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The Fifth Cycle: Gideon

6:1 to 9:57

It is evident from a casual reading that the fifth cycle divides into two major parts:



Gideon and the Midianites (6:1 to 8:32): It is probably true to say that, along with Samson, **Gideon** is the most familiar character in the book of **Judges**. You may dislike the term “character,” because it makes him sound fictional, and want to stress that he’s a real person. Together they hint at one reason for **Gideon’s** being so well-known. For many Bible teachers, it’s easy to have a character-study of some prominent person, and some Bible people lend themselves more readily than others to being held up as examples to follow. And **the judges** we have encountered in the first four **cycles** are tough nuts to crack as relatable examples of any kind. So, with some relief, we arrive at the story of **Gideon**, who seems to be (as **James** says of **Elijah**) **a human just like we are (James 5:17a)**. He has to cope, personally, with circumstances to which we might also face. On that basis, we might expect to learn lessons from Gideon by seeing him as Everyman.

But before we renew our acquaintance with him with that sort of object in mind, we ought to recall that hardly anyone in **Judges** so far has provided suitable material for character-study. **Othniel**, **Ehud**, and **Shamgar** are not Everyman; **Deborah**

and **Ja'el** are not Everywoman. As we read their stories, we don't say to ourselves, "I ought to be like that," or "I must be careful not to be like that." Instead, what **the book** has been focusing on is the attitudes and actions of **Isra'el** as a nation, **the apple of His eye (Psalm 17:8)**, rather than from a character study of her leaders, that we can apply to our own lives. **He** has successes and failures . . . and so do we. **His** is the longest story of all **the judges**. Although Samson has four chapters to **Gideon's** three, **Gideon** has a hundred verses to **Samson's** ninety-six.¹³²

The Rise and Fall of Abimelech (8:33 to 9:57): 8:33-35 transition from **Gideon** to **Abimelech**; then **9:1-57** is a sequel to the **Gideon** story. There are two explicit statements where the author provides the theme of the sequel. The first occurs in **9:23-24**, at a crucial point in the plot: **And God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem, and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech (9:23 KJV). God was punishing Abimelech for murdering Gideon's seventy sons, and the citizens of Shechem for supporting him in this treachery of murdering his brothers (9:24 NLT).** We see the second in **9:56-57**, after the climax has been reached with the death of **Abimelech**: **In this way, God punished Abimelech for the evil he had done against his father by murdering his seventy brothers. God also punished the men of Shechem for all their evil. So the curse of Jotham son of Gideon was fulfilled (9:56-57 NLT).** These two statements complement each other and point to retribution as the key to the rise and fall of **Abimelech**: **God** causes the evil that **Abimelech** and **the men of Shechem** do to rebound on **their** own heads.¹³³ **And he who rolls a stone down onto others, it will crush you instead (Proverbs 26:27).**