

Abimelech's Rise and Downfall **Judges 9**

Introduction

Gideon was a brave hero and a good judge. *(He had seventy sons who were his own offspring, for he had many wives. His concubine¹ who was in Shechem also bore him a son, whose name he called Abimelech (Judges 8:30-31).* After Gideon's death, his son, Abimelech, murdered his own brothers. Only Gideon's youngest son survived. Abimelech wanted to be the first king of Israel. Instead, he is known as nothing more than a vicious murderer who deserved his humiliating death.

Outline of Judges Chapter 9

- I. Abimelech's Ambition - Judges 9:1-21
- II. Abimelech's Reign - Judges 9:22-49
- III. Abimelech's End - Judges 9:50-57

I. Abimelech's Ambition - Judges 9:1-21

Abimelech was the son of Gideon and his concubine. He did not grow up with his father and brothers in Ophrah. Instead, he lived with his mother in Shechem. He went to his fellow Shechemites and gave them a choice: to be ruled by one of their own (himself) or by seventy outsiders (Gideon's other sons). He failed to mention the third choice which was to be ruled by neither.

¹ In the Old Testament, a concubine was a secondary 'wife' with a lower status than the wife or wives of a husband. "The law-code of King Hammurabi of Babylon, dated about 1750 BC, records that: 'A man would not take a second wife unless the first was unable to have children...or his wife might give him a slave-girl, to have children by her.' (Nelson's Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Bible)" The practice evolved and became very popular in ancient cultures. It likely phased out of the Jewish culture throughout the first century AD, as it is not God's original intent for marriage (Matthew 10:6-9).

Abimelech's relatives convinced the Shechemites to support their own *flesh and bone* (9:2). He received seventy pieces of silver from the pagan temple and used it to hire *worthless and reckless men* to follow him (9:4). Having followers may mean that you are a leader, but it does not mean you are a good leader.

It did not take courage for Abimelech to lead his group of thugs. At his father's house in Ophrah, they murdered all of his seventy half-brothers except one. Jotham, who was the youngest, hid and he alone survived the slaughter.

Returning to Shechem, the men proclaimed Abimelech king *beside the terebinth tree at the pillar* (9:6). Jotham went to the top of Mt. Gerizim, above Shechem. He told a parable of four different plants which were asked to **reign** over all of the trees. Each of the first three plants refused because they were useful in better ways.

The olive tree was the first plant asked to reign over the trees. It responded, *Should I cease giving my oil, with which they honor God and men, and go to sway over trees?* It was a **rhetorical** question with an obvious answer. Swaying (ruling) over the trees could never compare to giving oil for God's altar or man's tables.

The fig tree was able to give good fruit for sweetness. He also asked if swaying (ruling) over the trees was better providing the service for which he was made.

Thirdly, the vine, produced wine and, like the oil, was used at God's altar and enjoyed by man. The vine recognized that being used

as an offering to God was much better than swaying over trees.

The bramble, however, was of little use. It was nothing more than a thornbush found growing at the base of trees. It's only purpose was to be burnt, used to start a fire. It was delighted at the thought of swaying over the trees.

The parable demonstrates that worthless people like to place themselves in positions over others. Meanwhile, worthy people are busy performing useful work and do not have the time or desire to be concerned about positions of power.

Jotham challenged the men of Shechem to think about the choice they had made. Had they honored his father, Gideon, who had risked his life for them? Before he fled from Abimelech, he declared a curse of fire on them.

Wasn't Abimelech different than his father, Gideon? When we look at two items that are like each other, we "compare" them. But, when we look at how two items are different, we "contrast" them. Let's contrast Abimelech and Gideon. Gideon did not want to reign over Israel (8:23), he believed that job belonged to the Lord. Nor did Gideon want his children to reign over Israel. However, Abimelech disagreed with his father and wanted to reign over Israel. When the Angel of the Lord first came to Gideon, he was a humble son who did not think too highly of himself (6:15). Abimelech thought himself worthy to be king over Israel. Gideon and Abimelech are in many ways the complete opposites of each other. However, there is one way in which they were the same...both were the least in their father's house. Perhaps, Abimelech's true jealousy was not so much with his brothers as it was with his own father. He lusted for the power that had been given to Gideon by God. Sadly, he was willing to do anything to get that power, even if it meant killing his 70 half brothers. He failed to see that God alone is the source of power.

When sold into slavery by his half brothers, Joseph said that it was God who raised him up to power. *It was not you that sent me here but God. He has made me...ruler throughout all the land...* (Genesis 45:8). When Hannah's prayers for a son were answered, she rejoiced by saying, *The Lord makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and lifts up* (1 Samuel 2:7). *Exaltation comes neither from the east nor from the west nor from the south. God is the judge; He puts down one and **exalts** another* (Psalm 75:7).

Has anyone ever asked you, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Perhaps you already know what you want to do when you are an adult. Maybe you have no idea. Remember, God has a purpose for you. Talk to Him about your desires. He will lead you. No one says when they are little, "I want to grow up and go to jail," but a lot of people end up there. Don't be so attached to what you want (like Abimelech) that you disobey God to get it. The Bible says you are not your own, *you are bought with a price* (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Your real life is *hidden with Christ in God* (Colossians 3:3). Are you willing to present your desires to God and trust Him to know what is best for your life's purpose?

II. Abimelech's Reign - Judges 9:22-49

After three years of peace, God *sent a spirit of ill will* between the Shechemites and their king. The atmosphere changed from peace and cooperation to **strife** and arguments. This happens in families, businesses, and churches, as well as in cities and countries. We are told to guard our spirits. One negative, complaining person can turn a happy place into a place of misery. A spirit of jealousy can ruin friendships.

Abimelech wanted to rule, but he didn't care if he was good at it. He didn't care about the people he was ruling any more than he cared for his brothers whom he had murdered.

The evil that Abimelech had done began to return upon him. The Shechemites weakened his rule by robbing travelers and interfering with the tolls paid by caravans. They even gave an outsider, Gaal, a chance to overthrow Abimelech, although he failed.

After destroying the people who had fought against him, he demolished a nearby city and then led the torching of Shechem's tower² where a thousand men and women hid.

III. Abimelech's End - Judges 9:50-57

For unknown reasons, Abimelech attacked the city Thebez and took it. All the people sought refuge in their town's tower. Abimelech was thirsty to burn down another tower full of victims. So thirsty, that he came too close and a *certain woman* dropped a millstone (round stone used to grind grain) on his head. He did not die immediately. His last words were a request to his armor-bearer to kill him. He did not want people to say he had been brought down by a woman. Alas, he did not get his wish.

Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech which he had done to his father by killing his seventy brothers. And all the evil of the men of Shechem God returned on their own heads, and on them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal.

The apostle Paul said, *Do not be deceived, God is not **mocked**; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap* (Galatians 6:7). The idea is that you cannot sneak anything past God.

2 Editor's note: The ruins of the tower of Shechem were discovered by a German archaeologist, Herman Thiersh, in 2003. (Bible and Spade, Spring, 2005).

Sometimes, it can feel like others get away with all sorts of wrongs. But, don't be discouraged. God is not mocked. *God will bring every work into judgement, including every secret thing, whether good or evil* (Ecclesiastes 12:14). (See also 1 Corinthians 4:5.)

Some day, the Lord Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords. A day of judgement is coming. On that day, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that He is Lord (Philippians 2:10-11). Do you willingly bow to Him now? †

Prayer

Ask God what He created you to do and how He wants you to use your gifts for His glory.

Memory Verse

1 Chronicles 29:12 *Both riches and honor come from You, and You reign over all. In your hand is power and might; in your hand it is to make great to give strength to all.*

Vocabulary

reign - to rule as a king, queen, emperor, etc.

rhetorical - a statement or question to make a point without expecting an answer

exalt - to raise in power; glorify

strife - bitter disagreement; struggle; fight

mock - to make fun of; ridicule; treat with scorn

QUESTIONS FOR JUDGES/RUTH LESSON 8

All questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

DAY ONE: Read all notes and references.

1. What lesson did you learn from Abimelech's life? (Be specific.)

2. ? (Thought Question) Give a modern day example of reaping what you sow (Galatians 6:7).

DAY TWO: Read Judges 10:1-16.

3. a. Name the two judges who arose after Abimelech and give three facts about each.

Judge: _____

Judge: _____

1. _____

1. _____

2. _____

2. _____

3. _____

3. _____

- b. How many years of peace did Israel experience under these two judges? _____

4. After the long period of peace, another cycle of sin began. Fill in the blanks below to tell what happened.

a. Israel did _____ in God's sight by serving many pagan _____. (vs.6)

b. Israel forsook _____ and did not _____. (vs. 6)

c. The _____ of the _____ was hot against Israel. (vs. 7)

d. The Philistines and the Ammonites _____ and _____

the people of Israel in _____ for _____ years. (vs. 8)

e. The other tribes which were affected were _____, _____,
and _____. (vs. 9)

5. On your map, find the areas from your answers in questions 4 d. and e. Write the name of the location that does NOT border (touch) a body of water (sea, lake, or river)?

6. a. What did Israel do next? Give verse: _____

b. How did God answer?

- c. How did the people of Israel show they were serious?

verse 15

verse 16

DAY THREE: Read Judges 10:17-11:11.

7. When war with the Ammonites threatened, what question did the men of Gilead ask?

8. From verses 1-3, give five facts about Jephthah (Jeff-thuh).

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

9. a. Why did the men of Gilead change their minds about Jephthah?

- b. What did they promise him?

- c. What deal did Jephthah make with the men of Gilead?

DAY FOUR: Read Judges 11:12-28.

10. What question did Jephthah want answered and who did he want to answer it?

11. a. Using Deuteronomy 31:24-28 and Joshua 24:6, how could Jephthah have known Israel's history so well?

- b. Why do you think it is important for you to know the history of God's people?

12. a. In verses 14-26, Jephthah used three different arguments to show why Israel had rights to the land claimed by the Ammonites. Give the three reasons.

1.

2.

3.

- b. Do you think Jephthah's arguments are reasonable? (Circle one.) YES NO
- c. Did the king of Ammon listen to Jephthah's reasoning? (Circle one.) YES NO
- d. Do you think most people today listen to sound reasoning? Give reasons to support your answer.
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DAY FIVE: Read Judges 11:29-40.

13. Circle T (true) or F (false) next to each of the statements below. Give the verse(s) for each statement and correct the false statements.

- a. T or F vs. _____ The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah as he went forward to battle.
- b. T or F vs. _____ Jephthah made a vow to give 10% of the spoils of battle to the Lord.
- c. T or F vs. _____ Jephthah was victorious in subduing the Ammonites because of his great army.

14. a. Who went to meet Jephthah when he returned home? _____

b. How did Jephthah respond?

c. What do the following verses say about making a vow?
Numbers 30:2

Ecclesiastes 5:4-5

VOCABULARY FOR JUDGES/RUTH LESSON 8

*"The more words you know, the more clearly and powerfully you will think...
and the more ideas you will invite into your mind."*

— Wilfred Funk

DAY ONE: Write the definition of each vocabulary word.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

DAY TWO: Write three sentences using three different vocabulary words from this lesson.

1.

2.

3.

DAY THREE: Circle the word's synonym(s). (Synonym is a word/phrase that means the same thing.)

- | | | | | | | | |
|------|---------------|-------|---------|-------|--------------|-------|----------|
| 1. . | exalt | | glorify | | magnify | | belittle |
| 2. . | strife | | harmony | | disagreement | | trouble |
| 3. . | mock | | praise | | make fun of | | ridicule |

DAY FOUR: Match the word to its meaning.**Word****Definition****rhetorical**

to raise in power; glorify

reign

a statement or question to make a point without expecting an answer

strife

to make fun of; ridicule; treat with scorn

exalt

to rule as a king, queen, emperor, etc.

mock

bitter disagreement; struggle; fight

DAY FIVE: Review previous vocabulary words. Try to work from memory.Wordsearch: Review previous vocabulary word(s). Try to work from memory.

Find the hidden words left, right, forward, backward, and diagonally. Each letter is used only once.

E O A F F W P N T H U B P R D
 S V F O C W O R N U V O G E M
 D T I E L I T S E F W E V H Z
 E Y N T T P H E T Y P O L T Z
 P R N I C U U T O J U X S M H
 J W B A Q U D U P T A K Q I Z
 B M F I S E R M M E C J F A E
 A L K N R T K T I K W R P S M
 T W J L S S Y C S T N L M X O
 G W R W F E W A T E D P Z L D
 G S M O S O V E U F D J K X E
 T M F F L S J O G K V R R C S
 P O L Y G A M Y E U S R U P T
 Y U A G F E V W D P E H P I Y
 Y L F M U M Q Y K R B X A V E

_____ - designed or tending
to hurt or destroy

_____ - personal bravery in the face
of danger

_____ - silent; unable to speak

_____ - devoted to religion or
religious duties

_____ - lacking in power or
strength

_____ - to follow in order to
capture; chase

_____ - series of rulers from
the same family or group

_____ - free from vanity;
concerned with descent behavior,
clothing, speech

_____ - desire for fame, power,
or a goal

_____ - the practice of having
several spouses, especially wives, at
one time