

A learning resource: The Bible Project: Judges overview -
Found on YouTube.

Recap:

Last week we began to look at the life of Abimelech, Gideon's son. Unlike Gideon, Abimelech was hugely ambitious and wanted to reign over Israel as king. Unfortunately, Abimelech became king as the result of severe moral compromise and disobedience to God. This included receiving bribe money from the temple of Baal for the hiring of mercenaries as well as the murder of his seventy brothers in order to ensure his position as king. In our own lives we considered what can cause our commitment to God to wane and recognized the danger of ambition that is void of obedience to God.

Overview:

Judges 9:22-57 continues the story of Abimelech in which we read of his downfall by the hand of the Shechemites who once assisted him in becoming king. All of this came from the Lord who was about to punish both Abimelech and Shechem for the slaughter of Gideon's sons. Abimelech ultimately meets his end when a woman of Thebez drops a millstone on his head, killing him.

Specifics:

There are four main sections to this portion of scripture:

Day One: The Boasting of Gaal: V25-33.

- After a three-year reign God begins to cause division between King Abimelech and the Shechemites in which they begin to rebel against the king. **V22**
- We read that while God may have appeared absent, he sent an evil spirit to stir up animosity between Abimelech and Shechem. God does not allow evil to go unpunished indefinitely. Justice delayed is not justice denied.
- Tim Keller comments that **"God may have been silent, but he was not absent."**
- This division manifested through the Shechemites robbing tradespeople who passed through the city costing Abimelech both money and reputation.
- Abimelech's reputation was damaged as word spread that he was incapable of controlling his people and protecting local business.
- As a result of this situation, we read of Gaal son of Ebed who seeks to seize power and does so by further questioning Abimelech's capability as king, thus setting the people against him. **V26-29**
- Gaal also won the hearts of the people. He lived in Shechem where he could listen to their needs and offer help. Abimelech, meanwhile, was a distant king living in Arumah which caused a disconnect between the people and himself.
- Zebul, a representative of the king, reports all that is happening back to Abimelech and so a battle between Abimelech and Gaal was about to take place. **V30-33**

Day Two: The Defeat of Gaal: V34-31

- Abimelech then launches his assault against Gaal and Shechem.
- His strategy of sending the troops by night is similar to that of his father Gideon. Yet Abimelech does not share the faith in the Lord that his father had - neither does he have the support of the Lord nor the resources Gideon and his men had. **V34**
- Ultimately Gaal and his clan are defeated and chased out of Shechem. **V41**

Day Three: The Punishment of Shechem: V42-49

- After defeating Gaal, Abimelech now turns his focus towards the people of Shechem. **V42**
- Abimelech ambushes and kills many of the people of Shechem, he also destroyed the city to ensure no one would rebel against him again. **V45**
- Sowing of salt on a conquered city was a symbolic action that condemned a city to desolation so no one would want to live there.

Closing Section: Losing the Kingdom: V50-57

- Warren Weirsbe tells us that “...the shedding of innocent blood is something that God takes very seriously and eventually avenges.”
- Abimelech paid for the murders he committed. This took place as he was trying to defend his throne.
- After defeating Shechem, Abimelech travels to the city of Thebez to destroy it as punishment for their co-operation with Shechem against Abimelech. **V50-52**
- Whilst trying to destroy the city’s tower, a woman drops a millstone on Abimelech’s head leading to his death. Abimelech, trying to avoid shame, commands his servant to put a sword through him to avoid being killed by a woman. The servant complies and Abimelech is killed. **V53-55**
- Despite his servant dealing the final blow, centuries later Abimelech is remembered for his shameful fate which we read of in (2 Sam. 11:21)
- Ultimately Abimelech loses both his life and the kingdom. The curse of Jotham his half-brother is fulfilled.

What do we learn from this passage?

- God’s judgement comes unseen: The people at the time would have been unable to see the spirit God sent to bring division between Abimelech and the Shechemites. In our day we might not be able to tell where, when and how God is judging people. But we can be assured it is happening. In the end God will make all things right. We must also be careful not to pass judgement ourselves, but to allow only God to be the judge.
- God’s judgement isn’t always immediate: Three years passed between Jotham’s warning of the judgement and the actual judgement. In the meantime, God may have seemed silent but he was still at work making things happen in his perfect timing. Jotham, meanwhile, had to learn patience and trust in God.

Points to discuss:

- 1) Just like Jotham had to wait three years for God to fulfil his word, how do we find periods of waiting? Do we have any thoughts on how we can be faithful to God in the waiting?
- 2) ‘God was Silent but not absent.’ Are there times in your life where God has appeared silent but looking back you can see that he was at work?
- 3) How does this passage challenge us to allow God to work things out in his way and timing as opposed to trying to force things to happen in our own strength?
- 4) What lessons from this passage can we apply to our Christian walk?