

## Lesson 4 – Judges 9

Text: Judges 9

Main Characters: God, Abimelech, Men of Shechem

Key Passages:

- Judges 9:23-24 – God worked to ensure that both wicked parties received justice.
- Judges 9:55 – Without Abimelech to lead them, the Israelites all went home.

Main Storyline:

After Gideon died, the people of Israel returned to their idolatry, completely forgetting about God and Gideon (Jerubbaal, “Baal-fighter”) and what they had done for them. Gideon had had 70 sons by his wives and one son, Abimelech, who lived in another city, Shechem. Abimelech assembled all of his mother’s family and asked them to talk to the leaders of Shechem on his behalf, requesting that they support him as ruler over Israel instead of the other 70 sons of Jerubbaal (Gideon). He made it a point to specifically remind them that he was related to them by blood. They agreed to do so, and the leaders also decided to support Abimelech as the ruler of Israel, specifically citing their familial relationship.

The men of Shechem gave Abimelech some money from the temple of Baal-Berith (an idolatrous house of worship), which he promptly used to hire some thugs. He and the thugs went to Ophrah, the city where Gideon’s family was living, and they executed all of Abimelech’s brothers on a rock, one by one. Only one brother, Jotham, escaped because he hid himself from the men. Following the executions, the men of Shechem gathered together and declared Abimelech king over Israel.

When Jotham heard that Abimelech had been made king, he climbed to the top of Mount Gerazim and declared a parable toward the men of Shechem. In the parable, the trees were trying to find a king to reign over them. They asked the olive tree, the fig tree, and the vine to rule over them. Each time, however, they were rejected, as each prospective king did not want to give up serving God and men in order to be king over some trees. Eventually, they asked the bramble, who immediately accepted their proposition to be king. Jotham was apparently comparing the men of Shechem to the trees looking for a king, declaring that they had chosen an undesirable king because all of the other more desirable kings (Gideon’s other sons perhaps) had chosen to serve God rather than be king. Finally, he cursed Abimelech and the men of Shechem for their ungodly decisions and actions.

Abimelech reigned over Israel for three years. During that time, the relationship between Abimelech and Shechem became much more strained. God apparently had a hand in this, sending a spirit of ill will (or evil spirit) between them in order to facilitate judgment upon them. One day, a man named Gaal and his family came to Shechem and apparently won the confidence of the men of Shechem. They all had a party where they ate and drank wine, eventually leading Gaal to disrespect Abimelech and recklessly challenge him in battle. The governor of the city, Zebul, informed Abimelech of Gaal’s challenge. Abimelech responded by gathering his army and attacking Shechem, destroying it.

After Shechem was destroyed, Abimelech continued his rampage in another city, Thebez (perhaps in alliance with Shechem). While fighting the people there, a woman threw a large stone out of a tower, mortally wounding Abimelech. Abimelech, unwilling to be killed by a woman, asked his armorbearer to kill him. The armorbearer did as Abimelech asked, but when the rest of the Israelites realized Abimelech had been killed, they stopped fighting and went home. Justice had been done.

Lessons/Applications:

- 1.) God wants leaders who follow Him first, not self-appointed, selfish leaders (Matthew 5:14-16).
- 2.) Even in a society full of wickedness and evil, God is still working and in control (Isaiah 46:8-13).