

ABIMELECH

Introduction:

1. The longest chapter in the book of Judges is dedicated to describing the wickedness, cruelty, and demise of Abimelech, son of Gideon.
2. Following Gideon's great victory over Midian, we learn of his errors in judgment and his fathering 70 sons.
3. Abimelech was born to one of Gideon's concubines – a slave who lived in Shechem.
4. Even though Gideon had rejected the notion of becoming king over Israel, his son's name means "father king." {*This is interpreted to mean, "My father a king," or, "Father of a king."*}
5. Unlike Gideon, Abimelech wanted to be king – and he would do anything to get what he wanted.

- I. Abimelech Seizes Power (9:1-6)
 - A. Remember, there was no king in Israel.
 1. When God led the Israelites safely across the Red Sea and defeated Pharaoh's army, Israel accepted Him as their King (Exodus 15:18).
 2. By the time of the judges, Israel had rejected God as their King.
 3. Thus, they often seek to replace God with a human king.
 - B. Though he desired the power of a king, Abimelech had not be called or chosen by God to be a judge, much less a king.
 - C. Still, he hatched a plot to take power for himself.
 1. Abimelech's covetousness, greed, and selfishness stands as a sober warning to all.
 2. "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18; cf. Isaiah 14:13; Daniel 4:28ff; etc.).
 - D. First, he would return to Shechem.
 1. The text seems to indicate that Shechem was inhabited by both Jews and Canaanites.
 2. It is possible that Gideon's concubine, the handmaiden, was a Gentile slave to a Jewish family.
 3. So, Abimelech returned to Shechem to set in opposition the worshippers of Baal and followers of Jehovah.
 - E. Second, he made a plea to his brethren.
 1. This illustrates one of the undesirable consequences of polygamy – Abimelech had family that was not related to his brothers.
 2. He uses this blood connection to motivate their acceptance of his rule.
 3. He also mentions the fact that the sons of Jerubbaal (Gideon, "Baal fighter") would follow their father and oppose Baal worship.
 - F. Third, he convinced his family to campaign for him throughout the community.
 - G. Fourth, he demonstrated his allegiance to Baal by receiving money from the idolatrous temple (cf. 8:33).
 - H. Finally, he executed all of his brethren – save one.
 1. The phrase "upon one stone" indicates that these murders occurred as executions, seemingly one after the other.
 2. Only Jotham, the youngest son escaped, for he hid himself from his stepbrother.
 - I. So, Abimelech was made king over Shechem

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- II. Jotham Speaks a Parable (9:7-21)
- A. Jotham was the only son of Gideon to survive the executions arranged by Abimelech in his grab for power.
 - B. So, when he learned that Abimelech had been made king, he stood upon Mount Gerizim and spoke a parable to the people of Shechem.
 - 1. Mount Gerizim was the mountain from which the record of God's blessings was to be read to the people of Israel (Deut. 11:29).
 - 2. Interestingly, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh were to stand on Mount Gerizim when this was done (Deut. 27:12).
 - 3. But, Jotham pronounced a curse upon Gideon's tribe of Manasseh from the mount of blessing.
 - 4. Though often called a parable, Jotham's speech is actually a fable.
 - C. In his fable, the trees are searching for one to reign over them as king.
 - 1. The noble trees who are asked to reign reject the offer.
 - 2. They understood that their functions in the kingdom were too important to abandon in order to seek power over others.
 - 3. But, the bramble readily accepted the offer to reign and rule.
 - a. The bramble was a thorn bush – "a lowly stunted tree with drooping jagged branches" with "sharp stiff thorns, affording no shade."
 - b. It offered no value to the kingdom, save for its use as fuel for a fire.
 - 4. Imagine a stately olive tree trusting in the shade of a weed like the bramble!
 - 5. Indeed, the fire would come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon.
 - D. The lesson of his fable was the Shechem had chosen the lowest and weakest among them as their ruler.
 - E. Abimelech "would be unable to protect the people, but he would cause judgment to come that would destroy those who trusted him."
 - F. They had dealt with treachery against Gideon and his family – in spite of all that he had done for them – and they would suffer the righteous judgment of God for their sin.
 - G. The overall lesson that God is teaching is the danger that comes when God is rejected as king and man seeks out his own master.
- III. Discord Slays People (9:22-57)
- A. After allowing Abimelech to reign for three years, God begins to bring about His retribution and judgment.
 - B. First, the men of Shechem began to turn against Abimelech and "laid in wait" to capture or kill him.
 - C. Then, a man named Gaal followed some of Abimelech's own tactics and swayed the loyalty of the people to himself.
 - D. While they were feasting, Gaal issued a boastful challenge against Abimelech.
 - E. Upon learning of this challenge to his rule, Abimelech led his forces against Shechem.
 - 1. Notice that Zebul was aiding Abimelech while feigning loyalty to Gaal.
 - 2. Also, notice that Abimelech attempted to use a battle strategy similar to what his father had done against Midian.
 - F. Abimelech defeated Gaal, who was driven from the city, and then turned his attention to the rebellious men of Shechem.

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- G. When the people came out of the town to work in the fields, Abimelech and his men blocked the entrance to the city and slaughtered the workers in the fields.
- H. Some tried to escape by fleeing to and hiding in the temple of Berith (their false god), but Abimelech burnt the building down with the people inside of it.
- I. Finally, the king sought to punish the town of Thebez (about ten miles from Shechem) for their part in the rebellion against him.
- J. In this city, all the inhabitants fled to the town tower for safety.
- K. As before, Abimelech tried to burn down the building – but he was defeated when a woman dropped a part of a millstone upon his head.
- L. Abimelech convinced his armor-bearer to kill him with a sword so it would not be said that he died at the hands of a woman.
- M. But, years later it was remembered that he died because of a woman and a millstone (cf. 2 Samuel 11:21).
- N. Following his death, the fighting stopped in Israel.
- O. The lesson is that God hates the shedding of innocent blood, and He will avenge it.

Conclusion:

1. Abimelech sought to replace God as the King of Israel.
2. If only Israel had learned their lesson, they might not have continued to request a king “like all the nations.”
3. We must be content to follow and serve God, for the ways of man lead to destruction and death.