



## When Good Goes Bad

### RECAP

**This week's focus: "Sin produces serious consequences; returning to the Savior produces redemption."**

In chapter 7 of Judges, Gideon had just pulled off the most incredible upset in military history. With only 300 soldiers he defeated a massive Midianite army of over 100,000 soldiers without so much as a single Israelite casualty. Yet, not long after his victorious return home, his people were backbiting and bickering with each other.

Chapter 8 begins with Gideon in conflict with two groups of Israelites. First is Ephraim, a large wealthy clan and second are a couple of small, poorer townships called Succoth and Penuel. Ephraim had their pride hurt by not being part of Gideon's battle. So, Gideon responds with flattery, and he woos them over. To the smaller towns of Succoth and Penuel who don't take Gideon seriously, however, he responds with harshness by torturing the leaders of Succoth and leveling the town of Penuel, killing its inhabitants.

Gideon's response is inconsistent and appears to be based on what is best for him rather than what God wants. A powerful shift begins to appear in Gideon. He started with complete dependence on God and obeying His direction in Chapter 6. Now, instead of being a deliverer of the people and teaching them to have faith in God, he's become a stumbling block to the people, keeping them from faith in God.

While Gideon refuses an invitation to become their king, in many other respects he begins acting like a king. The text tells us he had many wives, seventy sons and his own concubine. In addition, he started collecting a tax from his own people in the form of gold earrings. In a troubling act of idolatry, he created an ephod of gold directing people's attention away from God and onto himself. For the first time in Judges, the people fall away from God while the Judge is reigning. Gideon's actions lead the nation down the spiral of despair.

Following Gideon's death, Abimelech, one of Gideon's sons, seizes the moment to be king. He approaches the leaders of Shechem, leveraging his lineage to gain support. The leaders agree and in a scandalous act of ruthless ambition, Abimelech murdered sixty-nine of his brothers to eliminate threats to his rule, with only the youngest, Jotham, escaping. In response, Jotham delivers a poignant parable, warning the people about the dangers of choosing a leader like Abimelech, whom he compares to a thornbush—seemingly attractive but ultimately harmful.

Judges 9 records a dizzying account of scandal, sabotage and mass murder during Abimelech's reign. In a climactic moment, Abimelech besieges a city where the leaders have taken refuge in a tower. Just as he is about to light it on fire, a woman on the top floor takes a millstone and drops it on his head. In a smashing display of justice, Abimelech suffers a mortal wound. In desperation, he asks that his servant kill him with a sword to avoid the humiliation of being killed by a woman.

These graphic and disturbing stories illustrate for us the consequence of sin and the potential all of us have of following our hearts and falling away from God. This story reminds us that God not only needs to rescue us from the evil around us but also from the evil within us. The same enemy is at work today. The bible clearly shows us how we can identify his schemes and avoid the same deadly pitfalls of Gideon and Abimelech.



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### SHARE (5-10 min)

1. Icebreaker Question: Who is someone you respect as a leader? Why do you admire him or her?

### STUDY (about 30 min) Read Judges 8:1-10:5

2. How did God speak to you through the scripture and the sermon this week? Is there anything that was unclear, or that you have questions about?
3. Read Judges 8:1–32. What does Gideon do to lead Israel away from God?
4. Read Judges 9:50–57. What does God’s judgment of Abimelech and the people of Shechem show you about his character?
5. Identify at least three or more key biblical principles we can take away from Chapters 8:1-10:5 regarding sin, God’s character and the heart of man.
6. When would it be tempting for you to think that changing your circumstances will change your heart? What has God done in your life to show you he’s the only one powerful enough to transform your heart?
7. What happened when the Israelites didn’t weed out their sin? What are the consequences of letting sin stay in our lives untouched?
8. Read 1 John 2:16-17. Identify the schemes Satan used to trap Gideon and Abimelech. What area are you most likely to be tempted? (passion, possession or position) What can you do to overcome these temptations?
9. Discuss what it looks like to turn away from sin (repentance)? How do we repent personally and corporately from the sin of self-focus and self-reliance?

### SUPPORT (15 min)

Spend time in your group praying for one another.

This week pray that God would teach you to depend on him in your strengths and weaknesses. Each morning, take five minutes to pray about the day ahead and ask God to sustain you through it.

If you’re struggling with a specific sin, take this week to search Scripture to see what God says about it. Make a list of helpful verses to memorize and keep the list nearby—on notecards, in a journal, or on your phone. Read them when you’re tempted to sin.