

A STUDY OF JUDGES & RUTH

THE TEST

Last Week we looked at Gideon's rise. God's valiant warrior defeated the Midian horde without lifting his sword. However, his story continues the descending caliber of God's judges.

It's a good time to introduce a Bible study principle—prescriptive versus descriptive passages. *Prescriptive* passages tell the reader exactly what to do. Much of what we've read in *Judges* is *descriptive*, meaning it's describing what happened. *Descriptive* passages contain timeless principles, but we should not assume that we are to act just as Gideon and the others acted—especially in today's passage!

A great example of this confusion is Gideon's fleece test in Judges 6:36–40. People have treated this passage *prescriptively* by “putting out their fleece.” Instead, this passage is *descriptive*—and probably not a great example to follow. These events illustrate God's grace and patience to encourage Gideon's weakness of faith. The Bible has given other clear instruction on discerning his will for us. Such a test of God's commands is ill advised.

JUDGES 8:22–9:6 (SELECTED)

²² Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, “Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also, for you have saved us from the hand of Midian.” ²³ Gideon said to them, “I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the LORD will rule over you.”

²⁴ And Gideon said to them, “Let me make a request of you: every one of you give me the earrings from his spoil.”... ²⁵ And they spread a cloak, and every man threw in it the earrings of his spoil. ²⁶ And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was 1,700 shekels of gold... ²⁷ And Gideon made an ephod of it and put it in his city, in Ophrah. And all Israel whored after it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family... ³⁰ Now Gideon had seventy sons, his own offspring, for he had many wives. ³¹ And his concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, and he called his name Abimelech.

¹ Now Abimelech the son of [Gideon] went to Shechem to his mother's relatives and said to them and to the whole clan of his mother's family, ² “Say in the ears of all the leaders of Shechem, ‘Which is better for you, that all seventy of the sons of Jerubbaal rule over you, or that one rule over you?’” ³ And his mother's relatives... inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, “He is our brother.”... ⁵ And he went to his father's house at Ophrah and killed his brothers... ⁶ and they went and made Abimelech king.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Gideon told the people, "The Lord will rule over you." His words were more true than he realized. This statement reflected God's revealed plan for Israel, but as we will understand later, they struggled to maintain God as their sole King.

Eventually, God allowed Israel to have human kings. In fact, one of them, David, was offered a promise of an eternal throne. That throne was and is occupied by King Jesus. Scan the QR code to celebrate his rule and reign.



DISCUSSION

Have you ever witnessed hypocrisy? What were the circumstances and how did it make you feel?

ICEBREAKER

1. How did the Israelites respond to Gideon's victory? (22) How did Gideon respond to their offer of kingship? (23-24)

OBSERVATION

2. What did Gideon do with the Midianite gold he received from the Israelites? (25-27)

3. How did Abimelech become king of Shechem? (1-6)

4. In what ways did Gideon's actions betray his words that neither he nor his son would be king?

INTERPRETATION

5. What might it look like for your success to go to your head? How might that be destructive?

APPLICATION

It's hard to keep the right perspective about things. We all need people who speak into our lives. If you need help not letting things go to your head, talk to your Coach today!

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STUDY NOTES

DYNASTY

Love him or hate him, Tom Brady is the greatest to play the game. He holds more Super Bowl rings than any *franchise*, much less player. The only person who has more rings is coach Bill Belichick, who has 6 as the Head Coach of New England and another 2 from his time as the Giants Defensive Coordinator. These two have ruled the 2000's, but nothing lasts forever.

After Gideon's successes, *the men of Israel said to Gideon, "Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also, for you have saved us from the hand of Midian." Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the LORD will rule over you."* Like a lot of players being interviewed after a tough game, Gideon said all the right things. He knew God did not designate him king, nor was his rule something that should be passed down through birthright.

God raised up judges who served as a short-term leader. Each one ushered in an era of peace that lasted for their lifetime. Gideon seemed to understand that neither he nor his descendants shall rule as king. Now, if only he acted like it.

GODLY LEADERS MUST AVOID THE WORLD'S CORRUPTION

Gideon declined the throne. However, he seemed ready to exploit his popularity and enjoy some of the perks of kingship without the responsibility. *Gideon said to them, "Let me make a request of you: every one of you give me the earrings from his spoil."... And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was 1,700 shekels of gold... And Gideon made an ephod of it and put it in his city, in Ophrah. And all Israel whored after it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family.*

In addition to creating a golden ephod, Gideon exercised the "perks" of kingship by accumulating a harem that produced *seventy sons* the author making clear—*his own offspring*. The Lord commanded in Deuteronomy 17:17 that Israel's rulers not have multiple wives. This was done by the rulers of other nations and detestable to the Lord.

In addition to his *many wives*, Gideon also had a *concubine*, or secondary wife. Here again, we see the betrayal of Gideon's words. He said that neither he nor his son will rule. And yet, when his concubine *bore him a son, he called his name Abimelech*. Abimelech means, "my father is king."

The ephod, the harem, and the naming of Abimelech point to a man who outwardly rejected kingship, but who inwardly took it for himself. The valiant warrior betrayed his own legacy because of the world's corruption and the consequences were devastating.

First, *Abimelech* lived out his name by going *to his mother's relatives* and asking that he alone *rule over* them. "My father is king" sought to take the throne. Second, Gideon's *seventy sons* appear to have been ruling over the people of *Shechem* as oligarch's. Third, *Abimelech went to his father's house at Ophrah and killed his brothers...and* [the leaders of Shechem] *went and made Abimelech king.*

Abimelech's rule ended in disaster. His relationship with Shechem crumbled and he ended up murdering 1,000 people at once, setting fire to a tower into which they had fled. Again, he attacked a city with the townspeople seeking shelter in a strong tower. This time, when Abimelech went to set it on fire, a woman dropped a millstone that crushed his head. His death was all the more shameful at the hands of a woman.

THE CORRUPTION OF PRIDE

Everything about this story is wrong. All the previous judges had admirable, redeemable qualities. They were imperfect, sure, but they often displayed character and honor. With Abimelech, those days are over. In terms of the book of *Judges*, we're now going downhill fast and picking up speed.

Pride seeks to take from God things he never intended that person to have. It's an attempt to steal the glory, honor, and recognition that belongs only to God. It claims power and authority *of God*, rather than the power and authority *granted by God*.

We all have God-given power—strength, skill, knowledge, influence, etc. Likewise, we all have God-given authority in our areas of responsibility. The problem comes when we abuse those things *granted by God* so that we can be *like God*. The corruption of pride existed with Adam and Eve in the Garden and has persisted in every generation since.

The cure to pride is humility. Humility maintains a right perspective about who I am in light of who God is. As image-bearers of God, we have dignity and worth. Humility isn't humiliation—we shouldn't be made to feel bad. In Christ, we are sons and daughters of the King of the Universe.

In Abimelech's story, we see the road which pride can take a person down. He wanted to live up to his own name and it cost him his life. As Christians, we humbly surrender our lives, take on the name of Christ, and will live forever in eternity.