

Judges | When All Hell Breaks Loose

Looking for a King

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Judges 8.22ff

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Then the men of Israel 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." 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 Yet Gideon said to them, "I would request of you, that each of you give me an earring from his spoil." (For they had gold earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.) ²⁵ They said, "We will surely give them." So they spread out a garment, and every one of them threw an earring there from his spoil. ²⁶ The weight of the gold earrings that he requested was 1,700 shekels 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. ²⁷ Gideon made it into an ephod, and placed it in his city, Ophrah, and all Israel played the harlot with it there, so that it became a snare to Gideon and his household.

²⁸ *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.*

²⁹ *Then Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and lived in his own house. ³⁰ Now Gideon had seventy sons who were his direct descendants, for he had many wives. ³¹ His concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, and he named him Abimelech. ³² 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.*

³³ *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 their god. ³⁴ 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; ³⁵ 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. (Judges 8.22ff)*

We've been working through the Book of Judges (1300 BC?) when the Israelites were settling into the Promised Land but failing to drive out the Canaanites who practiced child sacrifice and worshipped evil.

The subtitle for the series is provocative: Judges – When All Hell Breaks Loose. And today we round the corner for HELL – the history gets dark and ominous like the poem by W.B. Yeats, "The Second Coming":

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world...

The best lack all conviction, while the worst

Are full of passionate intensity.

Maybe YOU have the felt that we are headed toward that place in our own society – “things fall apart; the centre cannot hold”. People of all persuasions report feeling this way. The New York Times columnist, David Brooks, who has become a Christian (in the past few years) wrote these words in a recent editorial: “It’s become clear in the interim that things are not in good shape, that our problems are societal. The whole country is going through some sort of spiritual and emotional crisis.” (April 15, 2019)

And what is needed (among other things) – and I don’t think this is controversial or odd to say this – we need people of integrity. That word means whole (like “integer” – a whole number) – someone whose words are ONE with his/her actions. Not narrow-minded but sound-minded – people who are headed toward the good, true and beautiful and while they are NOT flawless, they are not double-minded, not living a double-life but an integrated/whole/solid life.

Sadly, Gideon, was NOT this kind of person. We’ve been studying his life for a few weeks and we’ve seen that Gideon was loved by God, chosen by God, called and USED by God – a man who did believe God (Heb 11.32) but he was a double-minded man – NOT a leader with integrity – a double name, a double life.

And tragically he remained divided (lacking integrity) to the very end and he left a destructive legacy due to his own inner dis-integration. And as soon as he died, all hell broke loose (9.20).

I’d like to think with you today about:

- 1) A Lack of Integrity and It’s Legacy
- 2) The Path to RE-integration
- 3) The Practice of Covenant Integrity

The campaign against the Midianites is complete and that’s a big deal because they were ruining the peace and prosperity of the Land. God made it very clear that this victory was ALL His doing. The method God gave them was sort of ridiculous SO THAT – “Israel would NOT become boastful, saying, ‘My own power has delivered me.’” (7.2)

But the people give credit to the one they can see, to Gideon – who was really only an instrument... and when they ascribe the victory to Gideon, he doesn’t stop them (Acts 12.21ff) and then they try to make Gideon king – in fact to set up a dynasty (his sons will become kings for generations – like the Canaanite kings!).

And Gideon answers in a pious-sounding way, “I will NOT rule over you; the LORD will rule over you!”

And then v.4 begins with the ONE WORD that best epitomizes the whole life of this conflicted judge, "YET..." They ask to make him king; he says, "No! and... YET I will allow you to give me a tribute... "Yet I would request of you, that each of you give me an earring from his spoil." (24)

What could it hurt to have a little souvenir from the war? Except all the Midianites wore gold earrings and when it was all gathered it amounted to over 40 POUNDS of gold – a tribute fit for a KING!

And it appears that Gideon got the camels of Midian (26) and then in v. 29 we learn that Jerubbaal er...uh...um i.e. Gideon (double-name/double-life) that Jerubbaal had many sons – 70 sons! – because, he had many wives (a harem – like the Canaanite kings!)

Moses warned, back in Deuteronomy CH 17 (16) that the Israelites could eventually have a king but NOT A KING like the pagans who would multiply wives, gold and horses! And suddenly Jerubbaal/Gideon who said he WOULDN'T be king...and "YET" ...he looks a lot like a king. He said one thing and did another.

And then we're told, the wives weren't enough and he took a Canaanite woman as a mistress. She had a son and Gideon named him, "My Father Is King" – Abi-Melech. "Gideon! Are you king or NOT?!"

"No! I've been crystal clear – I am NOT king...and YET." He says one thing and YET, all his actions undo his words. No TRUTH and NO INTEGRITY...inwardly divided! He leads a double-life, double-name, double-minded.

Now, just two more pieces of this NO-INTEGRITY PUZZLE: 1) What happened to all that gold? 2) What happened to that Canaanite son – Abi-Melech?

Well, the gold was fashioned into a "ephod" which was a garment worn by priests – but this was made of GOLD (not linen) and THIS THING appears to have been a big statue... an IDOL and Gideon set it up as a shrine in his home town and Israelites came from all over just to consult it (remember the fleece? - This made the fleece a permanent institution!) And maybe Gideon dedicated it to YHWH – and YET YHWH had forbidden idols – even idols dedicated to Him (especially idols dedicated to Him!) Double-Life.

And that son – named MY-FATHER-IS-KING – well, he turned out to be the incarnation of Jerubbaal's evil side. He was the embodiment of all the worst in Gideon.

And Abimelech (CH 9 tells the horror story!) rallies his mother's people at Shechem (probably Canaanites) and convinces them that he STANDS for them; he's OF THEM. And he makes a new covenant with Baal – v.33: "Israel played the harlot with the Baals and made Baal-berith their god." (that means Baal of the Covenant) and Israel married Baal – a new covenant of evil.

Then Abimelech (my father is king) sacrifices his 70 brothers on a rock, an altar to Baal. He kills all the sons of Gideon and he becomes a kind of Antichrist who unleashes hell-fire (9.15-20) on the earth.

CH 9 (very long!) tells the story that ends with Abimelech laying siege to a tower... and a woman pushes a millstone from atop the tower and it crushes the head of Antichrist-Abimelech – the seed of the woman crushes the serpent’s head (Gen 3.15).

This is the story of a man who lacked integrity and the tragic legacy it left to the next generation.

It’s NOT a happy story... but even here... in the dark we can see a faint outline of a PATH leading from the divided self to the RE-integrated self.

I would venture to say that no one I know WANTS to be a dis-integrated person. If I asked you, “Would you like to be a flighty person...blown around by every fad and changing your mind so often that eventually you don’t even know who you really are? Who wants to have a shadow-identity – to live a lie, to be like chaff, prisoner to opinions of others and captive to your own passions and whims so that YOUR LIFE amounts to nothing and opens the gates of HELL on the next generation? Anyone?”

Of course no one wants that, but integrity is compromised and begins to wither in a kind of non-deliberate, un-noticed way. What happens is that little by little you give in to your inner Abimelech. You live for the applause of people. You listen to the lies of culture/advertising and you look to idols to satisfy yourself (they don’t!)

And then you begin to let your inner child, your inner Abimelech LIE TO YOU and you find it convenient to believe those lies and eventually you forget who you really are – Gideon or Jerubbaal?

But the whisper of hope in this terrifying picture of antichrist IS THAT THERE IS A REAL CHRIST and He offers YOU a solid, true identity (Rev 2.17). He can make you all that you were made to be – not a counterfeit-you or someone who is religious and weird but the real YOU! He makes a true New Covenant! (Jeremiah 31.33 and CH 33)

There’s a True Abimelech – He says, “My Father really IS the King” and I really am One with you. As the evil Abimelech was the incarnation of all Gideon’s evil – Jesus Christ is the incarnation of ALL GOD’S TRUTH, BEAUTY and GOODNESS.

He comes NOT to slay His brothers but to die in their place in order to bring many sons to glory (Heb 2.10). He comes to sinners like YOU and ME and He promises to crucify and bury the

imposter, the false self – He promises to put your false self to death and leave your inner Abimelech in the grave.

He promises to all who simply trust Him to make us a New Creation – to give us a new name, a new identity – a son or daughter of the living God. Not something fake or unreal or robotic like a religious clone but each one, beautiful, good, true and different, individual – THE REAL YOU AS GOD SEES YOU.

Our Father is NOT like Gideon – He is the True King who changes not – “Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.” (Jam 1.17)

Now how do we practice this? How do we walk this path to the real integrated self?

Well, we ask God to help us see our own inner Abimelech. We ask to see the ways we’ve made a deal with idols – like stuff, like the affirmation of people, like a false self-image, like comforts and good things we’ve made “necessary” and “ultimate”. We ask the True Christ to expose these idols and fight against them and the false self. We find our life in Him.

I see myself, as no better than Gideon (my name doesn’t appear in the hall of Faith – Heb 11) and I simply depend over and over again – depend on what Jesus Christ has done for me.

He IS the New Covenant that marries me to God and daily - sometimes even moment by moment I come to the True Child of the King and say, “Lord Jesus Christ – You are my life! You are crucifying the old-man, the false-self.”

“Use all circumstances in my life to weaken and crush the imposter – carve and chisel and sculpt me and set free the New Self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.” (Col 3:10)

St Paul wrote, “put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” (Eph 4.24)

See that’s True Integrity – to trust in the Real Abimelech, MY FATHER IS KING, Jesus Christ, God’s only begotten Son and the Incarnation of truth beauty and goodness – and to receive His forgiveness and His ongoing work and to live in that daily expectation that “He who began a good work in you will COMPLETE it until the day of Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 1.6)

