

Abimelech, Illegitimate Son of Gideon

Where is God When Nations Fall?

Judges 9

Judges


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Sunday, February 2, 2014, 5pm at Living Hope Church of Roselle, Illinois

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We must not be so engulfed in trying to force social behavior to conform to our standards that we become enemies of those our Lord has called us to win to Himself. We must reject sin and never compromise God's standards of righteousness. But we also must never engage in defamation and denigration of the lost sinners who make up our corrupt culture. When Christians become political, sinners become the enemy instead of the mission field.”

JOHN MACARTHUR

 Open your Bible to **Judges 9**. We are continuing in a series the book of Judges. This evening we are asking the question, “Where is God When Nations Fall?”

A History of God's Work in the World

Where is God when nations fall? When we ask this question, we are particularly thinking of nations whose people at one time followed the Lord.

- We can think of amazing revivals in the early church that swept up what is now Turkey and the Middle East, from Egypt to Arabia, Jesus Christ was preached. Now all that for the most part is a spiritual waste land.
- We think of the Reformation times when the Gospel swept Britain, Germany, France and Switzerland, when even in John Calvin's lifetime, 2000 new churches were planted across Europe.
- We think of the great revivals of a hundred years ago that swept England, Wales, and the United States.
- Today that work has been greatly undone. Now we see God moving greatly in Africa and Central and South America. We see Him moving in South Korea and China. We see Him moving once again in the Arabic world where the Gospel first was preached and small revivals are breaking out in Iraq, Iran and Egypt. Churches are being planted. The Gospel is spreading.

But where is God when nations die? Where is God when nations reject His gracious hand and willingly put themselves into the bondage of statism and paganism?

Spiritual Suicide

A hundred years ago, our own nation began on a path of spiritual suicide. This began a hundred years ago, when our educators adopted the humanist manifesto to rid God from the classroom and textbooks.

Today there is a deep religious faith in evolution. The new Bible is Darwin's Origin of Species. Our nation has embraced infanticide. The abortion clinics where modern worship of Molech takes place sadly can be found under the name "Planned Parenthood."

God's institution of marriage between a man and a woman has been rejected.

Israel's Fall as a Nation

If Judges gives a warning of anything, and it does, the primary warning is that the nation whose leaders do not follow the Lord are doomed to fall.

I. God is present even when godless **Leaders** prosper (9:1-21).

Remember Gideon

In Judges 6-8 we are introduced to what seems to be a godly leader, that goes sour – Gideon. He has humble beginnings with a victory and an army of only 300 men. But by the end of Judges 8, Gideon goes from being a humble general to a celebrity pastor.

He starts so well and ends so poorly. Gideon responds to God's call, talks with God, faithfully tears down pagan altars, and battles victoriously against the Midianites.

He refuses the crown but then acts like a king. His success makes him prideful which leads him to abuse his own people. Then he makes an EPHOD, directing all worship toward himself and centering all worship around his family, specifically around his 70 sons in **Ophrah**—not in the invisible God dwelling in the tabernacle at **Shiloh**. He becomes the first celebrity pastor and the EPHOD became a snare to his family.

Look at **Judges 8:33-35**, "As soon as Gideon died, the people of Israel turned again and whored after the Baals and made Baal-berith their god. 34 And the people of Israel did not remember the Lord their God, who had delivered them from the hand of all their enemies on every side, 35 and they did not show steadfast love to the family of Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) in return for all the good that he had done to Israel." Houston we have a problem. This is what happens to a nation that begins to die. Judges 9 takes it to a new level.

Introducing Abimelech – Master Manipulator

Judges 9, "Now Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem to his mother's relatives and said to them and to the whole clan of his mother's family, 2 "Say in the ears of all the leaders of Shechem, 'Which is better for you, that all seventy of the sons of Jerubbaal rule over you, or that one rule over you?' Remember also that I am your bone and your flesh."

Abimelech is Gideon's son by his concubine, who lived in Shechem (8:31). This means that from his birth, he had been an outsider in his own family. Unlike Gideon's other seventy sons, he was illegitimate. He did not stand to inherit. As the story unfolds, we see a man who feels that whatever he will get out of life, he will have to get for himself—and who is utterly determined to get whatever he can.

Here is a man who sadly, would fit well into our current political system.

Grasping for Power

So Abimelech (“My Father is King”) begins grasping for power. Every other leader in Judges is called by God without seeking the role. Abimelech grasps it for himself, going to his mother’s brothers in Shechem (Judges 9:1) and pointing out that he is a son of his kinglike father and a kinsmen of theirs (v 2). His argument is: Wouldn’t it be better to have just one ruler? And wouldn’t it be good to ensure that that ruler is one of us? Wouldn’t it be good if your king were me?

So Abimelech goes kills all but one of Gideon’s 70 sons (vs. 3-5). We read in verse 5, “Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, for he hid himself.”

“King” Abimelech

Then we read in verse 6, that Abimelech has the leaders of Shechem anoint him as king, “And all the leaders of Shechem came together, and all Beth-millo, and they went and made Abimelech king, by the oak of the pillar at Shechem” (vs. 6).

Gideon had a lot of kids. He maintained a harem of wives in his hometown of Ophrah. He also kept a t concubine on the side in the city of Shechem who is most likely a Canaanite. She gave birth to a son Abimelech, whom she named “My Father is King” and raised in Shechem with visits from Dad every other weekend. “My Daddy is King” has serious “Daddy wounds”, he feels marginalized, abandoned, and rejected, he is not happy, he believes he deserves more. After the death of his dead-beat Dad, Abimelech appeals to his relatives and his clan.

This was total human manipulation and grasping for power, as we see in so much of politics today. Look at verse 4-5, “And they gave him seventy pieces of silver out of the house of Baal-berith with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless fellows, who followed him. 5 And he went to his father’s house at Ophrah and killed his brothers the sons of Jerubbaal, seventy men, on one stone.”

So these worthless men of Shechem made a murderer their king.

Jotham’s Parable of the Thornbush King (vs. 7-21)

In verse 7-21 the only living legitimate son of Gideon is Jotham. The parable Jotham tells in Judges 9:8-14 is designed to show the ridiculousness of choosing Abimelech as king.

Olive trees (v 8-9), fig-trees (10-11) and vines (v 12-13) were valuable, and produced the main crops of the Israelite agricultural economy. But they pass on becoming king. “Finally all the trees said to the thornbush, ‘Come and be our king’” (v 14). Thornbushes were not at all valuable plants. They were too short and scraggy to provide any shade from the heat, and often caught fire, which spread to surrounding foliage and destroyed more valuable trees. The thornbush points this out in agreeing to become king (v 15), and makes the remarkable claim (given it only grows a foot or two off the ground) that other trees can “come and take refuge in my shade.”

What is Jotham’s point? Verses 16-20 explain it. Basically he says, if God told you to make Abimelech your king, then good things are in store. But if you made a man king who was never ordained by God to be your king then he says, “let fire come out from Abimelech and devour the leaders of Shechem and Beth-millo; and let fire come out from the leaders of Shechem and from Beth-millo and devour Abimelech.” 21 And Jotham ran away and fled and went to Beer and lived there, because of Abimelech his brother” (vs. 20-21).

What's the point? The only thing a godless leader can do is bring the people and the nation down.

When our leaders begin to mock the Bible, and they have at the highest level, then our nation is doomed to failure.

II. God is present even when the carelessness of the **People** prevails (9:22-49).

Enter Gaal

So three years pass (vs. 22) and God sends an unharmonious spirit between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem, and then gives them a more tyrannical leader than Abimelech.

Judges 9:28-29, “Gaal the son of Ebed said, “Who is Abimelech, and who are we of 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? 29 Would that this people were under my hand! Then I would remove Abimelech. I would say to Abimelech, ‘Increase your army, and come out.’”

Verses 30-49 describe the fight between Abimelech and Gaal, and the battle ends in verse 41, “And Abimelech lived at Arumah, and Zebul drove out Gaal and his relatives, so that they could not dwell at Shechem.”

Abimelech Punishes the People of Shechem

Verses 42-45 tell how Abimelech punishes the city of Shechem for following Gaal. We read in verse 45, “He [Abimelech] captured the city and killed the people who were in it, and he razed the city and sowed it with salt.”

How could the people be so careless? They thought Abimelech could give them what they wanted, but it backfired. He destroyed Shechem. He destroyed their families.

Samuel Adams

I think of Samuel Adams, one of the founders of this country who was far ahead of his time. He was a Christian who loved the Lord and the Scriptures and so denounced slavery that modern historians call him the “Malcom X” of his time.

Samuel Adams said:

“If ye love wealth better than liberty, the tranquility of servitude better than the animating contest of freedom, go home from us in peace. We ask not your counsels or arms. Crouch down and lick the hands which feed you. May your chains set lightly upon you, and may posterity forget that ye were our countrymen.”¹

The Killing Continues

Over a thousand Shechemites take refuge in the temple of their idol, in the stronghold of the tower (v 46), but Abimelech's thirst for revenge is not sated. He leads his men to burn it down (v 48-49). “So all the people in the tower of Shechem, about a thousand men and women, also died” (v 49).

¹ See “The Indispensable Samuel Adams” from Christianity Today.
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/booksandresources/reviews/indispensablesamueladams.html>

Judges 9:46-49, “When all the leaders of the Tower of Shechem heard of it, they entered the stronghold of the house of El-berith. 47 Abimelech was told that all the leaders of the Tower of Shechem were gathered together. 48 And Abimelech went up to Mount Zalmon, he and all the people who were with him. And Abimelech took an axe in his hand and cut down a bundle of brushwood and took it up and laid it on his shoulder. And he said to the men who were with him, ‘What you have seen me do, hurry and do as I have done.’ 49 So every one of the people cut down his bundle and following Abimelech put it against the stronghold, and they set the stronghold on fire over them, so that all the people of the Tower of Shechem also died, about 1,000 men and women.”

III. God is patient but will eventually bring **judgment** (9:50-57).

Abimelech Judged

It looks as though the town of Thebez will suffer the same fate (v 50-52). But as Abimelech “approached the entrance to the tower to set it on fire, a woman dropped an upper millstone on his head and cracked his skull” (v 53). Fatally injured, Abimelech (ever mindful of his reputation) has his servant run him through so that a woman won’t have killed him (v 54).

Judges 9:50-57, “Then Abimelech went to Thebez and encamped against Thebez and captured it. 51 But there was a strong tower within the city, and all the men and women and all the leaders of the city fled to it and shut themselves in, and they went up to the roof of the tower. 52 And Abimelech came to the tower and fought against it and drew near to the door of the tower to burn it with fire. 53 And a certain woman threw an upper millstone on Abimelech’s head and crushed his skull. 54 Then he called quickly to the young man his armor-bearer and said to him, ‘Draw your sword and kill me, lest they say of me, ‘A woman killed him.’ ” And his young man thrust him through, and he died.

55 And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, everyone departed to his home. 56 Thus God returned the evil of Abimelech, which he committed against his father in killing his seventy brothers. 57 And God also made all the evil of the men of Shechem return on their heads, and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal.”

APPLICATIONS

1. Choices (both good and bad) have Lasting Consequences

First, the sins of men often have lasting consequences. Our failure to lead in our homes, in our churches, and in our communities will have a generational impact—much of which we may never see. We need someone to save us from ourselves.

The evil of the men of Shechem was to trust in men, first in Abimelech and then in Gaal. Neither could deliver them. Their choices brought awful consequences.

Galatians 7:7-9, “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. 8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. 9 And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.”

There is no such thing as a curse for an individual, a generation, or a nation. The only curse that effects the individual, generation, nation and world is the curse of sin!

Grace overcomes the curse of sin! If you have failed greatly, then start obeying God greatly. You reap what you sow. Sow to the Spirit! That is hope for your family, your church, your nation, and your world!

2. Second, bad men are judged by a good God.

And all men are bad; all men fall short of the glory of God no matter how much “good” you think you have done—you will not be the one to beat that verse. God makes good on his promises to bless and his promises to punish, if not now then in eternity. In other words, God is a God of integrity, he is who he says he is Exodus 34.6: “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.” We need someone to save us from God’s wrath.

3. Third, we must be careful about choosing leaders from among sinful men, but ultimate salvation comes not from man but from God!

It doesn’t take much for good leadership to become very bad leadership. As an individual you ought always to vote your conscience. But ultimately it is not voting correctly that is going to change our nation. There has to be a movement of God in our churches that affects our nation. Only then will our nation have hope.

Conclusion: With a Gracious God, a Nation is Never Without Hope

In the rule of Abimelech, Israel plumbs new depths. Yet there is more to come “after the time of Abimelech” (Judges 10:1). “Tola ... rose to save Israel” (v 1). He “led Israel twenty-three years” (v 2). This is the same language used of Deborah, one of the best of the judges. God has raised up someone else who saved and led Israel in the way she did. And he is followed by another **twenty-two years** of peace under Jair (v 3). **This is the sheer grace of God.**

The people have completely abandoned him. They have opted to be led by a man who was chosen not by the Lord, but by himself, who was recommended not by the Lord’s divine commission but by his own power. Israel have sunk to the depths and they are not even crying out in repentance, yet God sends them Tola and Jair to be the judge-saviors they are not asking for.¹

¹ Keller, Timothy (2013-08-06). Judges For You (God’s Word For You) (Kindle Locations 1408-1414). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.