

If I were to label any chapter of the Bible - “UGLY” ... It would be Judges chapter 9. ... This HAS to be the ugliest chapter in our Holy book.

All of this malice and violence... relates to the narrative of Gideon. ... In this chapter... Gideon is only referred to as “Jerubaal.” ... Abimelech was Gideon’s son... who tried to murder all 70 of Gideon’s legitimate sons... but Jotham escaped.

What a way to conclude the narrative of Gideon... one of the heroes of Scripture! ... Judges chapter nine is the dark legacy that Gideon left behind. Many people live inconsistent lives. ... And inconsistency causes all kinds of problems... problems both for the inconsistent person... and for those who observe his inconsistency. ... All kinds of guilt and problems arise for the person who lives an up and down... contradictory life. ... If a person is up one day and down the next day... achieving one week and failing the next week... feeling pleased one moment... and displeased the next moment — the person faces a miserable life... and causes misery for others. ... He / she is influencing others to fail or commit sin and evil.

Inconsistency — a life of strengths and weaknesses — was one of the major traits of Gideon. ... A picture of his fluctuating life... of both his strengths and weaknesses... is painted in Judges chapters 8 and 9... Our passage today stands as a warning to us against living an inconsistent life.

This morning... we are going to begin our study with Gideon at what was... perhaps... the pinnacle of his spiritual strength. ... then we will quickly see it plunge... giving rise to all the ugliness that we just saw in chapter nine.

Last week... we began to see Gideon in his weakness... Judges chapter 8... is actually the prelude of the ugly chapter 9. It reveals how things digressed to such a degree. You may remember how Gideon relentlessly pursued two personal enemies of his... because they had killed his brothers. ... Gideon's rage had him slaughter an entire city of his own countrymen... (fellow Israelites!)... because they stood in his way... they were an obstacle to his personal revenge.

But... having led Israel to victory over the Midianites... Israel was very grateful... and where we start today in Judges chapter 8... we find Gideon entertaining a request from his countrymen.

Judges 8:22-26

Having been ruled over by pagan kings... the Israelites now want a king of their own. ... Long before the events we just read about... the Lord knew the day would come when his people would want a king... and He made provision for them by commanding them to submit to a man of His choosing (Deuteronomy 17:14-15). ... The Lord chose Gideon to deliver Israel from the Midianites... He didn't choose Gideon to rule over Israel. ... The Israelites... though... want Gideon to rule over them because he saved them from Midian. ... Or did he? ... The writer of Judges has been careful to credit the Lord... not Gideon... with delivering Israel. ... In fact... the Lord reduced the number of Gideon's troops to a measly three hundred... to guard against human boasting. ... Even a soldier of Midian understood that God was responsible for Israel's victory... that is the way he explained his soldier friend's nightmare. ... The Israelites... on the other hand... have

misinterpreted their victory... and attributed it not to the Lord... but to the Lord's instrument. ... In this case... the Israelites' desire for a human king represents rejection of their divine king.

And if you're going to prefer a human king to the divine king... what better candidate than Gideon... the slayer of the pagan kings who dominated you? ... The Israelites not only want Gideon... they also want his son and his grandson - they want a hereditary dynasty.

Gideon rightly rejects the offer by observing, "The Lord will rule over you." The Israelites request was a confession of unbelief... for as Gideon reminded them... *God* was their king. ... Gideon rejected their generous offer... purely on theological grounds. ... He would not take the place of Jehovah God. ...

The Hebrew word order might be paraphrased as, "It is *the Lord*, and no other, who shall rule over you!" ... It is not "maybe" but a dogmatic "no" all the time.

While Gideon's words were theologically correct, his subsequent actions show either that he was only pretending or that he was self-deceived; he appears eventually to have been seduced by the lures of being a king.

If Gideon had stopped here... he would have had a sterling testimony for God. ... Unfortunately... the worse in Gideon is yet to come. ... An eclipse of failure is about to darken Gideon's sunny life.

Gideon was doing so well and then he took a nosedive. ... He rejected the throne... yet... lived like a king. ... He refused one honor to grasp another honor he did not deserve. ... He resisted a very strong temptation and stood for the Lord. ... Then he changed his actions... which are inconsistent with his words. ... The people wanted Gideon to have dominion... but he wanted a donation. ... Gideon went from victory to defeat... from grace to guile... and from virtue to vileness. ... He turned down the temptation only to yield to another.

The wealth was not the problem... it was what it was used for. ... Gideon's actions were confusing. ... We create confusion when we claim Christ and then live like the rest of the world. ... We might have the theologically correct words and responses... but inconsistent behavior is devastating. Are you confusing others by living an inconsistent Christian life?

Gideon had one request — just **one!** ... He wants a little of the plunder. It's not too much to ask... is it... to be compensated for all his hard work? ... The Israelites don't think so... anyway... and they collect forty-three pounds of gold... and sweeten the pot with accoutrements that belonged to the kings of Midian.

The Lord had commanded (according to Deuteronomy 17:17) that a king in Israel “must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold.” ... But Gideon is now in possession of what looks like a royal treasure. ... Gideon has refused the kingship but collects a treasure fit for a pagan king... complete with the crown jewels that once belonged to pagan kings. ... He feigns humility... supposedly refusing to rule... but he practices pride... embracing the trappings of royalty.

Gideon... though reticent to lead at first... we have watched throughout chapter 8... grow increasingly tyrannical... melding the Lord's agenda with his own personal vengeance... slaughtering his own people... and now procuring for himself royal ornaments... His accumulation of what looks like a royal treasure... is consistent with the trappings of royalty that he had apparently *already* embraced.

The Israelites gladly donated their plunder to him. (YOU KNOW) something within us wants to credit human achievement. We seem strangely bent toward trusting in something... especially someone... we can see... rather than God... Who is unseen.

If others want to build us up... some of us are only too happy to be built up. If credit is being passed out... we may as well take at least some of it... even while making pronouncements similar to Gideon's "*the Lord will rule over you.*" ... Like Gideon... some of us pretend humility but practice pride.

If you believe that you deserve the credit for your accomplishments, then, as a matter of course, shouldn't you be compensated accordingly? Don't you deserve at least a little of the plunder, so to speak? Those who skim a little off the top commonly rationalize their behavior by saying that they deserve a little something extra for all their toil and sacrifice. This line of thinking, once acted on, can lead to increasingly self-absorbed thinking and actions.

If you collect a little of the plunder, what might you do with it? Let's see what Gideon does with it.

Judges 8:27

So... what does Gideon do with all the gold he has collected? ... He makes an ephod... a priestly garment. ...

The ephod always spoke of the ministry of the high priest of Israel unless otherwise indicated. It was a sleeveless outer vest coming down to the hips in length. Upon its front was worn the breastplate containing twelve stones representing the twelve tribes. The pouch on the front contained the Urim and Thumim which were stones used to discern the will of God. The ephod was worn only by the high priest.

Whether this ephod was an embellished version of the garment used by the high priest... or some kind of standing idol... we can't say for sure... but the inference is very strong here... and we do know from Scripture that it was used in worship and became a snare to Gideon and the people. (Ps. 106:36 also mentions it). Perhaps Gideon used it to determine the will of God and help the people with their problems. ... If the ephod was indeed a copy of the high priest's garment... then Gideon was definitely out of God's will in duplicating it and using it... because Gideon wasn't a priest.

Now Gideon... who wasn't supposed to be a king... but embraced the benefits of royalty... takes ANOTHER strictly forbidden action... by apparently assuming... perhaps even usurping... God's appointed high

priest. ... Gideon was from the tribe of Manasseh... not the priestly tribe of Levi.

And does Gideon... in the role of a priest... lead people to the Lord? ... No... he leads them astray. ... The Israelites make pilgrimages to Ophrah... not the site of the tabernacle. Israelites came to worship the ephod... not the Lord. ... The new “high priest” sponsors what amounts to a pagan cult in his hometown. And all Israel... in fact... is delighted with what Gideon has done.

For Gideon... though... the ephod became a snare... trapping him in pride and false worship. ... It became a snare for his family... too... especially for one of his sons - Abimelech. ... Gideon may have told the Israelites that neither he nor his son would rule over them... but Abimelech would take the bait just as Gideon did... and would also seek to rule... but in a more brazen manner.

The Lord tried to protect Gideon from himself... reducing his troops so that he would have no cause to boast... but Gideon succumbed nonetheless.

If we take the credit for our accomplishments and convince ourselves that we deserve a little something extra... we may eventually develop a disparity in our lives between our beliefs and our actions. ... Gideon... for example... grabbed for the gold and changed his beliefs.

But it wasn't only in taking the gold and purple... that shows Gideon wanted to act as king. ... He didn't stop with ONLY those trappings. ... He also

lived like a king... taking for himself many wives... and in naming one of his sons.

Judges 8:28-32

True, Midian didn't raise its head again, but Gideon's family did, even though he promised that his descendants would not rule over Israel. And one of Gideon's sons would prove to be at least as problematic for Israel as Midian.

Gideon went back home to "live" *yashab*, which can also be translated "sit as king." Gideon didn't go home to retire; he went home to make an object of worship and live like a king. He had a king's harem. The way kings established their greatness in the ancient Near East was to have large harems which called attention to their wealth and authority. ... Now the Law... according to Deuteronomy 17:17 also forbade the King to have many wives... because it could turn his heart away from the Lord. ... And of course one woman... probably not even an Israelite (because Shechem was under the Israelite's rule but it was primarily inhabited by Canaanites.) Abimelech's mom was Gideon's concubine – probably because she wasn't Jewish.

Gideon had seventy legal sons and at least one illegitimate son... from his non-Jewish concubine. Do you see what he was doing? Gideon said that he would not be king... but he allowed himself to have all the perquisites of being king - - riches... wives... concubines... and acclaim. ... He got the

right answer when the formal question was asked... but he lived as if he were the king.

Maintaining a concubine from Shechem... a Canaanite woman, no less... violated the the law as expressed in Deuteronomy 7:3-4. ... If Gideon was ambiguous about saying no to kingship... but living like one... by the time he named his son from his concubine... he was not at all ambiguous. Abimelek means - "My father is king." ... Gideon said neither he nor his son would rule over Israel... but by giving his son such a name... he all but comes out and says it: "I am the king!." ... By reigning as the de-facto king and by siring seventy sons... developing a cult religion... Gideon set the stage for a bloody dynastic struggle.

The Lord blessed Gideon with a stunning victory, but instead of celebrating the Lord, Gideon lapsed into idolatry (the ephod) and succumbed to money (forty-three pounds of gold), sex (many wives and at least one concubine), and power (assuming the posture of a king). His is a sad legacy indeed.

No matter who you are... moral laxness will cause problems. ... Just because you have won a single battle with temptation does not mean you will automatically win the next one.

The inconsistent life of Gideon led a nation into false worship. And if we live inconsistent lives, we will lead others into a life of sin and evil. We must heed what the Holy Scripture teaches about living an inconsistent life.

Being inconsistent—living for God one day and living a worldly, unholy life the next day—is one of the worst offenses against God that can be committed. An inconsistent life destroys our testimony and affects other lives, often leading others into sin and evil. If we are living in sin and evil, we are leading others to live sinful and evil lives. Just think for a moment:

⇒ If we are living immoral lives, then we are leading others into immorality.

⇒ If we are lying or stealing, we are teaching others to lie and steal.

⇒ If we become angry or hostile, then we are arousing others to become angry or hostile.

According to the teaching of Christ... what is wrong with the world is practical atheism. ... This is not an intellectual persuasion of God's non-existence. ... A “Practical Atheist” is one who proclaims that God does exist... but they live as though He does not exist.

Now I will close with these convicting words from a British preacher who lived from 1863-1923... *John Henry Jowett*:

We leave our places of worship, and no deep and inexpressible wonder sits upon our faces. We can sing these lilting melodies, and when we go out into the streets our faces are one with the faces of those who have left the theaters and the music halls. There is nothing about us to suggest that we have been looking at anything stupendous and overwhelming. ... And what is the explanation of the loss? Preeminently our impoverished conception of God.

John Henry Jowett