

• *The people of Israel ask their saviour Gideon to start a line of kings in Israel*

Gideon tended always to underestimate what God could do in his life. The time comes when Gideon receives a fresh challenge to serve God. The people of Israel ask Gideon to start a line of kings in Israel. ‘You have saved us; so now we want you and your descendants to be a line of kings to rule the nation’ <sup>1</sup>. One part of their request is reasonable. Someone who has shown that he is able to be a Saviour is likely to be a good man to have as a king.

<sup>1</sup> 8:22

• *Jesus - the only Saviour-King*

Jesus is in fact the only One to whom this line of argument really applies. ‘Saviour ... therefore ruler’ applies to Him alone. He alone is unchangingly faithful. He is eternal and while it is progressing, never hands over His work to anyone else.

• *The idea of a line of Kings is foolish*

However there is another part of the people’s request which is foolish. The idea that a **line** of kings will help them is foolish. Will the son of a saviour equally be a saviour?

• *Gideon’s options*

What should Gideon have done at this point? There are three possibilities.

(i) He could have simply turned down the offer and thrown off all further responsibility for Israel.

(ii) He could have accepted the offer and then he and his descendants would have been a line of kings in Israel. However there could be no way that he could guarantee that his sons and grandsons would be worthy as kings of Israel.

(iii) The wisest course of action would have been to take some kind of middle course. He could have simply retained his position as a kind of permanent judge, and then left it to God as to what should happen when his reign was at an end.

• *Gideon refused the offer with its responsibilities – but then took the privileges*

What Gideon did was to turn down the offer, but then to live like a king without taking responsibility for the future well-being of the nation. He declines the offer, saying ‘Yahweh will rule over you’ <sup>1</sup>. So far, so good. Yet from that point onward Gideon made mistakes. He no longer sought ways of serving his nation. Yet at the same time he wanted the privileges that arose from his almost being a king in Israel.

<sup>1</sup> 8:23

• *Abimelech a very unwise choice of name for a son*

There are times when we turn down the offer of something we know would be wrong but then we hanker after the very thing we have said ‘no’ to! Gideon says ‘no’ to the offer of kingship – and yet much that he does afterwards is behaving like a dynastic king. And Gideon himself must take some of the blame if later one of his sons, Abimelech, tried to become a king. After all, ‘Abimelech’ means ‘My father is king!’

**1. A mistake to seek wealth without responsibility**

**1. It was a mistake to seek wealth without responsibility.** When the people asked Gideon to start a line of kings in Israel, Gideon used the opportunity to ask for gold <sup>1</sup>. Kings were famous for accumulating gold. The law of Israel warned any king ‘He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold’ <sup>2</sup>. Gideon says ‘no’ to kingship, but then immediately starts acting like a king – but not a good one! He wants the money but he is not doing much to help Israel.

<sup>1</sup> 8:24  
<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 17:17

**2. A mistake to take a step towards idolatry**

**2. It was a mistake to take a step towards idolatry.** Gideon is given the gold that he wants <sup>1</sup>. The people each give a piece of gold from what they had taken from the Midianites. Then Gideon uses it to make his home town, Ophrah, into a kind of religious sanctuary. He makes a golden ‘ephod’. The ‘ephod’ was some sort of coat in which stones were kept. When the stones were thrown down, they acted as dice,

<sup>1</sup> 8:5-26

• *An almost high-high priest in Gideon's home town - Ophrah*

• *God's appointed Levitical high priest was at Shiloh*

### 3. A mistake to set up a royal harem

• *Disobedience to the law of Moses*

• *Like a near eastern King he paraded his status by taking many wives*

• *After Gideon the people relapsed yet again*

• *A missed opportunity through a failure to consult the Lord*

• *Gideon began well but failed to continue faithfully to the end.*

giving God's will. They could give one of three results: 'yes', 'no', or 'no answer'. Gideon had always had a problem being sure about God's calling. Now he makes Ophrah into a sacred city, where people will come to worship God and get guidance from Him. Its central spectacle is Gideon's ephod. Not only is Gideon acting as an almost-king. He is acting as an almost-high-priest.

But none of this is following God's will. There is a tabernacle at Shiloh; God's true 'ephod' belongs to the great high-priest in the tribe of Levi. Gideon had made himself his own high-priest – in the line of Manasseh! Gideon said 'no' to the offer of kingship but now is acting as if he is king-and priest combined. The people began worshipping the ephod; it brought idolatry into Gideon's family <sup>1</sup>. The problem all began when Gideon was given an opportunity to be responsible for the nation of Israel. He turned down the responsibility, but he wanted the privileges.

3. **It was a mistake to set up a royal harem.** During Gideon's lifetime the Midianites were subdued, and there was a generation of peace <sup>1</sup>. Gideon himself continued to act like a bad king. The Mosaic law had warned Israel against having a king who accumulated many wives. 'He must not take many wives' said Deuteronomy 17:17. Gideon says 'no' to kingship, but then he goes back to Ophrah <sup>2</sup> and starts living a life that resembles that of a king. He has many wives, many sons<sup>3</sup>. He takes a concubine in Shechem <sup>4</sup> and has a son through her. The son's name is Abimelech, which means 'My father is king!' Gideon said 'no' to kingship, but then got as near to being a king as he could get! Near eastern kings paraded their status by taking many wives.

When Gideon died he was given an honourable burial <sup>1</sup> but then Israel went back to its sinful ways <sup>2</sup>. They had not learned the lesson. The idolatry which brought them trouble in the first place <sup>3</sup> was taken up again. They forgot God <sup>4</sup> and they forgot Gideon and what he had done <sup>5</sup>.

Gideon missed a great opportunity for good when Israel offered him kingship. The Mosaic law allowed Israel to have a king.<sup>6</sup> If they had consulted the Lord, perhaps he would have let them have Gideon as their king. If he had obeyed the rules about kingship in Deuteronomy 17:14–20 he might have upheld righteousness in Israel. He could have become a judge like Samuel, upholding righteousness

Instead he acted like Solomon, collecting gold and wives, making his city into a religious sanctuary, but eventually leading Israel into idolatry. It is one thing to begin well; it is another thing to continue in faithfulness to the very end.

<sup>1</sup> 8:27

<sup>1</sup> 8:28

<sup>2</sup> 8:29

<sup>3</sup> 8:30

<sup>4</sup> 8:31

<sup>1</sup> 8:32

<sup>2</sup> 8:33

<sup>3</sup> see 6:1

<sup>4</sup> 8:34

<sup>5</sup> 8:35

<sup>6</sup> see Deuteronomy 17:14–20



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