

## **Dark Times. Broken People. Faithful King**

Week 6

Judges 9-10:5

For the past two weeks, we have looked at the life of Gideon, a tentative leader who overcomes his fear with faith. In a battle fought primarily with trumpets, pitchers, and torches, the Lord routed the vast Midianite army and gave them into the hands of Gideon and his army of 300 men. Sadly, we watched Gideon's life self-destruct as he (seemingly) abandoned his walk with the Lord and began living contrary to God's Law. Gideon took many wives and fathered 70 sons. He even took a Canaanite concubine who lived in the (largely) Canaanite city of Shechem. He fathered a son with her and named him Abimelech. He is the subject of our study today.

We can only imagine the force for godliness Gideon could have been to turn the hearts of the Israelites back to the Lord after his unprecedented win over the Midianites. The cautionary tale of Gideon is that he started well but did not finish strong. His heart was drawn away from the Lord by pride, greed, and self-centeredness, leaving the once valiant warrior for the Lord almost unrecognizable in his latter years. God graciously gave peace to Israel "and the land was undisturbed for forty years in the days of Gideon" (Judges 8:28). Sadly, "as soon as Gideon was dead . . . the sons of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals" (Judges 8:35). Sin cycle five was underway.

### **I. Tragedy - Judges 9:1-6**

Abimelech was Gideon's son by his concubine. His name means "my father is a king." Although Gideon refused Israel's request to be enthroned as their king (see Judges 8:22-23), he certainly lived like one, amassing a great fortune and building a harem full of wives. When Gideon died, Abimelech decided that he would be king. We can assume his (illegitimate) son always resented his father's decision to refuse to set up a monarchy in Israel and that he suffered ridicule (real or perceived) from the 70 (legitimate) sons of Gideon.

Gary Inris notes,

"The son of a concubine was in a very divided situation. Legally, he had no rights from his father, and he belonged to his mother's family. So, Abimelech had his father's genes but not his father's name. He could hardly respect his father for his life-style or his morality, or love him because of his fatherly care" (*Hearts of Iron, Feet of Clay*, p. 161-162).

We cannot excuse his actions or remove Abimelech's guilt, but this gives us some insight into the character of this man. Abimelech made his first political move to secure his reign by going to the leaders of Shechem. Having garnered their support and financial backing (70 pieces of silver from the Baal temple treasury), Abimelech proceeded to hire "worthless and reckless fellows" (Judges 9:4). In short order, Abimelech went to his father's house and systematically killed all his half-brothers, except Jotham who escaped certain death by

hiding. "All the men of Shechem and all Beth-millo assembled together, and they went and made Abimelech king" (Judges 9:6).

Inris observes,

"We need to remind ourselves at this point of the basic lesson of Judges 9. If God is not King, a usurper will arise in His place. If God had been kept in His place as King, Abimelech would never have been successful. But when there is a spiritual vacuum, Satan will rush in to fill it" (*Hearts of Iron, Feet of Clay*, p. 161-162, Chicago, IL: Moody Press).

## **II. Truth - Judges 9:7-21**

Jotham, at great personal risk, went to the top of Mount Gerizim and addressed the men of Shechem. He used a parable to identify Abimelech as a "bramble king." Brambles were worthless underbrush which were regarded as a nuisance and represented a fire hazard. Jotham reminded the men that his father had delivered them from the Midianites. He assigned blame to them for the methodical assassination of his brothers, making them complicit in the savage actions of Abimelech. The "bramble king" Abimelech would be unable to protect them. Furthermore, he would cause judgment to come and destroy them all.

## **III. Treachery - Judges 9:22-57**

After three years of relative success, Abimelech discovered that acquiring the throne would be easier (he obviously had no qualms about killing his half-brothers) than retaining it. "Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech, so that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood might be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers" (Judges 9:24). The Lord was about to punish both Abimelech and the men of Shechem for the slaughter of Gideon's sons.

The citizens of Shechem, as well as an outsider named Gaal, began to turn on Abimelech. Gaal publicly challenged Abimelech. His insurrection was quickly reported to the king. Plans of an ambush against Gaal and his men were quickly laid. Abimelech and his army thoroughly thrashed Gaal and the opposition and chased them into retreat.

The common people resumed their regular workday, assuming the revolt had been thoroughly squelched. But Abimelech was in the mood for revenge. He and his bloodthirsty army attacked the unsuspecting citizens "who were in the field and slew them" (Judges 9:44). Then he pressed his attack against the city, butchering its citizens. There was one last stronghold remaining in Shechem. The pagan temple, evidently set apart from the city proper, had a fortress attached to it. The survivors of his blood-lust and madness fled to it. Abimelech led his men there and instructed them to cut branches and light the tower on fire, killing "about a thousand men and women" (Judges 9:49). Indeed, the fire did "come out from Abimelech and consume the men of Shechem and Beth-millo" (Judges 9:20) just as Jotham had said.

Gary Phillips writes,

"Shechem's destruction could not be more complete. The "thornbush" in whose brambles the trees had taken "shelter" had ignited and consumed them, like a wolf eating the foolish sheep that had elected him shepherd. The first part of Jotham's fable found fruition (vv. 15, 20a)" (*Holman Old Testament Commentary-Judges, Ruth*, p. 147-148).

We would assume after so much murderous mayhem Abimelech would have been sated, if not sickened by his vile blood-letting, but that was not the case. Thebez, a nearby city possibly sympathetic to Shechem's rebellion, became his next target. The people had fled to a strong tower in the center of the city. He "approached the entrance of the tower to burn it with fire. But a certain woman threw an upper millstone on Abimelech's head, crushing his skull" (Judges 9:52-53). His injury was serious but not immediately deadly, to which he commanded his armor bearer to finish the job so that he would not die at the hand of a woman. "Thus, God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father in killing his seventy brothers. Also, God returned all the wickedness of the men of Shechem on their heads, and the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal came upon them" (Judges 9:57).

The tragic story of Abimelech and the men of Shechem highlight the tragedy of those who reject the Lord. In the end, they reap what they sow. Galatians 6:7-8 says, "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life." Romans 1:18-20 says, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse."

#### **IV. Two More Judges - Judges 10:1-5**

After the death of Abimelech, Tola "arose to save Israel" and "judged Israel twenty-three years" (Judges 10:1). He was followed by Jair who "judged Israel twenty-two years" (Judges 10:3). Little is known about these judges. We can ascertain from the fact that Israel enjoyed forty-five years under their combined leadership that they were both faithful men of God. Unique to Tola and Jair is the fact that God raised both of these judges up apart from Israel's previously noted sin cycle. God graciously gave Israel what she needed, not what she deserved in the form of two godly leaders. Tragically this did not prompt national repentance or spark revival. After the death of Jair, Israel would again do evil in the sight of the Lord (see Judges 10:6).

Just as Israel returned to her sin cycle, we must be on guard lest we fall into the pattern of besetting sin. In Christ God has made us "more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:37, KJV). He remains our FAITHFUL KING!

