכול להלחם רק בלילה:

He attacked the camp at night, as he had frightened them at night on the first occasion. When the Sun rose over the land he retreated, meaning he retreated <u>because</u> the sun had risen, for his forces were few and he could only fight at night.

10. Radak to Shoftim 8:16

ויתכן לפרשו כמשמעו שהודיע להם פשעם עם הקוצים:

Or it may be explained as it sounds: he told them of their sins, with the thorns.

11. Abarbanel to Shoftim 8:14

ועשה זה לזקני העיר בלבד לפי שהם השיבוהו הרעה ההיא, כי גדעון לאנשי סכות בכלל שאל הלחם והתשובה לא היתה מהעם כי אם משרי מכות, ובעבור זה העניש את השרים... וזה פירוש אצלי "ויודע בהם את אנשי סכות", שהוא כמו "וידע אלקים", לשון רחמים... He did this to the city elders because they had given him that wicked reply. Gidon asked the general population of Succot for bread, and the response came not from the nation but from the leaders of Succot, and so he punished the leaders [alone] ... And I believe this is "Vayoda with the thorns the people of Succot", like "And G-d knew (Shemot 2:25)," an expression of mercy.

12. Malbim to Shoftim 8:14

ראה כי שרי סכות אינם ראוים לעונש, כי טענו כדין שעדיין לא היו מחויבים לתת לו מס, וגם כי היו יראים לעשות זאת. אבל אנשי סכות... "ויודע בהם" ר"ל על ידם, שצוה שהזקנים ייסרו את אנשי סכות... "ויודע בהם" ר"ל על ידם, שצוה שהזקנים ייסרו את אנשי סכות... "He saw that the leaders of Succot did not deserve punishment, for they argued correctly that they were not obligated to pay tribute, and they were also afraid to help. But the people of Succot, from whom he had sought tzedakah for his tired men, deserved punishment... "Vayoda with them" means via [the elders]; he instructed the elders to punish the people of Succot.

13. Radak to Shoftim 8:17

ועתה הרג את אנשי העיר אולי היו נלחמים עמו כשבא לנתוץ את המגדל:...

...And now he killed the people of the city, perhaps because they battled him when he came to destroy the fortress.

14. Abarbanel to Shoftim 8:20

כדי שהנער יתחיל גבורתו בהריגת שני מלכים שהוא כבוד גדול וסימן טוב לעתיד...

The youth would begin to display strength by killing two kings; this would be a great honour and a good omen...

15. Radak to Shoftim 8:21

לא נמות ע"י נער שנצטער בפגיעתו כי אין לו גבורה וכח עדין שיכה בנו בפעם אחת מהרה...

We will not die via a youth, such that we should be pained when he strikes us for he lacks the strength to strike us once, quickly...

16. Abarbanel to Shoftim 8:21

והיתה כוונתם שאין ראוי שילמדו הנערים חרב בגופי המלכים, ושאינו מהנאות שנער קטן יהרגם ולא אדם פחות כי אם שר הצבא ראש

They meant that it would not be appropriate for youths to learn the sword via the bodies of kings, and it would be inappropriate for a young man to kill them, or a lesser person. It should be the general, leader of the nation.