

Abimelech's Three-Year Rule Over Israel

Judges 9:1-25

Judges 9:1-25 - *"Then Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem, to his mother's brothers, and spoke with them and with all the family of the house of his mother's father, saying, ² "Please speak in the hearing of all the men of Shechem: 'Which is better for you, that all seventy of the sons of Jerubbaal reign over you, or that one reign over you?' Remember that I am your own flesh and bone."*

³ And his mother's brothers spoke all these words concerning him in the hearing of all the men of Shechem; and their heart was inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, "He is our brother." ⁴ So they gave him seventy shekels of silver from the temple of Baal-Berith, with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless men; and they followed him. ⁵ Then he went to his father's house at Ophrah and killed his brothers, the seventy sons of Jerubbaal, on one stone. But Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, because he hid himself. ⁶ And all the men of Shechem gathered together, all of Beth Millo, and they went and made Abimelech king beside the terebinth tree at the pillar that was in Shechem.

⁷ Now when they told Jotham, he went and stood on top of Mount Gerizim, and lifted his voice and cried out. And he said to them: "Listen to me, you men of Shechem, that God may listen to you! "The trees once 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, ' Should I cease giving my oil, with which they honor God and men, and go to sway over trees?' ¹⁰ "Then the trees said to the fig tree, 'You come and reign over us!' But the fig tree said to them, ' Should I cease my sweetness and my good fruit, and go to sway over trees?' ¹² "Then the trees said to the vine, 'You come and reign over us!' But the vine said to them, ' Should I cease my new wine, which cheers both God and men, and go to sway over trees?"

¹⁴ "Then all the trees said to the bramble, 'You come and reign over us!' And the bramble said to the trees, 'If in truth you anoint me as king over you, then come and take shelter in my shade; but if not, let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon!' ¹⁶ "Now therefore, if you have acted in truth and sincerity in making Abimelech king, and if you have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have done to him as he deserves— ¹⁷ for my father fought for you, risked his life, and delivered you out of the hand of Midian; ¹⁸ but you have risen up against my father's house this day, and killed his seventy sons on one stone, and made Abimelech, the son of his female servant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your brother— ¹⁹ if then you have acted in truth and sincerity with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, then rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you. ²⁰ But if not, let fire come from Abimelech and devour the men of Shechem and Beth Millo; and let fire come from the men of Shechem and from Beth Millo and devour Abimelech!" ²¹ And Jotham ran away and fled; and he went to Beer and dwelt there, for fear of Abimelech his brother. ²² After Abimelech had reigned over Israel three years, ²³ God sent a spirit of ill will between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech, ²⁴ that the crime done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might be settled and their blood be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who aided him in the killing of his brothers. ²⁵ And the men of Shechem set men in ambush against him on the tops of the mountains, and they robbed all who passed by them along that way; and it was told Abimelech."

Background Notes

The last days of Gideon were not his best days as a judge in Israel. That's an understatement, for sure. Gideon wrongly set up a golden ephod in his hometown, and it became an idol and a snare for all of Israel, including his own household. Gideon's household would have included his son Abimelech, the son of Gideon's concubine in Shechem. Gideon had departed from God's standards for marriage and taken many wives and concubines. "*Gideon had seventy sons who were his own offspring, for he had many wives. And his concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, whose name he called Abimelech*" (Judges 8:30-31).

Gideon had said that he would not rule as king in Israel because God was to rule as Israel's King, but we see that Gideon fell from that noble way of thinking. He even named his son "Abimelech," which means "My father is king." No wonder that we have the sad results in Judges 9.

Abimelech was such an evil ruler that many Bible commentators don't even consider him to be one of Israel's judges, even though he did rule over Israel for three years. Abimelech went to his relatives in Shechem, his mother's hometown, and sweet-talked them into campaigning for him. As a result, Abimelech was made king at Shechem.

Does the name Shechem ring a bell in your memory? A number of biblical events had already taken place in Shechem. Abraham stopped at Shechem when he came into the land. Jacob dug a well at Shechem. Jacob's sons perpetrated a horrible massacre of the inhabitants of Shechem. Shechem was the place where Joseph's bones were finally buried after being carried through the wilderness for 40 years (Joshua 24). All these events took place at Shechem.

Now Abimelech was proclaimed king over Shechem. As soon as he became ruler, he had all of his half-brothers killed. But Jotham, Gideon's youngest son, managed to escape, and he pronounced a curse upon Abimelech. And it wasn't long before there was a falling out between Abimelech and the people of Shechem. Judges 9:25 indicates that the men of Shechem robbed all who were passing through the crossroads of Shechem, thus depriving Abimelech of the taxes that he normally would collect from travelers.

Doctrinal Points

1. Bad choices result in bad fall-out.

Galatians 6:7 says, "*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.*" That biblical truth is certainly illustrated here in Judges 9. Abimelech reaped what he sowed, and the people of Shechem reaped what they had sown by choosing Abimelech as their ruler.

Jotham warned them. After Abimelech slaughtered his 70 half-brothers, Jotham, the one brother who escaped the massacre, went to the top of Mount Gerizim and called out a parable to the people in the city of Shechem below. In the parable, the people of Shechem were likened to trees looking for a king. The olive tree, the fig tree, and the vine all

refused to leave their God-given roles to become king. So the trees turned to the bramble bush (or buckthorn, or thorn bush), which could give no shade or fruit. The trees' choice of the bramble was an obvious reference to Amibelech, who became king over the trees (the people of Shechem).

That bad choice would result in very bad fallout. The bramble bush was a scraggily thorny bush that was good only for fueling cooking fires. If the fields caught fire, the dry bramble bush could cause a devastating wildfire in a very short time. So the meaning of the parable was obvious, and it literally came true. Abimelech set fire to the tower of Shechem, killing 1000 men and women.

So bad choices result in bad fall-out. That was true in the days of the Judges, and it's true today. Let's be careful about the choices we make. Let's not be deceived by the flesh. Listen to what the apostle Paul said in Romans 7:18, "*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.*" And verse 19, "*For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.*"

Abimelech could be a spiritual picture of our sinful nature wanting to rule over us and dominate our choices. So watch out! Let's think through our decisions and make sure we are following God's will.

Bad choices result in bad fall-out.

2. God controls even the evil spirits.

God sent a "spirit of ill-will" - an evil spirit - between Abimelech and the men of Shechem (v23). God sent an evil spirit? Wait! What's the Bible teaching here? The Bible is teaching that **everything** is under God's control, including evil, demonic spirits. 1 Samuel 16:14 says, "*The Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the LORD troubled him.*" In 1 Kings 22:23 the prophet Micaiah said to wicked king, Ahab, "*The LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets of yours, and the LORD has declared disaster against you.*" And there are more Scriptures we could mention in this connection.

So the Bible teaches that God controls everything, including evil demonic spirits. Even Satan himself is under God's control, as we clearly see in the first chapters of the Book of Job.

However, this doesn't mean that God is to blame for evil - no way! God allows evil at the present time. And because God is always in complete control, He is able to use evil to accomplish His purposes. And that's what we see here. God allowed an evil spirit to cause a falling out between Abimelech and the people of Shechem. Now notice the purpose in verse 24: "*that the crime done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might be settled and their blood be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who aided him in the killing of his brothers.*"

Ephesians 1:11 says, "...according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will..." God works **all things** according to His will! There's nothing that is out of God's control.

God controls even the evil spirits.

Practical Application

Watch out for smooth-talking brambles!

Abimelech was a smooth-talking bramble bush. No fruit and no shade - only thorns! No proven record, only smooth talk! Unfortunately the people of Shechem swallowed his line completely, and they reaped the sad consequences.

So watch out for smooth-talking brambles! What a lesson for us. This not only applies to buying used cars, but it even applies to choosing church leaders. We're all familiar with slick, fast-talking car salesmen, right? Well, watch out for smooth-talking brambles when you're recognizing elders and selecting leaders in the church.

Many sad examples could be given here. A proven record is what we must look for when selecting church leaders - not smooth talk! For example, would you trust a draft dodger as a military leader? Does that sound like I'm making a political statement here? Well, it's a principle for choosing leaders, not a political statement. Why is it not safe to follow a draft dodger as a military leader? No proven record!

Watch out for smooth talking brambles - **anywhere**, including the church. Watch out for smooth talking brambles!