

“From Great to Gone” (Judges 8:22–9:57)

In 2001, Jim Collins wrote the landmark business book *Good to Great*.¹ Collins and his team thoroughly researched hundreds of businesses and came up with a list of characteristics that distinguish great companies from good or mediocre ones. *Good to Great* has become one of the most popular business leadership books of all time. Interestingly, two companies Collins commends that moved from “good to great” are Fannie Mae and Circuit City. As you may know, both of these companies are now imploding. The principle is this: Just because a company succeeds doesn’t mean that their success will continue. This is true not only of businesses; it is also true of churches, families, and individuals.

Gideon was a man of mediocrity. He battled fear, discouragement, and disbelief. Yet God slowly but surely moved Gideon from good to great. When Gideon finally believed God’s promises and acted upon them, the Lord used him to conquer the Midianites and save Israel. If the story ended there Gideon would forever be remembered as a man of greatness.² Unfortunately, we are about to learn an important truth: *Greatness does not guarantee permanence*. Judges 8–9 chronicles the personal demise of Gideon and the forfeiture of his legacy.³ In this passage, we will find one of the greatest examples of the New Testament principle: What a person sows he will reap (Gal 6:7).

Gideon refuses Israel’s kingship (8:22–23). Gideon’s victory over the Midianites in chapter 7 led to national renown and popularity.⁴ In 8:22 we read: **“Then the men of Israel⁵ said to Gideon, ‘Rule over us, both you and your son, also your son’s son, for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian.’”** Gideon is so popular that the people ask him to set up a dynasty, something altogether new for the nation of Israel.⁶ This is one way they can reward Gideon for what he has done for them. It is also somewhat of a guarantee that there will be unity among the tribes and protection against future invaders. Yet, in their request Israel commits two sins. *First, Israel gives Gideon credit he doesn’t deserve*. Apart from what God has done in his life, Gideon is a weak, defeated, discouraged man. Although Gideon is the instrument, he is *only* an instrument. The credit belongs to God alone. Unfortunately, as you read this chapter you will not find one word of spontaneous praise or gratitude to God. Nothing is more indicative of the spiritual condition of Israel than this. Israel should have been praising God for His victory and seeking His guidance long before they approached Gideon. Instead, they get hyped over God’s instrument. We are just like Israel. We can find it easy to get caught up in people instead of God, who works through His people. God, however, doesn’t want me to put people on a pedestal; He wants me to worship Him as the one true God. *Second, Israel makes a request that is outside God’s will*. God raised up Gideon to be a judge, but Israel wants to make him into a king, to establish a royal dynasty. This is not God’s plan. God Himself is the king in Israel (Deut 33:5). God wants Israel to be a theocracy, a nation led and ruled by Him rather than by any earthly king.⁷ Later, God permits Israel to have a visible king, but at this point Israel is to be a theocracy.⁸ Like Israel, it can be easy for us to assume that we know better than God what we should do and when we should do it. Yet, we typically fail to pray, fast, and seek godly counsel. As a result, we move ahead of God and make foolish decisions. God wants us to wait on His timing and His will. Once He reveals His direction, we are then free to move forward in faith.

In 8:23, Gideon responds to Israel’s request by saying, **“I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you.”** Gideon turns down the opportunity of a lifetime. He then reminds his people that *God* is their king. What a theologian! What a God-fearer! This sounds so good, doesn’t it? It appears that Gideon is on the right track. Unfortunately, the rest of the story proves otherwise. Furthermore, there is a subtle clue here that demonstrates Gideon is less than theologically sound. Like Israel, Gideon fails to give credit to Yahweh for the victory.⁹ Previously, when Deborah and Barak won a victory over the Canaanites, Deborah wrote an entire song exalting the Lord for His victory (5:2–31). Moses and Joshua did the same thing when God gave them victory. But Gideon is strangely silent.

Gideon rebels against God (8:24–32). After Gideon turns down the kingship of Israel, he does something both shocking and revolting. In 8:24, he makes a request of his political suitors: **“I would request of you, that each of you give me an earring from his spoil.’ (For they [the Midianites] had gold earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.¹⁰) They [Israel] said, ‘We will surely give them.’ So they spread out a garment, and every one of them threw an earring there from his spoil. The weight of the gold earrings that he requested was 1,700 shekels [about 43 pounds] of gold, besides the crescent ornaments and the pendants and the purple robes which were on the kings of Midian, and besides the neck bands that were on their camels’ necks. Gideon made it into an ephod, and placed it in his city,¹¹ Ophrah, and all Israel played the harlot¹² with it there, so that it became a snare¹³ to Gideon and his household”** (8:24–27). Gideon turns from God to gold.¹⁴ Consequently, he becomes a greedy and idolatrous man.¹⁵ There is some debate over the ephod that Gideon makes. In the Old Testament, an ephod is a garment shaped somewhat like an apron and worn by the high priest during worship in the tabernacle.¹⁶ Over the ephod, the high priest wore a linen breastplate with two stones used to determine God’s will (Exod 28:1–14).¹⁷ However, in this context the ephod seems to be a shrine of idolatry. Apparently, Gideon reconstructs the shrine to Baal he earlier had torn down (6:25–32).¹⁸ This new shrine becomes a “snare” to Gideon and his household.¹⁹ Gideon is following in the footsteps of his passive father, Joash, who led Israel into idolatry. Like father, like son.²⁰

Remember, Gideon began life in a pagan home. Then God entered his life and he destroyed his family idols. But in his old age he returns to the idols of his youth. This is a phenomenon I’ve seen in the lives of many people: the sins of youth come back to haunt them in their old age. That’s why it’s so important for young people to “remember your Creator in the days of your youth” (Eccl 12:1). When we sow our wild oats the germination may take years. Eventually, the seeds will sprout.²¹ Young people, please avoid little compromises in your youth because they may come back to haunt you. *Greatness does not guarantee permanence.*

In 8:28, we learn that Gideon’s victory over the Midianites brought blessing. But the words here are bittersweet. **“So Midian was subdued before the sons of Israel, and they did not lift up their heads anymore. And the land was undisturbed for forty years in the days of Gideon.”** These words are sweet because the Midianites have finally been crushed. They can’t even lift up their heads anymore. This is how Israel lived for seven years under Midianite rule and invasion. But finally the tables have been turned...Israel is now on top! Yet, these words are also bitter because of the last phrase, “And the land was undisturbed for forty years in the days of Gideon” (8:28b). This is the last note of rest and peace in Judges (cf. 3:11, 30; 5:31). Gideon’s sin pushes God over the edge, so to speak. A corner has been turned; Israel is about to reap what they have sown (cf. Gal 6:7).

Tragically, Gideon’s rebellion against God continues. Gideon succumbs to the “I-deserve-it” syndrome.²² In 8:29, the author of Judges pens these predictable words: **“Then Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and lived in his own house.”** Gideon retires and decides to live large. Verses 29–32 describe the lifestyle of a king, not that of a judge or a retired army officer. Gideon is quite wealthy, partly from the spoils of battle and partly from the gifts of the people. Often having too much stored away for retirement can be a bad thing. Wealth and leisure can destroy us. Instead of serving God, it is easy to squander some of the best years of our lives on ourselves. Are you building up God’s kingdom or your own kingdom?

Gideon’s spiral disintegration continues in 8:30: **“Now Gideon had seventy sons who were his direct descendants, for he had many wives.”** The Mosaic Law had warned Israel against having a king who accumulated many wives (Deut 17:17). Near Eastern kings paraded their status by taking many wives.²³ It seems like this is exactly what Gideon is doing. To make matters even worse, Gideon has a child through his Canaanite mistress (concubine),²⁴ who lives in Shechem (8:31).²⁵ The Israelites were to eradicate the Canaanites, but now their top leader decides to marry one! This is expressly forbidden in Scripture (Exod 34:15–16; Deut 7:3–4). Israel suffers the consequences of Gideon’s disobedience.

It seems that Gideon's spectacular victory over the Midianites led to pride. Before long "Thy kingdom come" is replaced with "My kingdom come." Unfortunately, the old adage "Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely" often holds true even in the church.²⁶ We must always bear in mind that those who are called to leadership in God's kingdom face constant temptation to exchange God's agenda for personal ambition and pleasure. Ironically, the more impressive one's achievements for God, the greater the temptation one may encounter. Please pray for your pastors, elders, and ministry leaders. Leaders are not immune to idolatry or immorality. In fact, we may be even more susceptible to these sins because of Satan's constant attack. We desperately need your prayers. *Greatness does not guarantee permanence.*

The account of Gideon's life concludes in 8:32 with these words: **"And Gideon the son of Joash died at a ripe old age and was buried in the tomb of his father Joash, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites."**

Surprisingly, Gideon's death notice confirms his importance; only he and Samson are said to have been buried in the tomb of their fathers. To die "at a ripe old age" implies a long and full life. Elsewhere in the Old Testament, the expression is used only of Abraham (Gen 15:15; 25:8) and David (1 Chron 29:28). This leads to a natural question: Why does God allow Gideon to live out his fully ordained days? As a student of divine discipline, I would suspect that God would take him home prematurely. Yet, He doesn't. God just allows Gideon to wallow in his sin. Who can say why God does what He does? He has a purpose in everything. Sometimes He allows sinning Christians to live on and He takes faithful Christians home early. From our limited, earthly perspective, there is no rhyme or reason to it. Nonetheless, we know God is sovereign. All that we need to know is Gideon fails to finish well. Like many Old Testament characters, he falters in his latter years. It seems that Gideon fails because he lacks a strong foundation of faith. In other words, in the wake of a national emergency Gideon steps into the limelight and exhibits a moment of courage, but due to his lack of faith and faithfulness the rest of his life is weak and sinful.²⁷

It is important to recognize that there are two different types of courage—courage for a moment and courage for a lifetime. The latter is usually more difficult. In my weight lifting, I have trained my body to lift heavy weights. In a moment of courage (or insanity), I can attempt to lift a heavy set. I then take a rather lengthy break and do another set. This is power lifting. However, I have not trained my body to lift lighter weights for higher reps and little or no rest. This is endurance lifting. I think the majority of the Christian life consists of stamina not strength. As Christians, we need to work out with the light and momentary challenges of life and push ourselves on a daily basis to keep lifting. It's easy to be courageous in a moment of time, but what we really need is believers who will live for Christ day in and day out over the course of a lifetime. *Greatness does not guarantee permanence.*

Gideon fails to leave a godly legacy (8:33–35). The sad legacy of Gideon's life begins in 8:33–35: **"Then it came about, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the sons of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals, and made Baal-berith ["Baal of the covenant"] their god. Thus the sons of Israel did not remember the LORD their God, who had delivered them from the hands of all their enemies on every side; nor did they show kindness to the household of Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) in accord with all the good that he had done to Israel."** When the lead runner makes a wrong turn, his followers go with him. The idolatry of Gideon becomes the idolatry of his descendents.²⁸ This is a tragic failure! Leaders are responsible for the spiritual well-being of their followers. We must always take this seriously. You are most likely a leader over someone. How are you leading this person? Is your faith drawing this individual closer to Christ or is your example leading him or her astray? It needs to be noted that when a godly leader succumbs to sin the consequences can be disastrous. In the case of Gideon, Israel treats his family poorly (8:35). You see, when a godly leader falls the worst consequences hit his family. It is devastating for a family to hear the world and other Christians criticizing their loved one. It's even worse when people turn their words and ill-treatment on the victimized family. Churches also experience grave consequences when a leader falls. Regardless of what a leader has accomplished, a failure to finish well leaves a bad taste and taints a legacy. *Greatness does not guarantee permanence.*

Interestingly, in 8:35 the narrator begins calling Gideon by his pro-Baal name “Jerubbaal.” This is not coincidental. The Scriptures begin identifying Gideon by the name “Jerubbaal” after he makes the golden ephod (6:32). The name Gideon means “hacker,” and symbolizes the great victories of his life. It was Gideon who cut down the altar of Baal and then cut down the army of Midian. But it is the name “Jerubbaal” which identifies him with the pagan religious practices of his day. Ten times following his death, the Scriptures refer to Gideon by his pagan name “Jerubbaal.”²⁹ What a horrific legacy! The message seems to be that how you conclude your life will be how you are remembered by others. *Greatness does not guarantee permanence.*

Abimelech’s rise to power (9:1–6). The story of Gideon’s legacy continues into chapter 9 through his son Abimelech. Abimelech, which means “my father is a king,” tries to live up to his name and become ruler over all Israel.³⁰ In 9:1–6, the story picks up: **“And Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem to his mother’s relatives, and spoke to them and to the whole clan of the household of his mother’s father, saying, ‘Speak, now, in the hearing of all the leaders of Shechem, ‘Which is better for you, that seventy men, all the sons of Jerubbaal, rule over you, or that one man rule over you?’ Also, remember that I am your bone and your flesh.’** [The sons of Gideon are acting as if they are a tribe of kings! They are following their father’s example (8:27) and are not popular. Abimelech uses this to his advantage.] **And his mother’s relatives spoke all these words on his behalf in the hearing of all the leaders of Shechem; and they were inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, ‘He is our relative.’** [Abimelech gets his mother and her family to do his dirty work for him. The favorite-son argument wins the day. Apparently, blood is thicker than brains.³¹] **They gave him seventy pieces of silver from the house of Baal-berith with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless fellows, and they followed him.** [The seventy pieces of silver is for each intended assassin.] **Then he went to his father’s house at Ophrah and killed his brothers the sons of Jerubbaal, seventy men, on one stone.** [This is a calculated, brutal act of murder, not a quick slaughter of unsuspecting victims.³²] **But Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, for he hid himself.** [This fact will become important.] **All the men of Shechem and all Beth-millo assembled together, and they went and made Abimelech king, by the oak of the pillar which was in Shechem.”**

Abimelech’s “coronation” was a farce, an empty ritual that was never accepted or blessed by the Lord. The new “king” not only blasphemes God by the promises he made, but he defiles a place sacred in Jewish history. The coronation took place by the “oak of the pillar which was in Shechem” (9:6). This is probably the “oak of Moreh,” where the Lord appeared to Abraham and promised to give him and his descendants the land (Gen 12:6). It was near this site that the nation of Israel heard the blessings and curses read from the Law and promised to obey the Lord (Deut 11:26–32; Josh 8:30–35). Jacob buried the idols here as he called his family back to God (Gen 35:1–5), and here Joshua gave his last speech and led the people in reaffirming their obedience to the Lord (Josh 24:25–26). All of this sacred history is degraded and dishonored by the selfish acts of one godless man.³³

If only Gideon hadn’t had a mistress in Shechem (8:31)! Gideon no doubt assumed that with his vast wealth and great national reputation his children would be well provided for, but just the opposite proves true. Sixty-nine of his seventy sons are killed by their half-brother.³⁴ The principle is simple: There is no security apart from the will of God. As parents, the most important thing we can do for our children is pray for them and personally seek first God’s kingdom and His righteousness (Matt 6:33). If Gideon had done this, his legacy might have been radically different.³⁵ Similarly, if we choose to live for the Lord our children may follow hard after Him. There’s no guarantee.³⁶ But often godly parents will produce godly offspring. It has been said two factors influence a man supremely—his parents and his home environment. Unfortunately, both of these work against Abimelech. They do not excuse his actions or remove his guilt, but they are important considerations in understanding the man.³⁷ They are equally important for us to bear in mind as we raise our children.

Jotham's courageous fable (9:7–21). As I indicated above, the fact that one of Gideon's sons survived is significant. In the verses that follow, Jotham, whose name means "Yahweh has integrity/is blameless",³⁸ gets up to preach. **"Now when they told Jotham, he went and stood on the top of Mount Gerizim, and lifted his voice and called out. Thus he said to them, 'Listen to me, O men of Shechem, that God may listen to you. Once the trees went forth to anoint a king over them, and they said to the olive tree, 'Reign over us!' But the olive tree said to them, 'Shall I leave my fatness with which God and men are honored, and go to wave over the trees?' Then the trees said to the fig tree, 'You come, reign over us!' But the fig tree said to them, 'Shall I leave my sweetness and my good fruit, and go to wave over the trees?' Then the trees said to the vine, 'You come, reign over us!' But the vine said to them, 'Shall I leave my new wine, which cheers God and men, and go to wave over the trees?' [The olive tree, the fig tree, and the vine are all beneficial.] Finally all the trees said to the bramble [thorn bush], 'You come, reign over us!' [Abimelech considered himself to be a stately tree of great value, but Jotham said he is nothing but a useless weed. What a blow to the new king's pride! When Israel chose Abimelech as their king, the men of Shechem didn't get useful olive oil, tasty figs, or cheery wine; they got only thorns—fuel for the fire.] The bramble said to the trees, 'If in truth you are anointing me as king over you, come and take refuge in my shade;³⁹ but if not, may fire come out from the bramble and consume the cedars of Lebanon' [i.e., the leading citizens of the city]. Now therefore, if you have dealt in truth and integrity in making Abimelech king [The phrase "truth and integrity" (9:16, 19) is key to understanding this passage.⁴⁰], and if you have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have dealt with him as he deserved—for my father fought for you and risked his life and delivered you from the hand of Midian; but you have risen against my father's house today and have killed his sons, seventy men, on one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his maidservant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your relative—if then you have dealt in truth and integrity with Jerubbaal and his house this day, rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you. But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech and consume the men of Shechem and Beth-millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem and from Beth-millo, and consume Abimelech.' Then Jotham escaped and fled, and went to Beer and remained there because of Abimelech his brother."** The point of the fable is its climax (9:14–15). The focus is on the stupidity of the trees (9:14) and the uselessness of the bramble (9:15). For a bramble to invite the other trees to trust in its shadow is laughable!⁴¹ A bramble is a useless nuisance in the land, good only for fuel for the fire. This, of course, is a symbol of Abimelech, the new king. Only trees which are desperate or simple-minded would look for a leader in a bramble!⁴² Jotham's theme is the foolishness and peril of accepting clearly unqualified leadership. Jotham is no mere spinner of fables, but an instructor of the Church. What care God's people should take in seeking and selecting their leaders.⁴³ *Greatness does not guarantee permanence.*

In a nation of passive and frightened men, Jotham, the youngest of Gideon's sons, steps up in a big way. In speaking out against Abimelech he risks his life because he loves his people. He knows he can't do anything about Abimelech's reign, yet he speaks a prophetic word that is eventually fulfilled. Praise God for courageous men and women who will not back down from anyone or anything. Edmund Burke said, "All that is essential for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing." May you and I not sit by while evil occurs; may we be courageous like Jotham.

The story of Abimelech throws light on Gideon's refusal to become king. Gideon might have arranged for an orderly line of kings. He might have trained one of his sons to be a righteous king over Israel. Instead he took no steps to secure the future. No doubt securing the future is not completely possible, but Gideon did not make even the feeblest attempt to secure righteousness in the nation after so much time. The result is that Gideon left a power-vacuum after his death, and one of the worst of his sons has stepped into the gap. But the blame must largely go to Gideon. He took no responsibility for Israel's future.⁴⁴ He wanted privilege without responsibility. I don't know how things are run in your kingdom (your home), but this doesn't work in my home! Privileges come when responsibilities are met.

Abimelech's fall from power (9:22–57). Even in the midst of Abimelech and Shechem's downfall we see evidence that God's hand lies behind the course of events (9:23–24).⁴⁵ God sends an "evil spirit" (i.e., a bitter attitude)⁴⁶ between Abimelech and Shechem. The Shechemites begin dealing treacherously with Abimelech (9:23–25). Then all of a sudden a man by the name of Gaal comes on the scene. And let me tell you, this man has a lot of gall. (I know this is bad line.) In 8:27, Gaal heads to happy hour at the temple and finds that a little Shechem Light goes a long way. He denounces Abimelech and offers to lead a revolt against him. He had lots of support there in Baal's Bar.⁴⁷ Take a look at the trash talk in 9:28–29: **"Then Gaal the son of Ebed said, 'Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should serve him? Is he not the son of Jerubbaal, and is Zebul not his lieutenant? Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem; but why should we serve him? Would, therefore, that this people were under my authority! Then I would remove Abimelech.' And he said to Abimelech, 'Increase your army and come out.'"** Gaal is calling out Abimelech. YIKES! In doing so he makes a terrible mistake. His smack talk reaches the ears of Zebul who calls Abimelech on his cell phone and sets up Gaal (9:30–34). Check out the hilarious dialogue in 9:35–38: **"Now Gaal the son of Ebed went out and stood in the entrance of the city gate; and Abimelech and the people who were with him arose from the ambush. When Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, 'Look, people are coming down from the tops of the mountains.' But Zebul said to him, 'You are seeing the shadow of the mountains as if they were men.' [Check your contacts, Gaal.] Gaal spoke again and said, 'Behold, people are coming down from the highest part of the land, and one company comes by the way of the diviners' oak.' Then Zebul said to him, 'Where is your boasting [lit. "mouth" = trash talk] now with which you said, 'Who is Abimelech that we should serve him?' Is this not the people whom you despised? Go out now and fight with them!'"** Gaal has to "put up or shut up." If he hides in the city he loses his following, is disgraced, and eventually caught and killed. If he tries to run away, Abimelech's men will chase him down and kill him. All he can do is gather his followers and go out to face Abimelech. Of course, his army is routed and he and his cohorts are driven out of the city. The lesson here is found in Prov 16:18: "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling."

Abimelech lets this victory go to his head and he settles a score with the citizens of Shechem who had cursed him (9:27). In 9:42–44, he wipes out the Shechemites as they are working in the fields. In order to make sure the city didn't rebel against him again, Abimelech destroys it and sows salt over it. The sowing of salt on a conquered city was a symbolic action that condemned the city to desolation so nobody would want to live there. It's similar to spiking a football in the end zone. Abimelech is making a statement. He then goes after the city leaders who attempt to escape to what they hope is the safety of the temple tower. Abimelech, however, decides to play follow-the-leader (9:48) and starts a huge brushfire, either burning up or smoking out his prey (9:49).⁴⁸ Thus, the Lord avenges the blood of Gideon's sons.⁴⁹ Indeed, the fire did "come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon" (see 9:15, 9:20). If this isn't enough, Abimelech also takes out the city of Thebez (9:50–52). Yet, it is precisely at this point that we are introduced to a woman who has a crush on Abimelech.⁵⁰ In 9:53, we read these fascinating words: **"But a certain woman threw an upper millstone on Abimelech's head, crushing his skull."** Abimelech makes the mistake of getting too close to the tower, and a woman drops an upper millstone on his head and kills him. Abimelech experiences a triple disgrace: (1) He is killed, but not really in a battle; (2) he is killed by a woman, which is a disgrace to a soldier;⁵¹ and (3) he is killed with a millstone, not a sword.⁵² The fact that his armor-bearer finishes the job with a sword didn't change anything; for centuries later, Abimelech's shameful death is remembered as being accomplished by a woman (2 Sam 11:21).⁵³ There are great consequences when a man does not finish well.

Our passage closes with a focus on God's judgment. **"Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father in killing his seventy brothers. Also God returned all the wickedness of the men of Shechem on their heads, and the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal came upon them"** (9:56–57). This passage teaches that there is a payday someday. The question is: Do you want to be a spiritual Gideon or a spiritual Jerubbaal? *Greatness does not guarantee permanence.*

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Scripture References

Judges 8:22–9:57
2 Chronicles 16
2 Chronicles 18:1–19:3
2 Chronicles 26:16–23
2 Kings 20:12–21
1 Corinthians 9:24–10:13
1 Corinthians 10:14–11:1

Study Questions

1. When have I had a particularly impressive success (8:22–23)? What happened in the days or weeks following this victory? How did Satan and my own flesh battle me? Was I victorious or did I succumb to temptation? What was the result of my obedience or disobedience? What has God taught me through these experiences? How can I pass on what I've learned to others?
2. What sin do I battle with the most: pride, idolatry, greed, or immorality (8:22–35)? How does this sin manifest itself in my life? What can I do to avoid this pattern of destruction? Am I currently accountable to anyone? If so, who? If not, why not? Who can I ask for accountability and encouragement today? Write up a game plan to battle this sin in the power of the Holy Spirit. Read Romans 8:1–13; 13:14; and Galatians 5:16–26.
3. How can I leave a godly legacy for my children, grandchildren, and church (8:32–35)? If I were to die today, how would my legacy fare? Would my life be worthy of imitation and live on to impact the next generation? If not, what can I begin doing today to change the course of my generational line?
4. How does God bring His wrath upon an unbelieving world? Read Romans 1:18–32. How does God judge His people when they choose to ignore Him? Read Galatians 6:7–9. How have I witnessed this in my own life and in the experiences of others? What have I learned from these episodes?
5. Why does God use women to accomplish great and heroic acts in the Book of Judges (e.g., 9:53)? Where are the men? Who should have dealt with Abimelech? What can the men in my church do to protect God's people and lead them into victory? Read 1 Timothy 2:8 and 1 Chronicles 12:32. How can I grow in my prayer life and leadership? What steps is God calling me to take?

Notes

¹ Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap—and Others Don't* (New York: HarperBusiness, 2001).

² The author of Hebrews does include Gideon in the “Hall of Faith” (Heb 11:32), but that doesn't mean that he is a model of a man who finishes well.

³ Gideon didn't start well either. Trace the following chronology:

- He cynically expressed disappointment with God's present treatment of the nation (6:13).
- He was reluctant to accept God's call to him to be a deliverer (6:15).
- He needed a confirming sign that the call was really from God (6:17).
- Though he obeyed the Lord by tearing down the Baal altar, he did it by night because he feared the men of his village (6:27).
- The fleece incident reveals his lack of faith, because it was nothing more than an attempt to gain confirmation for what he already knew to be God's will (6:36–37).
- He took extreme measures of vengeance against his fellow Israelites at Succoth and Penuel (8:16–17). Webb, pointing out the internal fighting that took place under Gideon and Abimelech, wrote, “Gideon is the first judge to turn the sword against his compatriots.”

See Barry Webb, *The Book of the Judges: An Integrated Reading* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 158. The problem of internal strife, first observed with Gideon, persisted with Abimelech, Jephthah, and Samson. Though not necessarily placed chronologically, the epilogue to Judges reveals the intensity and magnitude of the internal problem.

⁴ God did make provision for an Israelite king in the Mosaic Law (Deut 17:14–20).

⁵ Block rightly argues that these men do represent the nation as a whole. Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*. The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 296–97.

⁶ Moses warned that Israel would one day want a king like the other nations and forget that they were a unique nation, unlike the Gentiles (Exod 19:4–5; Deut 4:5–8; 14:2; 17:14–20).

⁷ See 1 Sam 8:5–9.

⁸ Gary Inrig, *Heart of Iron, Feet of Clay* (Chicago: Moody, 1979), 148.

⁹ Block states, “In spite of his pious comment, ‘I will not rule over you’ (8:23), all of these actions suggest the opposite. He behaves like an oriental king, a status memorialized in the name of his son, Abimelech (‘my father is king’).” Daniel I. Block, “The Period of the Judges: Religious Disintegration under Tribal Rule,” in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration*, ed. Avraham Gileadi (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 50.

¹⁰ The term “Ishmaelites” loosely describes any trading nomadic group (cf. Gen. 37:25, 27, 28; 39:1).

¹¹ Instead of being a leader like Moses or Joshua, Gideon becomes like Aaron and leads God's people into idolatry (Exod 32:1–6).

¹² In Scripture, idolatry is looked upon as harlotry (Isa 50:1–3; 54:6–8; Jer 2:1–3; 3:1ff; Hosea 2; Jas 4:4; Rev 2:4).

¹³ “Snare” (*moqesh*) describes the lure or bait placed in a hunter's trap and comes to mean the snare itself as used to trap birds. The LXX translates *moqesh* with the Greek word *skandalon*, which is literally that part of a trap on which the bait was laid, when touched caused the trap to close on its prey and came to mean any entanglement of the foot. That's a picture of sin which looks alluring, but if touched will surely captivate and capture its foolish prey.

¹⁴ Kings were famous for accumulating gold. The OT law warned any king that he must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold (Deut 17:17). Gideon says “no” to kingship and then immediately starts acting like a king.

¹⁵ Gideon's actions in 8:24–32 are not consistent with his words in 8:22–23. He turns down the responsibility of kingship, but he wants the privileges. Michael Eaton, *Judges and Ruth*. Preaching through the Bible (England: Sovereign World, 2000), 52. He talks humility, but he thinks about his own importance. He no longer seeks ways of serving his nation, but he wants to live large and do his own thing. It is ever our danger that after being used of God in some way, we mouth humility but practice pride. Dale Ralph Davis, *Judges: Such a Great Salvation*. Focus on the Bible (Ross-Shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2000), 113.

¹⁶ See Exod 28:4, 31–35; 35:27; 39:2–4, 22–26.

¹⁷ Wright states, “The ephod represented the presence of God in intimate access to Him; for this reason, its use is restricted to the high priest. Gideon's ephod may have been such a vestment or a golden image of the person (or deity!) who wore the ephod. In either case, his making an ephod encroached upon areas of authority which were clearly not his.” Paul Wright ed., *Joshua, Judges*. Shepherd's Notes (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 74.

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- ¹⁸ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 300. See also Victor H. Matthews, *Judges and Ruth*. New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 98.
- ¹⁹ Moses and Joshua had warned Israel that the undefeated Canaanites would build idolatrous shrines (Exod 23:32–33; Num 33:55; Deut 7:16; Josh 23:13), yet here God’s top leader in Israel does so.
- ²⁰ Interestingly, Joash had challenged Baal to contend with Gideon/Jerubaal (see Judg 6:31–32) and now apparently Baal wins. See Daniel I. Block, “Will the Real Gideon Please Stand Up?” *JETS* 40 (1997a), 365.
- ²¹ Erwin W. Lutzer, *When a Good Man Falls* (Wheaton, IL: Victor/Scripture Press, 1985), 49.
- ²² Lutzer, *When a Good Man Falls*, 48.
- ²³ Eaton, *Judges and Ruth*, 52.
- ²⁴ The NET Study Notes state, “A concubine was a slave woman in ancient Near Eastern societies who was the legal property of her master, but who could have legitimate sexual relations with her master. A concubine’s status was more elevated than a mere servant, but she was not free and did not have the legal rights of a free wife. The children of a concubine could, in some instances, become equal heirs with the children of the free wife. After the period of the Judges concubines may have become more of a royal prerogative” (2 Sam 21:10–14; 1 Kgs 11:3).
- ²⁵ The Canaanites controlled Shechem at this time (cf. 9:2, 28). From the references that will appear in chapter 9, Gideon’s mistress is a Canaanite.
- ²⁶ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 307.
- ²⁷ See also Arthur E. Cundall, “Judges,” in *Judges and Ruth* by Arthur E. Cundall and Leon Morris. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1968), 122.
- ²⁸ Lutzer, *When a Good Man Falls*, 49.
- ²⁹ Judges 8:35; 9:1, 2, 5 [twice], 16, 19, 24, 28, 57. See also Elmer Towns, *History Makers of the Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor/Scripture Press, 1989), 273–74.
- ³⁰ It is likely that even though Gideon formally refused the office of king the people may have referred to him popularly as their king. This likely went to his head and further led to his carnality. Alternatively, it is also possible Gideon hopes that this son might one day become the father of Israel’s first king. Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Judges” (2009 ed.): <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/judges.pdf>, 59.
- ³¹ Davis, *Judges*, 122.
- ³² Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 312. See 1 Sam 14:33–34.
- ³³ Wiersbe, *Be Available*, Electronic ed.
- ³⁴ Why didn’t Israel stop Abimelech and protect Gideon’s family? Tragically, God’s people of Israel have forgotten the goodness of the Lord and the kindness of Gideon (8:33–35). They have neither the conviction to be concerned nor the courage to intervene.
- ³⁵ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Available* (Omaha, NE: QuickVerse 2006 [1994]), Electronic ed.
- ³⁶ The theme of a good man’s wicked son plays a prominent role in the subsequent historical books (e.g., Eli’s two sons, 1 Sam 2:12–36; Samuel’s two sons, 1 Sam 8:1–3; and David’s two sons, 2 Sam 13–18). John Sailhamer, *NIV Compact Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 209. I strongly recommend Gary Thomas, *Sacred Parenting* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004). Chapter 2 “The Gold Behind the Guilt” (pp. 37–52) is especially pertinent to this point.
- ³⁷ Inrig, *Heart of Iron, Feet of Clay*, 161.
- ³⁸ Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 604.
- ³⁹ “Shade” is a metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and in ancient Near Eastern literature for a ruler’s sovereign authority and protection.
- ⁴⁰ Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Judges: Grace Abounding*. The Bible Speaks Today Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 92. The only other time this phrase is used is in Josh 24:14, which is a radically different context.
- ⁴¹ Often in the summer, fires would break out in the bramble bushes; and these fires would spread and threaten the safety of the trees. (See David’s use of this image in 2 Sam 23:6–7; cf. Isa 9:18–19.)
- ⁴² Eaton, *Judges and Ruth*, 55.
- ⁴³ Davis, *Judges*, 124.
- ⁴⁴ Eaton, *Judges and Ruth*, 56.
- ⁴⁵ Sailhamer notes, “The lesson falls in line with the larger purpose of the Deuteronomistic history.” Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 604 writes, “Whereas Gideon was a warlord and refused to be a king, his son Abimelech is not a warlord and installs himself as a king. Though not a warlord, Abimelech is given a full narrative, in part to teach the principle of providential *lex talionis*. Gideon pays for his false cult in the loss of his sons, and Shechem pays for its treachery against Gideon by the loss of the city.”

⁴⁶ On several occasions in the OT, God uses an “evil spirit” to judge sinners (1 Sam 16:14; 18:10; 19:10; 1 Chron 21:1). Yet, we must be careful not to read the Gospels into the Book of Judges. This is not a demonic spirit.

⁴⁷ Davis, *Judges*, 125.

⁴⁸ Davis, *Judges*, 126.

⁴⁹ The shedding of innocent blood is something that God takes very seriously and eventually avenges (Deut 19:10, 13; 21:9; 1 Kgs 2:31; Prov 6:17; Isa 59:7; Jer 7:6; 22:3, 17; Joel 3:19).

⁵⁰ Davis, *Judges*, 119.

⁵¹ An unidentified woman dropped (lit. “threw”) a (piece of a) millstone down from the tower and cracked open Abimelech’s skull. The text emphasizes her singularity (lit. “one woman”) and by using the verb “threw” suggests a heroic act of strength like that of a warrior.

⁵² The LXX renders this as “a fragment of upper millstone.”

⁵³ Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 604 writes, “Abimelech is a type of Saul. Both have their armor-bearers draw their swords and kill them to spare them shame (9:54; 1 Sam. 31:4), and both committed suicide with the presence of an evil spirit from God whose coming hastened their demise” (Judg 9:23; 1 Sam 16:15).