

Title: Judges 9 – Abimelech And His Downfall

Scripture Reading: Judges 8.28–35

Outline

Intro

- The Judges Cycle
 - The people do evil in the sight of God
 - God brings an oppressor to show them the error of their ways
 - The people are humbled and cry out to God
 - God raises a judge in response to the cry to deliver the people
 - The judge delivers the people
 - There is a time of rest
 - The people eventually fall away again
- Gideon's story in context
 - The people sin and the Midians are raised against them
 - The people eventually cry out for freedom of oppression (though not exactly recognizing their sins)
 - Gideon is raised to deliver the people from Midian
 - Gideon succeeds because of God
 - As Gideon is given success he falls away
 - Gideon's life ends with him not showing mercy towards others, taking people towards foreign gods, and acting like a king.
- The end of Gideon's life brings us to the people sinning and also the birth of his son Abimelech (lit. my father is king)

Judges 9 break down

- Judges 9.1–6 : Abimelech's rise to power
 - The chapter starts by reintroducing Abimelech as a child of Gideon and one of his concubines from Shechem.
 - Abimelech sees an opportunity to seize power through his relatives. He basically asks to become their kings.
 - The people of Shechem are quick to listen to Abimelech and make him king because he's their relative. He seems to be a better option than the whole group of Gideon's sons that seemed to have been leading following Gideon's death.
 - In addition to agreeing to make him king, they also kill all of Abimelech's brothers, or try to, since Jotham survives.
- Note on Shechem.
 - Shechem is a prominent area in Israel's history. It is the first place in Canaan where Abram receives the promises from God (Genesis 12.6–7). Joseph was buried there (Joshua 24.32). The Blessings and Curses of the Covenant are also given to the people in this area between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim(cf. Joshua 8.33; Deuteronomy 11.29; 27.12)
- Judges 9.7–21 : Jotham tells an allegory and curses the people of Shechem
 - Jotham, the surviving son of Gideon, goes to Mt. Gerizim (the mountain associated with the blessings of God) and gives a story to the people
 - He tells a story of these trees looking for a new leader, but they keep asking these trees that are useful, but it never works out. Eventually the trees ask a bramble to be their leader. A bramble being a thorny worthless plant.
 - Jotham then says that this will be like the people of Shechem. They were wrong to reject the 70 sons and select Abimelech as their one leader, and if this decision was the wrong one Jotham crushes the people to be consumed in a fiery judgment.
- Judges 9.22–57 : Abimelech is judged

- Vs. 22–25 : The people of Shechem begin to undermine Abimelech’s rule
 - God allows Abimelech to rule in this area for three years but has now decided that it is time for him and the people of Shechem to fall.
 - An evil spirit falls upon them, and the people of Shechem start undermining Abimelech’s rule
- Vs. 26–33 : Gaal comes and conflict is brewing
 - A man named Gaal of Ebed enters Shechem. The people take a liking to Gaal and his family. Gaal sees this, and sees their dislike of Abimelech and takes the opportunity to try and gain control. He starts to encourage the people to prepare for battle against Abimelech and challenges him for control of Shechem.
 - Zebul is a ruler in the city and sympathetic to Abimelech and colludes with him to make sure that Gaal of Ebed’s plans don’t succeed.
- Vs. 34–41 : Gaal is defeated
 - Zebul successfully helps Abimelech, and Abimelech is able to come and Gaal is chased away from Shechem
- Vs. 42– 49 : Abimelech looks for more vengeance
 - It’s not enough to chase away Gaal, but Abimelech also decides to kill those in the city because they conspired against him.
 - His destruction is thorough and complete. He even goes as far as to burn down the tower with the leaders, echoing the curse Jotham spoke earlier.
 - It is kind of ironic what Abimelech does here. The only reason he has any sort of power is because the people of Shechem gave it to him, but now he is killing all of them. He’s destroying his only source of power.
- Vs. 50–57 : Abimelech attempts to destroy Thebez
 - I don’t know that we’re given a specific reason for Abimelech going to Thebez, but I think it’s clear that his intent here is the same. He’s looking to kill those that are trying to usurp his authority.
 - However, in Thebez, Abimelech does not find success. God does not want his reign of terror to continue. Before he can burn another tower, a woman gives him a fatal blow, which he has completed from his male armour bearer.
 - Abimelech’s death is intentionally meant to seem pathetic. And after he dies no one cares. They all go back to their homes. God found justice for the evil they did to the 70 sons of Gideon.

Application

- Be careful of selfish ambition
- Don’t be fickle like the people of Shechem
- Recognize God is always in control