

# *Significant Lessons From The Seemingly Insignificant*

#39 October 31: Abimelech's Coveting In Shechem Led To...

As a result of Joshua's farewell speech at Shechem, the nation took a stand for God and were ready to experience all the blessings of the Promised Land. After Joshua's death, ...  
Judges 2:10b there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.

Result: The Israelites lost their spiritual commitment and motivation. The Israelites entered the darkest period of her history. The first step was incomplete obedience to God. They refused to eliminate the enemy completely and everyone was doing "what was right in his own eyes." This led to them being captives. Out of their desperation they cried out to God to rescue them. In faithfulness to His promise and out of His loving-kindness, God would raise up a judge to deliver His people. Peace would rule for a time. Then complacency, compromise of their convictions and disobedience would set in, and the cycle would repeat itself.

The book of Judges spans ~325 years. It describes a period in Israel's history when it had no strong central leader like Moses or Joshua; a period before it would be led by kings. As you read this book, you should stand in awe of God's mercy as He delivers His people over and over.

1. Just before the time of the Judges, the land was distributed to the different tribes of Israel. Each area was affected differently by surrounding enemies such as Canaanites, Ammonites, Philistines, etc.
2. All the judges, except Eli & Samuel, were spread throughout the land of Israel.

Interesting Note: The "Spirit of the Lord" came upon 4 of these judges:

Othniel: Judges 3:10; Gideon:6:34; Jephthah: 11:29; Samson 13:25; 14:6,19; 15:14.

Gideon, judge #5, ruled for 40 years. In the shadow of his successful attack upon the Midianites, the elders of Israel tempted Gideon with position, power, and prestige.

Judges 8:22-23 Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, "Rule over us, both you and your son, also your son's son, for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian." But Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you."

1. Become our king and establish a dynasty through his descendants.
2. This request is a confession of unbelief. He reminded them: God is your King.
3. To set up a rival throne would be to dethrone the Lord.

Gideon's actions were commendable, but what he did next was puzzling.

1. He began to live like a king.
2. He then created for himself a position as sort of High Priest: complete with the Ephod.
3. He built a worship center in Ophrah that was in direct competition with the official one in Shiloh.

Judges 8:27 And Gideon made an ephod thereof, and put it in his city, even in Ophrah: and all Israel went thither a whoring after it: which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house.

Result: The "savior" of Israel led the people right back to idolatry and rebellion. This path was paved with Gideon's own ambitions and the gold of the false ephod he anointed himself with. His family and the people of Israel would pay a terrible price.

Key Point: Gideon did not establish the Lord in His rightful place in Israel.

Confession of God's kingship without consistent practice of that kingship is hollow.

### Death of Gideon: Judges 8:32-33

Gideon the son of Joash died in a good old age and was buried in the sepulchre of Joash his father, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites. <sup>33</sup> And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again, and went a whoring after Baalim, and made Baal-berith their god.

Israel plunged full speed ahead into idolatry. They made "Baal-Berith their god."

- Berith = covenant = They made Baal-Berith their god = a covenant
- Appears they are not worshipping the God of Israel and some Canaanite god. They are worshipping a Canaanite god as their only god. God warned them NOT to do this.

Don't forget: Events of Joshua 24:1, 14-26 at Shechem at death of Joshua

- Joshua gathered all Israel to Shechem. The next generation vowed they will not follow other gods. They emphatically declare they will obey God and keep His covenant.
- Joshua repeatedly warned them they were not able to keep this vow.
- He drew up a covenant and wrote it on a scroll. A large stone was set under "the oak tree." Could it be the same oak tree we find in Judges 9:6?

Judges 2:10b there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.

### Israel Is Ripe For Judgment: Judges 8:34-35

And the children of Israel remembered not the LORD their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side: <sup>35</sup> Neither shewed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely, Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had shewed unto Israel.

- God's judgment is not from an invading army. It seems to be what we find in:

Rom. 1:24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts,

Ps. 81:12 So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels.

#### I. After The Death Of Gideon, Abimelech Is Determined To Seize The Kingdom.

- Only account in Judges that takes place in the CENTRAL part of Israel
- It portrays the spiritual condition in that area.
- Shechem, a city of Levites, should have been teaching the people about true worship but instead the city chose to worship foreign gods.

### A. Selfish Ambition: Judges 9:1-2

Judges 9:1-2 And Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal [Gideon] went to Shechem unto his mother's brethren, and communed with them, and with all the family of the house of his mother's father, saying...

Consider: Abimelech's sole ambition was self-promotion.

- Although there was no indication that he was raised up of God, we know there are times when the permissive will of God allows ungodly men to take prominent positions.
- If the Spirit of God deemed it necessary to leave on record such a long and detailed chapter of Abimelech's nefarious exploits, then there must be lessons for us 'upon whom the ends of the world are come.' [I Cor. 10:11]
- Gideon had many wives = 70 sons
- Abimelech, "my father is a king," is the son of Gideon by a slave woman who lived with her father's family in Shechem. He is not considered on a level with the other sons.
- Abimelech's desire was to rule as king so he moved from Orphah to Shechem to appeal to his relatives for their support.
- Jews & Canaanites lived in Shechem during the days of Abimelech.
- His mother was a Shechemite and his father was a Jew.

If he became king, he could represent the Jews and the Canaanites.

Judges 9:2 Speak, I pray you, in the ears of all the men of Shechem, Whether is better for you, either that all the sons of Jerubbaal [Gideon], which are threescore and ten persons, reign over you, or that one reign over you? remember also that I am your bone and your flesh.

Note: Abimelech brings this matter to their attention. NO ONE has approached him.

Consider: "No man's life is completely worthless, for anyone can serve as a horrible example." He broke several of God's laws, brought destruction to himself and trouble to the people.

### The Rise & Fall Of Abimelech

A. Abimelech breaks Law #10: You Shall Not Covet

Note: Breaking this one is the 1<sup>st</sup> step to breaking the other 9.

Col. 3:5-6 Mortify [put to death] therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience:

Wiersbe: "If it's God's wind that lifts you and you're soaring on His wings that He's given you, then fly as high as He takes you. But if you manufacture the wind and the wings, you're heading for a terrible fall."

Key Point: Selfish Ambition Destroys:

Isa. 14:13 For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: This turned an angel into the devil!

Dan. 4:28-37 "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built" turned a king into an animal.

- If we exalt ourselves, God has many ways to bring us down. [Matt. 23:12]

Judges 9:3 And his mother's brethren spoke of him in the ears of all the men of Shechem all these words: and their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech; for they said, He is our brother.

- He was well connected in Shechem and they would receive preferential treatment from Abimelech. Gideon's other sons, even though more legitimate, loyalties would lie with the people of Ophrah, where they lived.

#### B. Idolatry: Judges 9:4

And they gave him threescore and ten pieces of silver out of the house of Baal-berith, wherewith Abimelech hired vain and light persons, which followed him.

Key: Abimelech breaks Laws # 1 & 2: "You shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself any carved image."

1. He was his own god and had no interest in God's will for the nation.
2. Leaders of Shechem were persuaded to make Abimelech their king, but they realized the 70 brothers would have to be eliminated.
  - They gave Abimelech 70 pieces of silver from the treasury of the temple of their god, Baal-Berith.
  - Shows he had renounced the God of Israel and was on the side of Baal.
3. Besides the god of ambition and Baal, Abimelech's other "god" was might.
  - Used tainted money from the heathen temple to hire a group of vile people who helped him gain and keep control over the people.
  - These vile terrorists assisted him in his evil plot to murder his 70 half-brothers in order to remove every rival from the throne.

#### C. Murder: Judges 9:5

Key: Abimelech breaks Law #6: You shall not murder. He violated this law several times.

And he went unto his father's house at Ophrah, and slew his brethren the sons of Jerubbaal, being threescore and ten persons, upon one stone: notwithstanding yet Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left; for he hid himself.

"The root of pride if left unchecked will grow into a murderous tree."

Question: Why didn't somebody stop these murderers and defend Gideon's family?

Judges 8:33-35 The people of Israel forgot both the goodness of the Lord and the kindness of Gideon.

#### D. Dishonesty: Judges 9:6

Key: Abimelech broke Laws #3 & 9: You shall not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain. Thou shalt not bear false witness.

And all the men of Shechem gathered together, and all the house of Millo, and went, and Made Abimelech King, by the plain of the pillar that was in Shechem.

1. Abimelech's coronation was a farce, an empty ritual. It was never accepted by the LORD.
2. The "king" not only blasphemed God by the promises he made, but he defiled a place sacred in Jewish history.

- Took place at the "great tree at the pillar in Shechem." This is probably the "oak of Moreh," where God appeared to Abram and promised to give him and his descendants the land.
- Jacob bought a plot of land here which is the burial site of Joseph.
- This plot of land at Shechem is the first within Canaan owned by house of Abraham.
- Jacob buried idols here as he called his family back to God. [Gen. 35:1-5]
- This is the area where the nation heard the blessings and curses read from the law and promised to obey the Lord.
- Joshua gave his farewell speech and led the people in reaffirming their obedience to God. [Joshua 24:25-16]
- Their sacred history was degraded and dishonored by this godless man.
- He who lusted after power now wielded power murderously. He who conspired against his own now sat enthroned over them. How despicable! The Bramble had become their king.

### Jotham's Parable: Judges 9:7-21

- When Jotham learned this, he stood on Mt. Gerizim and called the people of Shechem to account by telling them a parable. He then interpreted its meaning and application.
  - Only brother to escape the massacre
  - 1<sup>st</sup> parable recorded in the Bible
- 1. Jotham pictured the trees looking for a king to come reign over them.
- Jotham is addressing Canaanites, fallen Israelites and people of mixed heritage and spiritual loyalties.
- "Jotham is indicting the people's God-offending demands for a king.
- They should have no king over them but God, yet still they stamp their foot."
- a. They approach the olive tree with its valuable oil. 'Should I cease giving my oil, with which they honor God and men, and go to sway over trees?'
  - Olive tree produces oil for the glory of God who created it for this purpose. It is a high calling.
  - Its sacred oil was used to light the lamps in the Tabernacle and to anoint the heads of God's chosen priests and Kings.
  - It was important to the Israelites in baking and providing light.
  - Olive tree chose self-giving service over self-serving power.
- b. They approach the fig tree with its sweet fruit.
 

Should I cease my sweetness and my good fruit, and be promoted the over trees? Figs were a staple fruit and highly prized.
- c. They approach the vine with its clusters that could be made into wine.
 

Should I leave my wine, and go to be promoted over the trees? It was used in the libation offering that was necessary to many sacrifices and celebrations.

Key Point: ALL of the above refused to accept the honor of king over the trees.

They would each give up their place of honor and usefulness to God.

- ❖ All three knew what they were created for and were not successfully tempted to covet a role that was not theirs in order to gain power and the glory of position.
- ❖ God had created them for their own special purpose.
- ❖ They were bearing the fruits of that purpose.
- ❖ To abandon the Divine purpose was a misuse of their God-ordained gifts.

Final choice: The bramble, a thornbush that was a useless nuisance and good only as fuel for the fire. Thornbush = Abimelech

- ❖ The bramble is hard, full of thorns and stickers. It produces no fruit and no joy.
- ❖ When fires broke out in the bramble bushes, the fire would spread and threaten the safety of the trees.
- ❖ The Bramble agrees to be their King, but they must come down and "take shelter under its shade."
  - This is preposterous: The trees to rely on a thornbush and trust in its shadow!
  - Brambles cling so closely to the ground, they produce no usable shade except for unclean insects.
  - His acceptance is followed by a threat of coercive dominance.
  - If they confer kingship on it, but won't shelter in its shade, the Bramble will burn those trees down.
  - The reference to the bramble burning down the cedars of Lebanon: these cedars were the grandest of all the trees. The bramble is saying that its fiery wrath at those who will not submit to "its shelter in its shade" is so hot that even the greatest of the trees will be destroyed.

Jotham's Point: Come take refuge in a thorny bramble bush that is only good to be burned up! Abimelech, like a bramble, could offer no real security to the people of Shechem. He will cause judgment to come that would destroy those who trusted him.

Truth: Dominant coercive leadership brings decay and death.

When Shechem chose Abimelech, they didn't get useful olive oil, tasty figs or wine.

- They only got thorns - fuel for the fire.

In desperation the trees turn to the bramble, a worthless, barren shrub, producing only symbols of the curse, thorns to pierce and briars to snare those who come into contact with it.

Truth: If we reject the true King, we will be ruled by a usurper.

If my throne is not filled by God the King, it will be filled by an Abimelech, a bramble king, who will only bring destruction in my life.

Prayer: Jesus Be The Lord Of All The Kingdoms Of My Heart