

Judges & Ruth

God's *Faithfulness* Remains

women's | BIBLE STUDY

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LESSON *Seven*

Abimelech Rules Over Israel

Israel continued to follow foreign gods. After Gideon's death, his son, Abimelech, became power-hungry. He convinced the people to anoint him as king. Despite being challenged by several men, including Gideon's youngest son, Jotham, and a man named Gaal, Abimelech ruled over Israel for three years. Eventually, Abimelech was overthrown and killed by an unsuspecting woman.

STORM GOD

"[Israel] worshiped Baal-Berith (literally, "Baal of the covenant"), a local manifestation of the Canaanite storm god."⁴⁰

SHECHEM

Shechem was in the heart of Israel, about 30 miles north of Jerusalem. See Genesis 12:6 for its importance to the people of Israel. Also, to see where the city was located, turn to page 11.⁴¹

LEADERS

Notice that it is the "leaders of Shechem" who deem Abimelech king. It is significant that the nation of Israel is not mentioned in this decision.⁴²

Read Judges 8:33-10:5 before answering the following questions.

1. From Judges 8:33-35, what happened after Gideon (also called Jerubbaal) died? Do Israel's actions surprise you? Why or why not?

2. Considering the last two lessons on Gideon, in what ways was Abimelech like his father? How was he different?

Read Judges 8:33-9:6.

3. Who is Abimelech and what was his tactic for gaining control of the kingship?

4. Describe Abimelech's first actions as ruler over Israel (verses 4-6). What are some of the characteristics you see in this section that would make Abimelech a good king? A bad king?

Read Judges 9:7-21.

5. Jotham told a fable using trees in verses 8-15 to rebuke the Israelites for rashly making Abimelech king. Was Jotham justified in his rebuke? Why or why not?

6. Jotham suggested the people made an unwise, emotional decision when making Abimelech king. Considering this passage in Judges and the verses from Proverbs below, what do you learn about decision making?

Proverbs 3:5-6

Proverbs 16:25

Proverbs 18:1

Proverbs 19:2

On what do you typically rely when making decisions? Where do you have room to grow? (See Appendix: Wisdom.)

7. Jotham, the only surviving son of Gideon, courageously challenged the leaders of Shechem for their poor decisions. To whom might God be calling you to speak truth and why?

FABLE

A fable is a “short tale to teach a moral lesson.”⁴³

WISE DECISION MAKING

For more guidance on wise decision making, check out the sermon series called “Should I?” on watermark.org.

WISDOM

“Wisdom is the right use of knowledge. To know is not to be wise. Many men know a great deal and are all the greater fools for it. There is no fool so great a fool as a knowing fool. But to know how to use knowledge is to have wisdom.”⁴⁴

GROWING POWER

Notice in 9:22, there was a shift from Abimelech ruling over Shechem to ruling over “Israel.” While this might not mean he was ruling over the entire nation, it is likely that his power was growing.⁴⁵

SHIFT

Up until this point in the book, Israel's oppressors had all been from the outside. Now, there is a noticeable shift.

THEBEZ

Thebez was a nearby town where Abimelech set up his army.

MILLSTONE

A millstone is a stone used for grinding grain.

IRONY

Notice the irony in Abimelech's story. Abimelech killed Gideon's 70 sons on a stone (Judges 9:5), and his death came also by a stone (Judges 9:53).

Read Judges 9:22-10:5.

8. How did God respond in verses 22-25? What questions does this raise in your mind? (See also Job 1 and 1 Samuel 16:14-23.)

9. An Israelite man by the name of Gaal arrives on the scene (Judges 9:26). Who was he and how did he stir up trouble in Shechem? (For help, see the side bar.)

10. Verses 28-55 describe the battle that unfolded between Abimelech and the people of Israel. Note some of the battle highlights below. How did Abimelech die and what was God's role in it?

11. Beginning with Israel's worship of foreign gods, the reader can see there was great evil in the midst of this nation. Likely they did not even notice their slow decline. In what areas might you be slowly declining? Pray and consider where God might be calling you to be more fully devoted to Him.

“Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.”

– Augustine⁴⁶

12. Reread verses 56-57. Where do you see God’s faithfulness in this story?

How does this widen your understanding of God’s character?

EPILOGUE

Verses 56-57 serve as an epilogue to the Abimelech narrative. Ultimately, they underscore the fact that God Himself is King, One who shall never be moved from His throne.⁴⁷

TOLA AND JAIR

Tola and Jair are only briefly mentioned. However, the details included (such as the reference to thirty sons, indicating multiple wives) are possible evidence of their lack of devotion to God. Read Deuteronomy 17:17.

BIG IDEA

What is your biggest takeaway from this week’s lesson?

Notes