

GOD PORTRAYS MORE WOMEN

by

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CHAPTER SEVEN

ABIMELECH'S MOTHER AND A CERTAIN WOMAN

(Judges 8, 9)

A YOUNG FARMER, Gideon, was one of the many in Israel who were plundered yearly of their harvest by the marauders of Midian. Gideon was disgusted with the situation and determined he would not be robbed of his wheat. He had religious convictions too and protested against the idolatry in his own father's house. His courage in refusing to accept constant defeat appealed to God. He said, "There's a man I can use to deliver my people."

God sent an angel to tell Gideon he was to save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. The angel addressed him as a "**mighty man of valor**." Gideon felt that he was a very weak person and offered excuses for not accepting such an honor. The Lord assured him of His presence with him and gave explicit directions about the tactics to be used, giving him tokens to strengthen his confidence and faith.

Gideon obeyed implicitly and won a great victory—the Midianites were utterly routed. The nation was so grateful that they hastened to honor him and said: "**Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also; for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian**" (8:22). And Gideon said: "**I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you.**"

This revealed Gideon's humility and loyalty to God. Someone has said that the hour of victory is the hour of greatest danger. We are off our guard then, and at such a moment Satan is liable to take advantage, and we are likely to have confidence in the flesh.

The years of adversity brought out the best that was in Gideon, while the years of prosperity and popularity revealed his weaknesses. He grandly refused to be their king but he thought, "I have had a unique spiritual experience. Not many men have pulled down heathen idols or have had a visitation from an angel; neither have they had the assurance that their sacrifices were accepted as mine were! I have had greater honor from Heaven than any of the priests. I think I have special nearness to God and I would like it recognized."

So he said: "**I would desire a request of you, that ye would give me every man the earrings of his prey**" (8:24). And they said, "We will willingly give them." And they poured the gold into a spread-out garment, the total value of which was \$17,500.

“And Gideon made an ephod thereof, and put it in his city, even in Ophrah: and all Israel went thither awhoring after it, which thing became a snare unto Gideon and to his house” (8:27).

Here was a good man who made an idol of a wonderful spiritual experience in the past, which proved a snare to himself and other people. He valiantly pulled down the idols of others, but erected one for himself. He wanted a perpetual reminder of past attainments. Can we throw stones at Gideon? Do we treasure and continually think about complimentary letters, and entertain our friends and strangers with recounting the accomplishments of ourselves and of our families? How timely are those lines:

Forget each kindness that you do
As soon as you have done it.
Forget the praise that falls to you
The moment you have won it.

Yesterday is not yours; it belongs to God. One is reminded that in the Temple service the candle had to be snuffed each morning with the golden snuffers, and the snuff was burned on the altar. It seems strange that that which was light yesterday is snuff today, and is not to be laid up and treasured, admired and displayed, but burned before the Lord. Where is boasting then? It is excluded.

Gideon **“went and dwelt in his own house.”** The next sad words are: **“And Gideon had threescore and ten [seventy] sons . . . for he had many wives. And his concubine that was in Shechem, she also bare him a son, whose name he called Abimelech,”** meaning *“my father is king.”* One recalls that the law for kings forbade his multiplying wives (Deuteronomy 17:17).

He flagrantly disobeyed in this and added the sin of making one of his maidservants in Shechem a common law wife, by whom he had this “bramble child.” Though he publicly repudiated the throne for himself and any succession for his children, yet later we learn that one of his sons grasped at the prominence he rejected.

No doubt Abimelech’s mother never let him forget his importance and tried to satisfy her own ambition in the promotion of her son. Who of us have not our ambitions, even for that which we have not earned? Yes, she and her son determined to rise no matter how they climbed or on whom they trampled. According to the law, a child of a secondary wife could not inherit; therefore, the legitimate children must be put out of the way. A conspiracy started among the mother’s relatives and the seventy brothers were set upon and slain upon one stone, and Abimelech was made king.

Unfortunately for Abimelech, the youngest half-brother Jotham proved elusive and was not among the slain. He was a clever, thoughtful, resourceful, and God-fearing lad. Upon hearing about the crowning of Abimelech he, like a veritable John the Baptist, went and stood on the top of Mount Gerizim. It was a place of splendid acoustics and his voice carried perfectly.

He cried out, “**Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you**” (9:7), and then delivered his matchless parable of the trees and the bramble’s lust for power. It was clear, concise, and of exquisite beauty. The trees sought a king to rule over them and invited in turn the olive, the fig, and the vine to accept the office. All were too preoccupied with useful ministry for God and man and had no desire to “wave over” others, and no ambition for mere office or leadership. They loved to serve and contribute to the fatness, sweetness, and joy of others.

The bramble, which normally was intended for a branch, “became useless and fruitless, hurtful and vexatious, scratching and tearing and doing mischief.” The bramble was next nominated as king over the trees. He accepted with alacrity and said: “Anoint me king, trust in my shadow; if you do not, I will burn you with fire, even though you be as the cedars of Lebanon.” Who would like to trust the compassions of such a bramble king as Abimelech? Jotham charged him with just such cruelty and predicted his end, then fled for fear of Abimelech.

Jotham’s predictions came true to the letter, and wherever Abimelech went, the fire and the thorns consumed the innocent person and his fellows. But as a man sows, so he reaps. He had leveled one town by fire and hurried to another to lay siege to it and burn it. The people fled to their strong tower, and Abimelech charged and sought to burn the door of the tower. And “**a certain woman**” cast a piece of a millstone upon Abimelech’s head and brake his skull. “**Then he called hastily unto the young man his armorbearer, and said unto him, Draw thy sword, and slay me, that men say not of me, A woman slew him. And his young man thrust him through, and he died**” (9:54).

He had slain his seventy brethren on a stone, and a stone fell on his skull. Vengeance was aimed at the guilty head that usurped the crown. The stone was cast by a woman, and he knew it and it hurt his pride. It was the instrument used in humble daily toil by the women when they ground the grain for bread that brought down his haughty head.

Let us be warned against this lust for power or place or office, and be pre-engaged with that which is beneficent and a blessing and joy to God and man. Remember the Lord’s own words: “**The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life**” (Matthew 20:28). “**I am among you as he that serveth**” (Luke 22:27).

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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