

Finer Grounds

Judges and Ruth Lesson 6: The Invisible Yahweh (Judges 9)

Have you been keeping up with your marking? Remember that you are supposed to be noting the interactions between God and His people. If you are doing so, this chapter will stick out to you not because of all of the markings, but because of the lack of interaction. In fact, this chapter doesn't mention Yahweh at all; the few times God is mentioned the more general Elohim is used. One of the pictures painted in Judges is a view of what happens to those who do and don't seek God's will. In this chapter, we will see the inevitable result of blatantly defying that will. While it seems as if God is not present here, by the end of the chapter you will be able to see His invisible hand working.

Read Judges 9:1-6

According to Judges 8:31 who was Abimelech?

What awful crime did Abimelech commit (Don't forget Jerubbaal and Gideon are the same person)?

After the 40 years of peace brought on by his father Gideon, Abimelech single-handedly caused a violent civil uprising. He convinces his mother's household to support him and then kills all of his brothers except for one, Jotham (whose name

happens to mean "the Lord is perfect and honest").

Abimelech's name means "my father is king." Describe why this is ironic considering Judges 8:23.

An important detail to note is where Abimelech's "campaign contributions" came from. According to verse 4, they gave him money from the house of Baal-berith, their false god. People say you can usually tell a lot about a political candidate by his campaign donors; that being the case, it would seem that Abimelech is clearly aligned with this false god.

Read Judges 9:7-21

In a moment of bravery reflecting that of his father, Abimelech's lone surviving half-brother stands and presents a fable to the crowd.

In your own words describe the fable that Jotham tells.

Why do the olive tree, fig tree and vine decline to reign over the other trees?

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How does the bramble respond to the trees' request?

This fable has meaning for both Abimelech and his new subjects. First, Jotham wants to understand that in their desperation to make things happen their way, they actually made things more difficult for themselves. They were supposed to have a king; it should have been Yahweh (Judges 8: 23). By doing what they thought was best instead of seeking what God wanted of them, they will bring on nothing but trouble and desolation.

We all do this. We have a picture of exactly how something should be and we force it to happen. We can't allow our goal to be changed or affected. What we fail to realize is that sometimes in doing this we forget about God's goals. Sometimes we are so perfectionistic and objective driven that we don't consider if the path we are on is one God would choose for us. Sometimes it is best to prayerfully step back from a situation and revisit our choices and decisions with the backdrop of God's will.

List a time when you let your image of what should happen override God's plan.

What is one way that you can make sure you don't let your perfectionism and goals cause you to lose sight of what God wants in your life?

The other target for this fable is Abimelech. Jotham compares him to a bramble, a worthless, thorny plant that causes pain and trouble. The other trees (men) who would have the capacity to be great leaders declined because they recognized that God had another purpose for them. The bramble (Abimelech) seized the opportunity for power and immediately transformed into a tyrant (Judges 9:5, 15).

According to Judges 9:21, what does Jotham say to the men of Shechem and Beth-millo?

We will eventually see the fulfillment of this statement that the writer of Judges will later call "Jotham's curse." Remember that while God may not be visible in this section, no one will escape His judgment. That will be especially true of Abimelech.

Read Judges 9:22-41

The rest of the chapter summarizes Abimelech's reign. We notice right away that this isn't going to end well for him, his reign only lasts three years (Judges 9:22). The word translated "evil spirit" does not necessarily mean a demon. This could be explained as animosity, meaning that God caused there to be tension and ill will between Abimelech and the people of Shechem. The people who had willingly crowned Abimelech

king were now seeking to cause him harm (Judges 9:25).

What new character are we introduced to in Judges 9:26?

Describe the interaction between Gaal and Zebul.

Who is the victor in this situation according to Judges 9:41?

We are at the edge of our seats waiting for Abimelech's demise; however he is the one that puts an end to Gaal's uprising. This was getting personal and now Abimelech would take the offensive position.

Read Judges 9:42-49

Now the fickle people would discover the cost of putting their faith and trust in a man over Yahweh. Abimelech not only fights the troops from the city, he maliciously attacks the people within and sows their fields with salt. If any survived, it would not be for long because they would no longer be able to grow food.

How does the end of Jotham's fable (Judges 9:15) line up with the fate of the leaders of the town (Judges 9:46-49)?

They paid the price for following their own path with their very lives. Their poor decisions led to heartbreaking tragedy.

Read Judges 9:50-57

Abimelech continues his rampages and captures Thebez. In his arrogance he assumes that he can defeat these rulers in the exact same way as Shechem; he was wrong.

Describe the details surrounding Abimelech's death.

While this story seemed bleak, in these last few verses we see who was really in control the whole time. Even though none of our characters actively sought God's will, He saw that it was done. It doesn't matter how awful the situation seems, God's plan will come to pass. It may not be the way we envision and it may be in spite of our controlling actions; however, God will prevail.

Read Esther 4:14 and rewrite it in your own words.

Just like Esther, everyone involved in this scenario had a choice to make and most did not choose to seek God's will. They did not want to

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be part of His plan. Abimelech and those around him made a conscious decision to selfishly put their desires above God's approval. We must continually confront ourselves with the sentiment of Mordecai in Esther 4:14. How can I be used to fulfill God's plan in this situation?