



Unworthy Son of a Noble Father

Lesson Aim: To emphasize the folly of repudiating a noble heritage, and of casting aside an honorable name for the doubtful acquisition of personal power and gain.

L10. Text: Judges 8:22-23; 9:1-6, 16-19. **Date:** June 1959.

Topic: Sin: Of Men; Abimelech

Somehow sin has a way of finding one out. Sooner or later every person and family and community and nation which is affected by sin will have to suffer for it. Our lesson today concerns the ministry of Abimelech. He was not a judge raised up of God, but was an upstart who established his rule by violence. He was a son of Gideon born to a concubine who lived in Shechem. Concubinage was a lawful contract in those days, but the fact that the son was reared away from the influence of his father probably accounts for his vain ambition. He felt a natural jealousy toward the natural children of Gideon, that is, those children born to his full wives. The son of a concubine could not inherit from his father. The evil which followed probably resulted from that.

How fine it is to have parents who set the right example before their children. It is wonderful to see children growing up to be honest and respectable, following their parents' footsteps. Occasionally, however, there will be a child who does not follow his example. He becomes evil and base and uses his father's influence to self advantage. Such is the case of Abimelech. He tried to set himself upon the throne of Israel by the cruel murder of his brethren. Finally, he is killed in battle. The history of this man's career is our subject of study for today. Let us approach it seeking lessons for our own lives.

EXPOSITION

I. Noble Men Do Not Seek to Dominate Their Brethren, 8:22-23.

1. A noble man does not seek advancement at the expense of his brethren, verse 22. The deliverance from the oppression of the Midianites filled the minds of the men of Israel with great ambitions. They felt that if Gideon would become their king they would be safe from oppression by other nations and could grow into a powerful nation. They came to Gideon with the request that he would become their king and establish a hereditary kingship over them, "*Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also.*" (Thus we see that the desire for a king did not first arise in the days of Samuel and the selection of Saul.) This request was probably motivated by their realization that in order to resist their enemies they must be united. Gideon with the great victory he had won would be the man to unite the nation into one political unit. This very request was a sign of religious apostasy. Israel was supposed to have a theocratic government (that is, God ruled them) and had no right to demand another ruler. They did not seem to see that their suffering was the result of sin, not the result of their not having a political ruler. Gideon reveals the greatness of his character in his refusal. It is not his ambition to take supremacy over his brethren. He is content to serve them under God's leading without becoming their master. This reminds us of Jesus' admonition to His disciples, "*Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant,*" Matthew 23:10-11. He, who is willing to advance himself over his brethren, or at their expense, shows he lacks the spirit of the true Christian worker.

2. A noble man seeks for God's will to be done, verse 28. "*I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you.*" Gideon here resolves that he will do nothing which seems to trespass upon the divine prerogative. He was willing to serve them as judge for God had called him to that ministry. No call had been given to an institution of a kingship, however, and he refused to go beyond the call of God. Here is the subjection of the ambition of exalting a family name; here is the spirit of a true patriot who seeks the welfare of his country whatever personal cost may be involved. This magnificent act, of self-abnegation was the crowning glory of Gideon's career. He had achieved a decisive victory and restored national independence, gained the loyalty and confidence of his people, and yet retained his simplicity and humility. This is an evidence of true greatness. A sort of prophetic insight helped him to see that Israel's destiny was bound up with God's sovereignty and not with a temporal kingship.

3. Evil men commit evil deeds, verse 5. These evil and violent men who were associated with Abimelech were ready to do any evil deed which

would promote their interest. Someone makes the suggestion that the throne of Abimelech will not be secure until the rest of Gideon's sons are dead. Then followed the mass slaughter of the seventy sons of Gideon, only Jotham escapes. From verse twenty-four it appears that the men of Shechem joined likewise in this murder. Some scholars see this as being revenge upon the family of Gideon for his having torn down the altar of Baal (Judges 6:25-26). The sons of Gideon were slain "upon one stone." Ehrlich suggests that, according to an ancient belief the blood of a murdered person cries from heaven (Genesis 4:10), but not when it is covered with earth (Genesis 37:26; Job 16:18). When the blood is shed upon a stone and not where the earth can absorb it (cf Ezekiel 24:7f), it is an indication that the murderer is completely reckless and without thought of God who avenges the crime. Here is further evidence that ruthless ambition never hesitates; that neither conscience nor affection, neither the love of God nor the fear of man, restrains those who are under its influence.

4. Evil men often prosper in their deeds, verse 6. The people gathered in the plains of Shechem and proclaimed Abimelech king. It seemed his plans were working exactly as he desired. The vile men who were his companions, the inexcusable murder of his brothers, and the league he had formed with Baal-barith had joined to make him the first king of the Jews. Could it be that God's purposes were thus to be thwarted? Is Israel to lose her unique relation of a theocratic nation and select a king whom God had not even called?

If you, like the Psalmist, are envious of the foolish when you see the prosperity of the wicked (Psalm 73:3) take time to read Psalm 37. Here is shown that God often allows the evil man to prosper. Sometimes the wicked man is wealthy and often respected in his community. This writer knows of a wealthy man who had refused to even consider the claim of Jesus upon his soul. He had amassed his fortune by gambling and refused to give up the sin to become a Christian. The Psalm goes on to say, however, that judgment will come from God. Wickedness will be punished and righteousness rewarded. Then the prosperity of evil men will appear as it really is—a fleeting illusion which has temporarily blinded a man of true values.

III. The Plotting of Evil Men Works Harm to All Concerned, 9:16-20.

1. Evil men forget the sacrificial efforts of others, verse 16-17. Jotham was the only son of Gideon who escaped death at the hands of Abimelech. When he heard how the men of Shechem had made Abimelech king, he went to the top of mount Gerizim and called down to the people telling them

the fable of the trees selecting a king (Judges 9:7-15). He concludes by observing that the people had forgotten how Gideon had saved them from the Midianites and that Abimelech was the murderer of Gideon's sons. Now if the men had done right in making Abimelech king the Lord would prosper it; if not, the Lord would cause them to destroy each other.

Time so dulls memories that we are prone to forget the sacrifices of those who preceded us. The men who have been religious pioneers, the founders of our nation, the men who organized our Association or our local church, all these are so often forgotten and their contributions overlooked. It helps us see the working of God, to be mindful of His activities through former generations.

2. Evil men do injustice toward those who do good for them, verse 18. The murderous deed perpetrated by Abimelech is here charged upon the men of Shechem, because they consented to, approved, and probably assisted in it. Knowing of the crime that had been committed, they made Abimelech their king anyway. Moreover, the selection of Abimelech as king is attributed to selfish motives on the part of the men of Shechem. It is not because he is the son of Gideon, or from any worth in himself, but simply because he is a native of Shechem and the men who lived there would have an advantage in the king being their relative—this alone prompted the selection of Abimelech. How this address must have pricked the hearts of the men of Shechem. Jotham spoke the truth through now he must flee for his life to prohibit his own murder. Evil always hardens men's hearts until they lose their sense of justice and work evil to those who have treated them best.

3. Evil men will receive just reward for their deeds, verses 19-20. Observe that Jotham does not act the part of judge to condemn the actions of the men of Shechem. He leaves it to the providence of God to determine their guilt or innocence. If their course is approved of God they may expect reward. If it is disapproved then may Abimelech be the cause of discord which invites civil violence and overthrows his pretended kingdom. Just as Abimelech and the men of Shechem had consumed and destroyed the house of Gideon, now may they destroy one another. Jotham believes in the principle of just retribution in "measure for measure."

Let us never forget that evil will receive its just reward. God has warned, "*I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me,*" Deuteronomy 32:41. This judgment on sin will be determined according to the wickedness of such person, II Samuel 3:29. This punishment of evil will be performed before the eyes of men, Psalm 91:8. The sinner will suffer indescribable punishments for eternity, Revelation

20:15. *“Behold I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be,”* Revelation 22:12. Both in this life and in eternity the Lord is judging sin and will execute vengeance upon the ungodly. Because of this sure judgment, everyman should prepare to meet God, Amos 4:12.

QUESTIONS

1. Identify: Gideon, Abimelech, Jotham, and Shechem.
2. What reward did Israel offer Gideon for his great work?
3. Why did Gideon refuse to become king of Israel?
4. Why did Abimelech go to Shechem to seek to become king?
5. Whom did Abimelech hire to join with him?
6. What did Abimelech do to the sons of Gideon?
7. Tell the story of Jotham’s fable. Give its meaning.
8. Discuss God’s judgment upon sin.