

Title: 'As We See Fit': A study of the book of Judges- Part 10- "God repays"

Key text: Judges 9

Suppl. texts:

Introduction: Last time, we noted how Gideon handled complaints against his leadership. These incorrect assumptions charged Gideon with wrongdoing. Yet, Gideon responded softly & smartly, while swallowing his pride. Second, we saw that not all Israelites supported Gideon & refused to provide for his & his men's basic needs. They were worried that Gideon's luck had run out & they responded to his request for aid in a treasonous way. Finally, the eighth chapter of Judges showed us the arc of Gideon's life. He received the incredible offer to become Israel's first king & to set up a dynasty. While he rightly refuses, he asks for a reward from the plunder which he turned into a golden ephod. So, after leading Israel to freedom, he led the people into idolatry. Tonight, we move into chapter 9. Gideon is gone, but his family is going astray.

Outline: *read Judges 9:1-15.*

1. A despicable act

- Last time, we said the name Abimelech means my father is king. Now, it's the son, Abimelech, who wants to be the first king of Israel.
- **Vs. 1;** *"Abimelech, son of Jerub-Baal, went to his mother's brothers in Shechem and said to them and to all his mother's clan."*
- Shechem is a place of importance in the bible. Located between Mt. Ebal & Mt. Gerizim, the name means: 'shoulder'.
- The LORD appeared to Abram there & gave him the promise of the Promised Land.
- It was one of Israel's ancient cities of refuge, where someone accused of accidental manslaughter could be safe from the vengeance of family members.
- Abimelech went to his clan & appealed to become their king.
- **Vs. 2;** *"Ask all the citizens of Shechem, 'Which is better for you: to have all seventy of Jerub-Baal's sons rule over you, or just one man?' Remember, I am your flesh and blood."* He sees himself as Gideon's heir apparent & he makes his intentions plain.
- Surprisingly, the people of Shechem agree & make Abimelech their king.
- **Vs. 3;** *"When the brothers repeated all this to the citizens of Shechem, they were inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, "He is our brother."*
- Since he's Gideon's son, & he has the desire, they make a nepotistic decision.
- **Vs. 4;** *"They gave him seventy shekels of silver from the temple of Baal-Berith, and Abimelech used it to hire reckless adventurers, who became his followers."*
- Enriched by offerings made to Baal, Abimelech moves to secure his kingship.
- He surrounds himself with a mini-army that does his bidding.

- *"Reckless-Adventurers"*: Men of low character, a band of hired thugs, & they will assist Abimelech to do unspeakable things.
- **Vs. 5**; *"He went to his father's home in Ophrah and on one stone murdered his seventy brothers, the sons of Jerub-Baal. But Jotham, the youngest son of Jerub-Baal, escaped by hiding."* This was a cold-blooded slaughter of his kin.
- In the murderous chaos, Jotham, the youngest son of Gideon, escapes fratricide.
- These are the ripple effects, the shockwaves of the sins of Gideon now unintentionally visited on his family & specifically his sons.
- Yet, this is also God's providential hand at work. Abimelech's inability to secure all seventy brothers is actually part of God's purposes.

2. A thorny king

- Seemingly unfazed by the horrific actions of Abimelech, the people of Shechem crowned him as their king. Not king over Israel, but a regional king, nonetheless.
- **Vs. 6**; *"Then all the citizens of Shechem and Beth Millo gathered beside the great tree at the pillar in Shechem to crown Abimelech king."*
- The people are either too scared or completely unconcerned about the moral decadence of Abimelech's actions. *"Do not murder"* has clearly been broken.
- Jotham steps forward to address the seriousness of the sins of his older brother & the people who are complicit in his actions. He does this through a parable.
- **Vs. 8-15**; *"One day, the trees went out to anoint a king for themselves. They said to the olive tree, 'Be our king.' "But the olive tree answered, 'Should I give up my oil, by which both gods and men are honored, to hold sway over the trees?' "Next, the trees said to the fig tree, 'Come and be our king.' "But the fig tree replied, 'Should I give up my fruit, so good and sweet, to hold sway over the trees?' "Then the trees said to the vine, 'Come and be our king.' "But the vine answered, 'Should I give up my wine, which cheers both gods and men, to hold sway over the trees?' "Finally, all the trees said to the thornbush, 'Come and be our king.' "The thornbush said to the trees, 'If you really want to anoint me king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, then let fire come out of the thornbush and consume the cedars of Lebanon!"*
- The basic parts of the parable are as follows:
- The trees of the forest are seeking a king. They go to the most productive of trees.
- However, both the olive & fig trees turned the opportunity down; it was a demotion.
- Then the trees go to a vine, which is not a tree, yet still very productive. It refuses on the same grounds. The position is beneath it.
- Finally, the trees go to a bush, & not even a good one, a thorny bramble, which is low to the ground, is prickly, & can barely even offer any shade compared to the trees.
- The thorny king wants assurances & issues a promised curse if it is betrayed (vs. 15).
- The thorny king promises to burn the world down if they aren't careful.

- Jotham issues his own curse in **vs. 16-20**; *"Now if you have acted honorably and in good faith when you made Abimelech king, and if you have been fair to Jerub-Baal and his family, and if you have treated him as he deserves and to think that my father fought for you, risked his life to rescue you from the hand of Midian (but today you have revolted against my father's family, murdered his seventy sons on a single stone, and made Abimelech, the son of his slave girl, king over the citizens of Shechem because he is your brother)- if then you have acted honorably and in good faith toward Jerub-Baal and his family today, may Abimelech be your joy, and may you be his, too! But if you have not, let fire come out from Abimelech and consume you, citizens of Shechem and Beth Millo, and let fire come out from you, citizens of Shechem and Beth Millo, and consume Abimelech!"* May you **destroy** each other.
- Afterwards, he **flees** for his life, since Abimelech is firmly in power. He fades from the biblical narrative & isn't mentioned again. His **parable** becomes a **prophecy** fulfilled.
- Jotham is the younger brother; he's just one voice, but he speaks from wisdom & discernment. Meanwhile, the crowd kept silent & followed a murderer.

3. A **heavy** price

- Abimelech has crowned himself king of Shechem, though he wants to rule over all of Israel. He also **anoints** himself as **judge** over Israel. Not God, as with the others.
- God had spoken through Jotham, & now God acts with holy vengeance.
- **Vs. 22-24**; *"After Abimelech had governed Israel three years, God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the citizens of Shechem, who acted treacherously against Abimelech. God did this in order that the crime against Jerub-Baal's seventy sons, the shedding of their blood, might be avenged on their brother Abimelech and on the citizens of Shechem, who had helped him murder his brothers."*
- God doesn't overlook sin. He **repays** & **disciplines** in His timing. We often think that because the sin was long ago, we have gotten away with it. God repays.
- Now, we begin to see the moral turpitude of the men of Shechem as well, which seems to follow their leader. They begin to **resent** Abimelech's rule.
- **Vs. 25**; *"In opposition to him, these citizens of Shechem set men on the hilltops to ambush and rob everyone who passed by, and this was reported to Abimelech."*
- It seems Abimelech does **nothing** about the **theft**. *"Thou shalt not steal."*
- The people of Shechem seek to **replace** their ruler **flippantly**.
- **Vs. 26**; *"Now Gaal, son of Ebed, moved with his brothers into Shechem, and its citizens put their confidence in him."* Gaal questions Abimelech's right to rule.
- This betrayal gets back to Abimelech through Zebul, the governor of Shechem, who encourages Abimelech to attack the city to ensure his rule.
- Now, Abimelech responds with force, the full force of his army.
- Note, we've gone from **rescuing** Israel from its **foes** to attacking its own people.

- Zebul suggests a surprise attack on his own city.
- Abimelech & his men defeat Gaal & chase him & his men from the city.
- However, it's time for the prophetic parable to be fulfilled.
- Not satisfied with victory over Gaal & his forces, Abimelech turns his murderous wrath on the people of Shechem who supported Gaal in the first place.
- **Vs. 42-43**; *"The next day, the people of Shechem went out to the fields, and this was reported to Abimelech. So he took his men, divided them into three companies, and set an ambush in the fields. When he saw the people coming out of the city, he rose to attack them."* To strip & bury the dead & left exposed & Abimelech attacks again.
- **Vs. 44-45**; *"Abimelech and the companies with him rushed forward to a position at the entrance to the city gate. Then two companies rushed upon those in the fields and struck them down. All that day, Abimelech pressed his attack against the city until he had captured it and killed its people. Then he destroyed the city and scattered salt over it."*
- Abimelech destroys the city & people who gave him his rule, though many fled.
- In those days, a city would depend on its walls for safety & security. Yet, inside many cities, they would have a heavily fortified place, a stronghold, with a tower, as a last resort for survival if the walls failed.
- **Vs. 46**; *"On hearing this, the citizens in the tower of Shechem went into the stronghold of the temple of El-Berith."* Abimelech is a ruthless murderer.
- **Vs. 49**; *"So all the men cut branches and followed Abimelech. They piled them against the stronghold and set it on fire over the people inside. So all the people in the tower of Shechem, about a thousand men and women, also died."*
- Now, Abimelech is in a murderous rage, & he attacks another nearby city, Thebez.
- Perhaps some of the people of Shechem fled there, or to permanently end rebellion.
- **Vs. 50-53**; *"Next Abimelech went to Thebez and besieged it and captured it. Inside the city, however, was a strong tower, to which all the men and women, all the people of the city-fled. They locked themselves in and climbed up on the tower roof. Abimelech went to the tower and stormed it. But as he approached the entrance to the tower to set it on fire, a woman dropped an upper millstone on his head and cracked his skull."* In a rush to kill his enemies & mete out justice, he receives justice.
- **Vs. 54**; *"Hurriedly, he called to his armor-bearer, 'Draw your sword and kill me, so that they can't say, 'A woman killed him.' " So his servant ran him through, and he died."* Abimelech is the **first** recorded **suicide** in the bible.
- **Vs. 55-57**; *"When the Israelites saw that Abimelech was dead, they went home. Thus God repaid the wickedness that Abimelech had done to his father by murdering his seventy brothers. God also made the men of Shechem pay for all their wickedness. The curse of Jotham, son of Jerub-Baal, came on them."* The **devolvement** of Israel.

As We See Fit

A Study of the Book of Judges- Part 10

Last time, we noted how Gideon handled complaints against his leadership. These incorrect assumptions charged Gideon with wrongdoing. Yet, Gideon responded softly & smartly, while swallowing his pride. Second, we saw that not all Israelites supported Gideon & refused to provide for his & his men's basic needs. They were worried that Gideon's luck had run out & they responded to his request for aid in a treasonous way. Finally, the eighth chapter of Judges showed us the arc of Gideon's life. He received the incredible offer to become Israel's first king & to set up a dynasty. While he rightly refuses, he asks for a reward from the plunder which he turned into a golden ephod. So, after leading Israel to freedom, he led the people into idolatry. Tonight, we move into chapter 9. Gideon is gone, but his family is going astray.

1. A _____ act

- Shechem is a place of importance in the bible. Located between Mt. Ebal & Mt. Gerizim, the name means: '_____'.
- He sees himself as Gideon's _____ & he makes his intentions plain.
- Since he's Gideon's son, & he has the desire, they make a _____ decision.
- He surrounds himself with a _____ - _____ that does his bidding.
- Men of _____ character, a band of hired _____, & they will assist Abimelech to do _____ things.
- This was a _____ - _____ slaughter of his kin.
- In the murderous chaos, Jotham, the youngest son of Gideon, escapes _____.
- These are the _____, the _____ of the sins of Gideon now unintentionally visited on his family & specifically his sons.

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- Seemingly _____ by the horrific actions of Abimelech, the people of Shechem crowned him as their king. Not king over Israel, but a _____ king, nonetheless.
- The people are either too _____ or completely _____ about the moral _____ of Abimelech's actions.
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- The basic parts of the _____ are as follows:
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- May you _____ each other.
- Afterwards, he _____ for his life, since Abimelech is firmly in power. He fades from the biblical narrative & isn't mentioned again.
- His _____ becomes a _____ fulfilled.

3. A _____ price

- He also _____ himself as _____ over Israel.
- God doesn't overlook sin. He _____ & _____ in His timing.
- They begin to _____ Abimelech's rule.
- It seems Abimelech does _____ about the _____.
- The people of Shechem seek to _____ their ruler _____.
- Note, we've gone from _____ Israel from its _____ to attacking its own people.
- Abimelech is the _____ recorded _____ in the bible.
- The _____ of Israel.

Small Group Questions:

- 1.** It's hard to wrap our minds around such a despotic act as the killing of your own family/brothers as Abimelech did. In this act, we see the unintended consequences of Gideon's sin that outlived him. Discuss why we should rid ourselves of sin from our lives so that those sins & their judgments aren't repeated & passed along to the next generation.

- 2.** We commonly say things like: "With age comes wisdom!" But this is not always the case. God used the younger brother, Jotham, who barely escaped with his life, to speak a prophetic parable & shame the older/wiser men of Shechem. Why does age not always guarantee wisdom? How can we guard ourselves against a lack of spiritual maturity as we physically age?

- 3.** We noted infighting & disunity among God's people in the story today. The consequences were more than they ever imagined. How do we guard our lives, homes, & God's church against disunity?

- 4.** We know that pride goes before destruction. The pride of Abimelech came before a mighty fall, as he suffered major head trauma & eventual death. How do we guard our hearts against the blindness of pride? How much pride is 'okay' in the believer's life?