

BIBLE BRIEFING

“Fratricide’s Fable”

JUDGES 9

Introduction

It has been wisely said, *No man’s life is completely worthless – for anyone can serve as a horrible example!*

In Chapter Nine, we have such a man who fits that description. He is Abimelech, Gideon’s son.

One thing to notice: Abimelech was not a Judge! He did not deliver Israel from any enemy or oppressor. Yet his story occupies fifty-seven verses, a whole chapter in the Book of Judges.

It’s a lesson and a warning about leadership. God can and does raise-up leaders. But men also raise themselves to be leaders – with awful consequences among God’s people.

Judges 9:1 Then Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem, to his mother’s brothers, and spoke with them and with all the family of the house of his mother’s father, saying,

Shechem was the main city in the central part of the land. It was a strategic crossroads upon which caravans traveled with their goods. It had a mixed population of Israelites and Canaanites – although the Israelites seemed in control of the city.

Jerubbaal was a nickname for Gideon, in his more spiritual days. In his less spiritual days, he kept a concubine outside of Israel. She bore him a son who he named **Abimilech**. The name **Abimelech** means *My father, a king*; Gideon intended that his son would take a leadership role in Israel after Gideon himself was gone.

In Israel, Gideon refused to be called king. Outside of Israel, he wanted pagans to think of him as Israel’s king. What he *renounced* among God’s people was *pronounced* among the heathen. He was leading a dual life.

Live a consistent life before your family.

Judges 9:2 “Please speak in the hearing of all the men of Shechem: ‘Which is better for you, that all seventy of the sons of Jerubbaal reign over you, or that one reign over you?’ Remember that I *am* your own flesh and bone.”

It would have been better for God to reign over them! Gideon had raised a son with no heart for God; a selfish son.

Judges 9:3 And his mother’s brothers spoke all these words concerning him in the hearing of all the men of Shechem; and their heart was inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, “He is our brother.”

Judges 9:4 So they gave him seventy *shekels* of silver from the temple of Baal-Berith, with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless men; and they followed him.

Judges 9:5 Then he went to his father’s house at Ophrah and killed his brothers, the seventy sons of Jerubbaal, on one stone. But Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, because he hid himself.

Abimelech is off to a great start! He takes silver from a pagan temple, hires worthless men, and kills – probably by beheading – his own brothers.

It is somewhat ironic that the men of Schechem agree to help Abimelech because he was their brother on their mother’s side...

When they are helping him kill his brothers on his father’s side!

People do a lot of foolish things in the name of ‘family.’

Judges 9:6 And all the men of Shechem gathered together, all of Beth Millo, and they went and made Abimelech king beside the terebinth tree at the pillar that was in Shechem.

People want to be led. They respect strong leadership. That is why it is so important we understand God’s heart about leading and leadership.

Judges 9:7 Now when they told Jotham, he went and stood on top of Mount Gerizim, and lifted his voice and cried out. And he said to them:

“Listen to me, you men of Shechem,
That God may listen to you!

One son of Gideon, Jotham, escaped. He spoke what we’d call a *fable*. A fable is a type of parable, in which animals or inanimate

objects (like trees) can speak and behave like humans to convey the point of the story. His fable would become a prophecy.

Judges 9:8 “The trees once went forth to anoint a king over them.

And they said to the olive tree,
‘Reign over us!’

Judges 9:9 But the olive tree said to them,
‘Should I cease giving my oil,
With which they honor God and men,
And go to sway over trees?’

Judges 9:10 “Then the trees said to the fig tree,
‘You come *and* reign over us!’

Judges 9:11 But the fig tree said to them,
‘Should I cease my sweetness and my good fruit,
And go to sway over trees?’

Judges 9:12 “Then the trees said to the vine,
‘You come *and* reign over us!’

Judges 9:13 But the vine said to them,
‘Should I cease my new wine,
Which cheers *both* God and men,
And go to sway over trees?’

Judges 9:14 “Then all the trees said to the bramble,
‘You come *and* reign over us!’

The bramble is a thorn bush, a worthless weed. It produces no fruit, and is too low to the ground to produce any shade. It cannot be used for construction because it splits too easily. All it can do is burn.

Judges 9:15 And the bramble said to the trees,
‘If in truth you anoint me as king over you,
Then come *and* take shelter in my shade;
But if not, let fire come out of the bramble
And devour the cedars of Lebanon!’

The **olive**, the **fig**, and the **vine** were of great value. Thus, in this parable, the trees which deserved leadership the most desired it the least because they knew ruling over other trees meant they would cease bearing fruit. Only the **bramble** – the worthless tree – wanted to lead.

The fable gives us insight into leading and leadership. What do we learn about God’s heart toward leading and leadership?

First: Note the phrase, [sway over other trees](#). The trees that wanted a king were asking for a tree that would spend all its energies giving them shade, rather than bearing fruit.

I'm sure you've heard this parody before, describing the Perfect Pastor:

The perfect pastor preaches exactly 10 minutes. He condemns sin roundly but never hurts anyone's feelings. He works from 8 AM until midnight and is also the church janitor. The perfect pastor makes \$40 a week, wears good clothes, drives a good car, buys good books, and donates \$30 a week to the church. He is 29 years old and has 40 years experience. He never forgets a name and spends most of his time praying to God. Above all, he is handsome. He also knows when somebody is sick and needs visitation even without anyone telling him about it. He loves to spend time with his family and the perfect pastor has no problem with you dropping in unexpectedly. And he also spends most of his time in preparation to speak God's Word. He remembers everyone's birthdate and of course, their anniversary dates as well. Before and after services, he never fails to speak to each person present and will also take the time to listen to you for 15 minutes and pray for each person no less than 10 minutes after listening to them. The perfect pastor always smiles and tells you what you want to hear. He also goes out to eat after church with each individual family, spreading his time evenly between all, and he also pays for all their meals. The perfect pastor eats nutritiously, gets his rest, exercises daily, and is always there to listen to you night or day. The perfect pastor has a burning desire to work with teenagers, and he spends most of his time with the senior citizens. He smiles all the time with a straight face because he has a sense of humor that keeps him seriously dedicated to his church. He makes 15 home visits a day and is always in his office to be handy when needed. The perfect pastor always has time for church council and all of its committees. He never misses the meeting of any church organization and is always busy evangelizing the unchurched. He meets with the all the other pastors in town because they all have so much time on their hands. He also stays focused on the vision of the house. And he attends all the town meetings for PR's sake. He takes family vacations and attends all the latest church and ministers conferences and listens to your favorite TV preachers and is completely up to date on each prominent TV preacher's messages. He spends all day each Saturday preparing the Sunday sermon, and he focuses on his family too. He also doesn't overburden the church finances, so he holds down a full time secular job as well. He never spends your tithes on his children's Baskin Robins Ice Cream cones. And the perfect pastor is always in the next church over! If your pastor does not measure up, simply send this notice to six other churches that are tired of their pastor, too. Then bundle up your pastor and send him to the church at the top of the list. If everyone cooperates, in one week you will receive 1,643 pastors. One of them should be perfect. Have faith in this letter.

One church broke the chain and got its old pastor back in less than three months.

At the very beginning of the Church, in the Book of Acts, a need arose. Certain widows were not getting the proper distribution of benevolence. They took the issue to the leaders... Who wisely stated,

Acts 6:2 ... "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.

What do you mean, **it is not desirable**? **It means that it is not the best thing for the people!** It is better for you if your pastor studies God's Word, than goes around visiting everyone. It is better for you if he is fruitful, rather than he give you a moment's shade.

Here is another way of putting it: We should understand our biblical roles and responsibilities, rather than have our cultural expectations.

The second thing we learn about leading and leadership: If you are not careful, you will begin to become shade for others and cease to bear fruit. Today we like to call this 'burn-out.' Lots of ministers and missionaries have burned-out in their place of serving God.

We don't really believe in burn-out!

1. For one thing, if you burn-out, maybe it is an indication you were never called in the first place. A lot of people think they should serve God in a particular way; but they are operating on their own – without any real call upon their life.
2. For another thing – The source of your ministry is supposed to be the indwelling Holy Spirit. Can the Holy Spirit ever be exhausted? Of course not! He is portrayed as a never ending, always available, supply of oil or of water. If you burn-out, you are doing the work of the ministry in your own energy.

I'm not saying you won't get physically tired or taxed; you will! That isn't burn-out, and it is easily resolved.

I'm not saying you won't get discouraged; you will! That isn't burn-out either. Discouragement is a strategy of Satan to defeat and destroy you. It must be fought, not surrendered to.

The third thing you learn about leading and leadership: There are a lot of **brambles** out there, ready to take advantage of you. They have no fruit; they promise only shade – *which they cannot even give!* A lot of people get led astray by listening to the flattery of brambles. They tell you what you want to hear, not what you need to hear. They coddle you; they flatter you. They almost always suggest that the leader God has raised-up over you is somehow unfeeling, uncompassionate, uncaring. If only they were over you, well, then you'd get the care and attention you deserve.

Judges 9:16 “Now therefore, if you have acted in truth and sincerity in making Abimelech king, and if you have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have done to him as he deserves -

Judges 9:17 for my father fought for you, risked his life, and delivered you out of the hand of Midian;

Judges 9:18 but you have risen up against my father's house this day, and killed his seventy sons on one stone, and made Abimelech, the son of his female servant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your brother -

Judges 9:19 if then you have acted in truth and sincerity with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, *then* rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you.

Judges 9:20 But if not, let fire come from Abimelech and devour the men of Shechem and Beth Millo; and let fire come from the men of Shechem and from Beth Millo and devour Abimelech!”

Judges 9:21 And Jotham ran away and fled; and he went to Beer and dwelt there, for fear of Abimelech his brother.

God inspired Jotham to tell his parable; and that was all. He did not raise him up to fight Abimelech, or to judge Israel – even though he would have been a much better leader.

We need to know what God has, and has not, called us to do. We want to be right where God wants us to be.

Judges 9:22 After Abimelech had reigned over Israel three years,

Judges 9:23 God sent a spirit of ill will between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech,

God sent it. Satan, and his demons, cannot function outside of the boundaries of God's permission. People object to the language used, where it says **God sent** the spirit. You could simply say He allowed it; the result is the same.

Judges 9:24 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 9:25 And the men of Shechem set men in ambush against him on the tops of the mountains, and they robbed all who passed by them along that way; and it was told Abimelech.

It didn't take long for the animosity to form. Friends became foes; allies became adversaries. They started raiding caravans to deal a financial blow to Abimelech.

Judges 9:26 Now Gaal the son of Ebed came with his brothers and went over to Shechem; and the men of Shechem put their confidence in him.

Judges 9:27 So they went out into the fields, and gathered *grapes* from their vineyards and trod *them*, and made merry. And they went into the house of their god, and ate and drank, and cursed Abimelech.

Judges 9:28 Then Gaal the son of Ebed said, "Who *is* Abimelech, and who *is* Shechem, that we should serve him? *Is he* not the son of Jerubbaal, and *is not* Zebul his officer? Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem; but why should we serve him?"

Judges 9:29 If only this people were under my authority! Then I would remove Abimelech." So he said to Abimelech, "Increase your army and come out!"

We might call this, *The Gall of Gaal*. Why was he so filled with anger against Abimelech and Shechem? **Because he had been drinking!**

Abimelech had set-up a governor over the region – a man named Zebul. We meet him:

Judges 9:30 When Zebul, the ruler of the city, heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was aroused.

Judges 9:31 And he sent messengers to Abimelech secretly, saying, "Take note! Gaal the son of Ebed and his brothers have come to Shechem; and here they are, fortifying the city against you.

Judges 9:32 Now therefore, get up by night, you and the people who *are* with you, and lie in wait in the field.

Judges 9:33 And it shall be, as soon as the sun is up in the morning, *that* you shall rise early and rush upon the city; and *when* he and the people who are with him come out against you, you may then do to them as you find opportunity."

Judges 9:34 So Abimelech and all the people who *were* with him rose by night, and lay in wait against Shechem in four companies.

Judges 9:35 When Gaal the son of Ebed went out and stood in the entrance to the city gate, Abimelech and the people who *were* with him rose from lying in wait.

Zebul was a mole. He was working to overthrow Gaal.

Judges 9:36 And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, "Look, people are coming down from the tops of the mountains!" But Zebul said to him, "You see the shadows of the mountains as *if they were* men."

Judges 9:37 So Gaal spoke again and said, "See, people are coming down from the center of the land, and another company is coming from the Diviners' Terebinth Tree."

Judges 9:38 Then Zebul said to him, "Where indeed *is* your mouth now, with which you said, 'Who is Abimelech, that we should serve him?' *Are not these the* people whom you despised? Go out, if you will, and fight with them now."

Where is your mouth now! I love it! Classic schoolyard stuff – except from grown men.

Judges 9:39 So Gaal went out, leading the men of Shechem, and fought with Abimelech.

Judges 9:40 And Abimelech chased him, and he fled from him; and many fell wounded, to the *very* entrance of the gate.

Judges 9:41 Then Abimelech dwelt at Arumah, and Zebul drove out Gaal and his brothers, so that they would not dwell in Shechem.

Judges 9:42 And it came about on the next day that the people went out into the field, and they told Abimelech.

Judges 9:43 So he took his people, divided them into three companies, and lay in wait in the field. And he looked, and there were the people, coming out of the city; and he rose against them and attacked them.

Judges 9:44 Then Abimelech and the company that *was* with him rushed forward and stood at the entrance of the gate of the city; and the *other* two companies rushed upon all who *were* in the fields and killed them.

Judges 9:45 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.

Abimelech killed the people of his own hometown, and spoiled the soil. Having the wrong leader is not only foolish; it is harmful. It can rob you of your own fruitfulness.

Judges 9:46 Now when all the men of the tower of Shechem had heard *that*, they entered the stronghold of the temple of the god Berith.

Judges 9:47 And it was told Abimelech that all the men of the tower of Shechem were gathered together.

Judges 9:48 Then Abimelech went up to Mount Zalmon, he and all the people who *were* with him. And Abimelech took an ax in his hand and cut down a bough from the trees, and took it and laid *it* on his shoulder; then he said to the people

who were with him, “What you have seen me do, make haste *and* do as I *have done*.”

Judges 9:49 So each of the people likewise cut down his own bough and followed Abimelech, put *them* against the stronghold, and set the stronghold on fire above them, so that all the people of the tower of Shechem died, about a thousand men and women.

The imagery is suggestive: A bramble produced no shade, but was good for fire! The bramble king, who had promised to shade the people, was burning them instead.

Judges 9:50 Then Abimelech went to Thebez, and he encamped against Thebez and took it.

Judges 9:51 But there was a strong tower in the city, and all the men and women - all the people of the city - fled there and shut themselves in; then they went up to the top of the tower.

Judges 9:52 So Abimelech came as far as the tower and fought against it; and he drew near the door of the tower to burn it with fire.

Judges 9:53 But a certain woman dropped an upper millstone on Abimelech’s head and crushed his skull.

The same strategy backfired! Abimelech was killed by a woman – not the kind of death a warrior looks forward to.

Judges 9:54 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.

How was that any better? It wasn’t. It shows you what Abimelech was thinking about at the time of his death. He was more concerned about how history would remember him than how eternity would judge him.

Judges 9:55 And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they departed, every man to his place.

There was no real passion for their actions because they were not inspired by God.

Judges 9:56 Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father by killing his seventy brothers.

Judges 9:57 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.

God repaid Abimelech by letting him reap what he had sown. The same with the men of Shechem.

Conclusion

Jesus is our example of godly leadership:

1. He did not come to be served, but to serve.
2. All His servant-leading was accomplished by the presence of the Holy Spirit in His life. He was born of the Spirit... Filled with the Spirit... Led by the Spirit...
3. Know your gifts & callings and work to stay within them.