

King Abimelech? You're Kidding, Right?

1. What influences you to vote for a certain candidate in an election?
2. As we saw before in I Samuel 8:7-8, God was supposed to be Israel's king. Why was He the best choice to rule Israel? See Deuteronomy 7 and Psalm 91 for ideas.

When anyone does what is right in his/her own eyes, she will seek someone (or something) besides God to rule over her. When we are living in our flesh, we can make wrong choices, so thank God He is sovereign and can redeem to His glory even the messes we create.

Stop and Pray - Lord, show me who or what I am allowing to rule me. Reveal to me anything that I am taking refuge in, other than You.

3. From Judges 8:33-35, discern the spiritual state of the people of Israel at this time. Record your observations.

Read Judges 9. Reread 9:1-6 – Abimelech is made King. Mark this text on pages 5 and 6.

4. What do you find in Abimelech's heritage that would have set the stage for the events in 9:1-6?

*Note: Abimelech's name means *the king is my father* or *my father, the king*.*

5. What do Abimelech's actions, to attain the kingship in the way he did, reveal about his character?

Even after the atrocities done by Abimelech, the citizens of Shechem and Beth-millo gathered beside the great tree at the pillar in Shechem to crown Abimelech king.

6. a. What had happened at this same area/tree earlier in their history?
Joshua 21:20-21 (See Numbers 35:6, 11-12, 16 to discover its purpose.)

Joshua 24 (especially verses 25-27)

- b. Taking into account what we've learned so far, what should these people have done and what should they not have done at Shechem?
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7. a. What motivated the men of Shechem and Beth-millo to go against what they were required to do (Judges 9:2, 18)?

b. Are people still motivated in a similar way today? Explain your thinking.

Re-read Judges 9:7-21 — The Warning: The Parable of the Trees. Mark this text on page 6. When the Shechemites proceeded to make Abimelech king, Jotham, Gideon's youngest son who had escaped being murdered, took the opportunity to confront them for ignoring God's direction.

Note: While in Israel, I was shown an atab tree (here called a thorn bush or bramble). It was standing alone in the desert because its roots grew so densely that they had choked out all other plants near it. Its canopy provided lots of shade from the desert sun. However, the canopy was full of snagging thorns and combustible dead material, making it dangerous. Keep this in mind when reading the following parable.

8. "...one day the trees went out to anoint a king for themselves." (9:8 NIV) Where were they looking for a king (and by implication where were they not looking)?
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9. The Trees:
 - a. In Judges 9:8-14, what were the first three trees named and why were they asked to be king?

 - b. What were the reasons they refused?

- c. Finally in desperation, the trees ask the bramble (which obviously represents Abimelech) to be king. How does the thorn bush's response reveal its character and how it intended to rule?
10. A parable is “a fictitious narrative, invented for the purpose of conveying truth in a less offensive or more engaging form than that of direct assertion.” (Unger's Bible Dictionary)
What do you think was the point of this parable?
11. What was Jotham's warning for the men of Shechem?

Re-read Judges 9:22-57 — The Warning Fulfilled: Abimelech's Battles. Mark this text on pages 6-8.

12. For three years, it appeared as if the murderer/usurper Abimelech was allowed to rule with no consequences for his actions. However, after Abimelech had governed Israel for three years, God began to move. How would you explain the meaning of “God sent an evil spirit...”? I Samuel 16:14-23; 1 Kings 22:19-23; Job 1:6-12; Habakkuk 1:12-13 may be helpful.
13. Why did God allow an evil spirit to stir up contention between Abimelech and his subjects?
14. a. By allowing Abimelech to get away with his sin for three years without consequence, what might one possibly conclude about God's justice, involvement in our lives, tolerance of evil, etc.?
- b. What should you remember about God when you are wronged? How does God deal with evil? Exodus 34:6-7; Galatians 6:7; Hebrews 10:30; 2 Peter 3:7-9 might be helpful.

- c. Keeping in mind all that God is doing in the above verses, what should your attitude and actions be toward the one who wrongs you? Why?
15. Taking shelter in the shade of something other than God did not play out well for the men of Shechem. God did redeem the mess Israel had made. In Judges 9:22-57, how was the curse of Jotham fulfilled so that *God* repaid Abimelech and the men of Shechem for their wickedness?
God repaid the men of Shechem:
- God repaid Abimelech:
16. a. God still wants us to take shelter and refuge only in Him. Other than the Lord and His Word, in what shade are you taking refuge? What are you letting rule in your life to provide benefit, security, and comfort for you?
- b. How has or how could that ruler burn you?
- c. Evaluate how secure you feel in God's shelter. Why or why not?
17. Do you have a situation in your life where it feels like the wicked are winning and God doesn't care? What is the situation and how have you been encouraged by God's Word and this lesson in that situation?

Final Thoughts: "Sometimes it may appear as though evil is in control and that God has taken a vacation. Injustice dominates and wicked people, morally empty and reckless like Abimelech's hirelings, seem to prevail. And when believers forget the Lord and live according to the world's dictates, this only intensifies the power of the wicked. When believers choose this path, becoming functionally unbelievers, they may find that God allows them to get what they deserve, just as the Israelites experienced in the Abimelech story.

"Believers' apostasy can never negate God's sovereignty. He is in control whether they acknowledge Him or not, just as He is in control whether unbelievers acknowledge Him or not.

The Lord moves things to His intended outcome, and whatever gods have been used to replace Him will prove to be worthless in the day of trouble, just as Baal-Berith proved to be for the Shechemites, who took refuge in his temple from Abimelech. This text certainly underscores the results of sin. Our sins cannot be measured in a lifetime. They have an impact on the next generation and beyond. Whether it is our families or our communities or our nation, the impact will be felt. The harvest of the seeds of sin may not necessarily come in our generation but in innumerable ones beyond.”

(The NIV Application Commentary - K. Lawson Younger Jr. p. 234-235)

Pray –

- Thank You, God, that You are in control and will not let sin continue indefinitely without judgment.
- Thank You, God, that You have our eternity in mind, are slow to anger, and are abounding in love, or we too would have been judged for our sin a long time ago.
- Help me to seek shelter only in You, Lord. Be my shield and my joy.
- Forgive me and convict me when I take shelter in anything other than You, Lord

Kyna Ritchie (original 2002; revised 2013)

Lesson 15 — Abimelech — Judges 9

Examine your text by marking it, according to the following instructions, when instructed to in this lesson.

Mark your text. Put a box around all time words (e.g. now, then, finally, when). Put a circle around all conditional words (e.g. but, so, therefore). Put a brown jagged line under each location. Underline all references, including pronouns (e.g. he, they, whole clan, I):

- Abimelech in purple
- Men of Shechem in brown
- Gideon in green (note his other sons also in green)
- idols in black
- God in red
- Abimelech’s clan in orange
- Gaal in pink

Judges 9:1-6 — Abimelech is Made King

1 And Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem to his mother's relatives, and spoke to them and to the whole clan of the household of his mother's father, saying, 2 "Speak, now, in the hearing of all the leaders of Shechem, 'Which is better for you, that seventy men, all the sons of Jerubbaal, rule over you, or that one man rule over you?' Also, remember that I am your bone and your flesh." 3 And his mother's relatives spoke all these words on his behalf in the hearing of all the leaders of Shechem; and they were inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, "He is our relative." 4 They gave him seventy pieces of silver from the house of Baal-berith with which

Abimelech hired worthless and reckless fellows, and they followed him. 5 Then he went to his father's house at Ophrah and killed his brothers the sons of Jerubbaal, seventy men, on one stone. But Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, for he hid himself. 6 All the men of Shechem and all Beth-millo assembled together, and they went and made Abimelech king, by the oak of the pillar which was in Shechem.

Judges 9:7-21 — The Warning: The Parable of the Trees

7 Now when they told Jotham, he went and stood on the top of Mount Gerizim, and lifted his voice and called out. Thus he said to them, "Listen to me, O men of Shechem, that God may listen to you. 8 "Once the trees went forth to anoint a king over them, and they said to the olive tree, 'Reign over us!' 9 "But the olive tree said to them, 'Shall I leave my fatness with which God and men are honored, and go to wave over the trees?' 10 "Then the trees said to the fig tree, 'You come, reign over us!' 11 "But the fig tree said to them, 'Shall I leave my sweetness and my good fruit, and go to wave over the trees?' 12 "Then the trees said to the vine, 'You come, reign over us!' 13 "But the vine said to them, 'Shall I leave my new wine, which cheers God and men, and go to wave over the trees?' 14 "Finally all the trees said to the bramble, 'You come, reign over us!' 15 "The bramble said to the trees, 'If in truth you are anointing me as king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, may fire come out from the bramble and consume the cedars of Lebanon.' 16 "Now therefore, if you have dealt in truth and integrity in making Abimelech king, and if you have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have dealt with him as he deserved-- 17 for my father fought for you and risked his life and delivered you from the hand of Midian; 18 but you have risen against my father's house today and have killed his sons, seventy men, on one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his maidservant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your relative-- 19 if then you have dealt in truth and integrity with Jerubbaal and his house this day, rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you. 20 "But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech and consume the men of Shechem and Beth-millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem and from Beth-millo, and consume Abimelech." 21 Then Jotham escaped and fled, and went to Beer and remained there because of Abimelech his brother.

Judges 9:22-57 — The Warning Fulfilled: Abimelech's Battles

22 Now Abimelech ruled over Israel three years. 23 Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with

Abimelech, 24 so that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood might be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers. 25 The men of Shechem set men in ambush against him on the tops of the mountains, and they robbed all who might pass by them along the road; and it was told to Abimelech. 26 Now Gaal the son of Ebed came with his relatives, and crossed over into Shechem; and the men of Shechem put their trust in him. 27 They went out into the field and gathered the grapes of their vineyards and trod them, and held a festival; and they went into the house of their god, and ate and drank and cursed Abimelech. 28 Then Gaal the son of Ebed said, "Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should serve him? Is he not the son of Jerubbaal, and is Zebul not his lieutenant? Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem; but why should we serve him? 29 "Would, therefore, that this people were under my authority! Then I would remove Abimelech." And he said to Abimelech, "Increase your army and come out." 30 When Zebul the ruler of the city heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger burned. 31 He sent messengers to Abimelech deceitfully, saying, "Behold, Gaal the son of Ebed and his relatives have come to Shechem; and behold, they are stirring up the city against you. 32 "Now therefore, arise by night, you and the people who are with you, and lie in wait in the field. 33 "In the morning, as soon as the sun is up, you shall rise early and rush upon the city; and behold, when he and the people who are with him come out against you, you shall do to them whatever you can." 34 So Abimelech and all the people who were with him arose by night and lay in wait against Shechem in four companies. 35 Now Gaal the son of Ebed went out and stood in the entrance of the city gate; and Abimelech and the people who were with him arose from the ambush. 36 When Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, "Look, people are coming down from the tops of the mountains." But Zebul said to him, "You are seeing the shadow of the mountains as if they were men." 37 Gaal spoke again and said, "Behold, people are coming down from the highest part of the land, and one company comes by the way of the diviners' oak." 38 Then Zebul said to him, "Where is your boasting now with which you said, 'Who is Abimelech that we should serve him?' Is this not the people whom you despised? Go out now and fight with them!" 39 So Gaal went out before the leaders of Shechem and fought with Abimelech. 40 Abimelech chased him, and he fled before him; and many fell wounded up to the entrance of the gate. 41 Then Abimelech remained at Arumah, but Zebul drove out Gaal and his relatives so that they could not remain in Shechem. 42 Now it came about the next day, that the

people went out to the field, and it was told to Abimelech. 43 So he took his people and divided them into three companies, and lay in wait in the field; when he looked and saw the people coming out from the city, he arose against them and slew them. 44 Then Abimelech and the company who was with him dashed forward and stood in the entrance of the city gate; the other two companies then dashed against all who were in the field and slew them. 45 Abimelech fought against the city all that day, and he captured the city and killed the people who were in it; then he razed the city and sowed it with salt. 46 When all the leaders of the tower of Shechem heard of it, they entered the inner chamber of the temple of El-berith. 47 It was told Abimelech that all the leaders of the tower of Shechem were gathered together. 48 So Abimelech went up to Mount Zalmon, he and all the people who were with him; and Abimelech took an axe in his hand and cut down a branch from the trees, and lifted it and laid it on his shoulder. Then he said to the people who were with him, "What you have seen me do, hurry and do likewise." 49 All the people also cut down each one his branch and followed Abimelech, and put them on the inner chamber and set the inner chamber on fire over those inside, so that all the men of the tower of Shechem also died, about a thousand men and women. 50 Then Abimelech went to Thebez, and he camped against Thebez and captured it. 51 But there was a strong tower in the center of the city, and all the men and women with all the leaders of the city fled there and shut themselves in; and they went up on the roof of the tower. 52 So Abimelech came to the tower and fought against it, and approached the entrance of the tower to burn it with fire. 53 But a certain woman threw an upper millstone on Abimelech's head, crushing his skull. 54 Then he called quickly to the young man, his armor bearer, and said to him, "Draw your sword and kill me, so that it will not be said of me, 'A woman slew him.'" So the young man pierced him through, and he died. 55 When the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, each departed to his home. 56 Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father in killing his seventy brothers. 57 Also God returned all the wickedness of the men of Shechem on their heads, and the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal came upon them.

(Judges 9:1-57, NASB95)