

JUDGES || *The Rollercoaster of Sin*

Judges 9 || *The Shadowlands of Sin*

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Over the past several months, we have been working our way through the stories in the book of Judges. The sermon series is called “*The Rollercoaster of Sin*” because that’s what it feels like as you read through this book. The book begins with the Lord delivering His people from their enemies (1:4). But instead of living in obedience to God, the people begin to compromise (1:19, 27–36). As is always the case, compromise eventually leads to all out rebellion against God (2:11–13). Since God loves His people too much to leave them in their sin, He disciplines them by giving them over into the hands of their enemies (2:14–15). When they reach the point where they can no longer take the oppression, they cry out to the Lord, and He raises up a judge to deliver them (2:18). But then, when that deliverer was dead, the people would revert to their rebellious ways and behave even more corruptly than they had before (2:19). And on and on it goes.

And it came to pass, when the judge was dead,
that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods,
to serve them and bow down to them.

They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn way.

~ *Judges 2:19*

This is the rollercoaster ride throughout the book of Judges. So far, we have looked at the stories of Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar (3). Deborah (4–5). And Gideon (6–8). And as each of these deliverers dies, we find ourselves even deeper into the shadowlands of sin and rebellion than we were before. And by the time we get to the end of the book, this is the last sentence we are going to hear:

In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

~ *Judges 21:25*

Today, we are going to look at the story of a man who *tried* to be king in Israel. You may remember hearing about him at the very end of Gideon’s story in 8:29–35. His name is Abimelech, which means “*My Father is King*” – which wasn’t true. His father Gideon wasn’t king, but the fact that Gideon named his son “Abimelech” indicates that Gideon may have viewed himself as something of a king. While Gideon may have seen himself as a kingly figure, his son Abimelech actually seeks to become king – not because he cares at all for God’s people (he doesn’t). He wanted to become king because he was in love with the idea of power. Status. Fame.

CONTEXT

God’s Word has much to say
about **pride** (e.g., *Pro 15:25*).

In **chapters 7–8**, God rescued His people from the tyranny of the Midianites, and He did this through an *unlikely man* named Gideon and through his *unlikely army* of 300 men. In 8:28 we read that “Midian was subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted their heads no more. And the country was quiet for forty years in the days of Gideon” (8:28).

If this is how the story ended, then we could say that “*they all lived happily ever after.*” But that isn’t how the story ends. Gideon’s story continues with the same downward, rollercoaster spiral as every other story. As soon as Gideon dies, the people immediately begin to turn away from God (8:33–35).

So it was, as soon as Gideon was dead, that they children of Israel again played the harlot
with the Baals, and made Baal-berith their god.

Thus the children of Israel did not remember the Lord their God,
who had delivered them from the hands of all their enemies on every side;

nor did they show kindness to the house of Jerubbaal (Gideon)

in accordance with the good he had done for Israel.

~ *Judges 8:33–35*

How does Gideon’s story end? *It ends with his death and with the rebellion of his people.* One of the most significant problems with these deliverers is that all of them were human, and so all of them kept on dying. None of these deliverers were able to keep peace forever because none of them could act as their deliverer forever. **What does this mean?** It means that we should be looking for a Deliverer who lives forever. We should be looking for a Deliverer who not only conquered His enemies but who also conquered death itself.¹ And there is only One who fits this description, and His Name is Jesus. In **Revelation 4**, we read about a Deliverer sitting on the throne “*who lives forever and ever*” (4:9–10). And so, as we study the story of the judges, every time we read of a deliverer dying, it should remind us of our desperate need for Jesus.

Death isn’t the only negative thing we see at the end of Gideon’s story. At the end of **chapter 8**, we also read that Gideon spent the end of his life building his harem (*which means he had many wives and many concubines [which were basically female servants]*) (8:29–30). And one of these concubines was a lady from Shechem, and she gave birth to a son whose name was Abimelech (8:31). And that brings us to **Chapter 9** which is the miserable story of **Abimelech**: a *wicked* man with a *wicked* plan and *wicked* friends.

CHAPTER 9

When Gideon was dead, Abimelech went to his blood-relatives in Shechem (*which was a major city in Israel*), and he convinced them to make him their king. Because his mother was from Shechem, he convinced the people of Shechem that it would be better for him to be king than for any of the other 70 sons who were born to Gideon (9:1–3). The people agreed, and then they gave Abimelech a bunch of money from their temple (9:4). He used that money to hire a bunch of wicked mercenaries to help him eliminate any threat to his rule.

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Then he went to his father’s house at Ophrah and killed his brothers,
the seventy sons of Jerubbaal, on one stone...

~ *Judges 9:5*

One of the lessons we can learn from Abimelech’s life is that **it really matters what kind of people you surround yourself with**. Abimelech didn’t want people who would speak wisdom into his life.² He didn’t want people who would challenge him or who would call him to walk in the way of God. He wanted people who would help him get exactly what he wanted. He wanted people who would affirm his sinful desires – who would encourage him to be whatever he wanted to be and to do whatever he wanted to do.

- What kind of people do you surround yourself with? *It really does matter.*
 - What kinds of influences are you inviting into your life? *It really does matter.*
 - What *musicians/bands* have the privilege of getting their lyrics into your soul?
 - What *entertainment networks* have you welcomed into your headspace?
 - What *kind of people* do you spend time with on a regular basis?
- ***It matters...***

Ex. Almost every childhood friend...

Abimelech surrounded himself with “*worthless and reckless men*” (9:4), and then (together) they murdered the sons of Gideon – the man who had delivered them from the Midianites (9:5); but the youngest of Gideon’s sons escaped. His name was Jotham (5:5).³

After the massacre was over, all the men of Shechem gathered together and made Abimelech the first king in Israel. *Isn’t that interesting.* The text says that Shechem made Abimelech king, but he is never remembered as being a king in Israel. Why not? Perhaps the answer is because God never gave this title to him. God never called him or ordained him or anointed him as a king in Israel. **Abimelech wanted what God had not given to him**. He attempted to steal a position that did not belong to him, and so the history books of God’s people don’t acknowledge that Abimelech was anything other than a traitor and an imposter.⁴

¹ 1 Corinthians 15:55–58.

² Compare with the story of King **Rehoboam** in **1 Kings 12**.

³ This is not the Jotham who reigned as king in Judah (2 Kings 15:7; 1 Chr 5:17).

⁴ He also subverted the divine requirements for the kingly office (e.g., **Deut 17:14–20**).

When Jotham heard that his half brother had been crowned as a king in Israel, he climbed near the top of **Mount Gerizim** (which, in earlier days, had been a place where blessings were pronounced⁵), and he pronounced a curse over the people of Shechem who had murdered his brothers and then made this wicked man to be their king. He curses the people of Shechem by telling **an allegorical story** (*kind of like the parables that Jesus used*). Jotham's story was about a bunch of trees who wanted to anoint a king over them (9:8).

Of all the majestic trees that might be crowned as the king of trees, Jotham's little story ends with the trees choosing a **bramble** (*thornbush, tumbleweed*) to be their king (9:14). Bramble has absolutely no beneficial quality whatsoever – *except for the fact that it burns quickly*. It doesn't produce oil like the olive tree (9:8–9). It doesn't produce sweetness like the fig tree (9:10–11). It doesn't make the heart glad with its wine like the vine (9:12–13). It doesn't have anything of value to offer – *except that it burns fast*.

Jotham says, this is the kind of person that you chose to be your king, and the story is going to end with fire coming from **this bramble king** and devouring all of you (9:15, 20) – as judgment for the way you betrayed the family of Gideon by murdering his sons. I wonder if Jotham had any idea how prophetic his little story would be. But as soon as he finished his story, he ran and hid before Abimelech could kill him too (9:21).

ABIMELECH'S SHORT REIGN

Just like a tumbleweed burns quickly, so Abimelech's 'reign' was short-lived. After just three years 'in office' God orchestrated the beginning of the end.

After Abimelech had reigned over Israel three years,
God sent a spirit of ill will between Abimelech and the men of Shechem;
and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech,
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.

~ Judges 9:22–24

The rest of chapter nine describes the final days of Abimelech's reign (and of his life). The people of Shechem turn against him (9:25–29). So, he takes his army, ambushes their city, and kills a whole bunch of Shechemites (9:30–40). The very next day, he makes a surprise attack in their fields and kills a whole bunch more (9:41–44). And then, Abimelech and his army make their way into the city and utterly destroy the entire city.

So Abimelech fought against the city all that day;
he took the city and killed the people who were in it;
and he demolished the city and sowed it with salt.

~ Judges 9:45

But he wasn't done yet. There were still a number of people who were taking refuge in the tower of Shechem. And so Abimelech took his army, cut down some boughs from the trees (9:48) – *which may very likely have included some bramble bushes*, set them against the tower, and set it on fire...killing everybody inside "**so that all the people of the tower of Shechem died, about a thousand men and women**" (9:49).

But he still wasn't done. Immediately after destroying the city of Shechem with fire (*just as Jotham had prophesied*), Abimelech went to the city of Thebez to destroy everybody there too (9:50). And the story starts out very similar to the story of Shechem. Abimelech takes the city (9:50), and all the people run to the tower in the middle of the city for refuge (9:51). *Here we go again...* So, Abimelech took his army to the tower, and he planned on burning it to the ground just like he'd burned the tower in Shechem. But then something happened that Abimelech did not expect. 😊

⁵ Blessings from **Mt. Gerizim** (Deut 11:29; 27:12; Josh 8:33).

But a certain woman dropped an upper millstone on Abimelech's head and crushed his skull.

~ Judges 9:53

In that day, many of the women worked in mill where they would use a millstone to crush the grain. As the people ran to the tower for protection, apparently one of the women brought a millstone with her (*which she likely intended to use as a weapon*). At just the right moment, this unknown woman drops her millstone, and it just so happened to hit Abimelech on the head, and it “*crushed his skull*” (9:53).

But a certain woman dropped an upper millstone on Abimelech's head and crushed his skull.

Then he called quickly to the young man, his armorbearer, and said to him,

“Draw your sword and kill me, lest men say of me, ‘*A woman killed him.*’”

So his young man thrust him through, and he died.

~ Judges 9:53–54

When you read about an evil king's head being crushed at the hand of woman, **what should immediately come to your mind?** The promise of the coming Deliverer who would crush the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15). In Judges 4:21, we read about a woman who crushed the enemy leader's head by pounding a tent peg through his skull, and then here in 9:53, we read about another woman who crushed the evil king's head. We are meant to see this and remember the promise that God made to His people. A day is coming when the seed of a woman will crush the head of the enemy for good.

Abimelech's last command was that his armorbearer kill him so that people wouldn't say that he had been killed by a woman. Guess how history records his death? 😊

Who struck Abimelech...

Was it not a woman who cast a piece of a millstone on him from the wall, so that he died in Thebez...

~ 2 Samuel 11:21

History is interesting that way!

- He wanted to be known as the first king in Israel, and he was not remembered as being a king in Israel at all.
- He wanted history to forget that he was killed by a woman, and that's how the history books tell the story of his death.

Abimelech didn't realize that **God is the one who writes our story**, not us. This world belongs to God. This is *His* story. We are characters in *His* story. *He* is the Author. We don't have the right to choose what God does with our lives or how our story ends. It's not about us. It's not about our legacy. It's not about our success or our fortune or our fame. This story (your story) is about God. You were made to glorify Him (Isa 43:7).

Abimelech was living for his own glory, and so he attempted to write his own story, and in the end, it all came crashing down on his head. Literally.

And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they departed, every man to his place.

Thus **God repaid** the wickedness of Abimelech,

which he had done to his father by killing his seventy brothers.

And all the evil of the men of Shechem **God returned** on their own heads,

and on them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal.

~ Judges 9:55–57

As much as Abimelech wanted to be in control of his destiny, God was the one orchestrating every moment of his story.

- Why was there suddenly bad blood between Abimelech and Shechem?
 - **Because God** created a spirit of division between them (9:23).
- Why was Abimelech successful in destroying the city of Shechem?
 - **Because God** was returning their evil on their own heads (9:57).
- Why did the unknown woman make a perfect shot with her millstone, crushing Abimelech's head?
 - **Because God** was repaying the wickedness of Abimelech (9:56).

If you look at the war in Israel, and say, “*God, what are you doing?*”, that is a really good question, because it acknowledges that God is doing something. We may not know what He is doing or why He is doing it, but stories like this remind us that He is doing something – even when we can't see it. He is not removed from the horror in **Israel**. He is not distant from the heartache in **Ukraine**. He is not blind to the division in **Nigeria** or to the devastation in **Maui**. And He is not withdrawn from the wars in your own soul – or in your home – or at your work. Though you may have NO IDEA what God is doing, we know that what the enemy meant for evil, God meant for good (**Gen 50:20**). We know that He is a very present help in time of trouble (**Psa 46:1**). We know that He is working all things together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (**Rom 8:28**).

Why was there war between Abimelech and Shechem? Because God was doing something for the glory of His name and for the good of His people.

APPLICATION

1. Submit to the **SOVEREIGNTY** of God (*over the affairs of world & over the affairs of your life*).
2. Let God write your **STORY**. God knows what He is doing. “**Take My life and let it be...**”
3. **SURROUND** yourself with people who will draw you nearer to God.