

Life Lesson 50
Abimelech
Judges 8 and 9

Introduction

Everyone wants to be the boss! Have you ever noticed that? When kids play games, there is a big fight to see who is going to be the leader or the quarterback or the one who is “it.” When boys and girls grow up to be men and women, the same thing is true. Everyone wants to be the boss and have his own way.

That is a good definition of sin, wanting to be our own boss. There is a big word for it. It’s called the “natural depravity of man.” That means every person is born with a desire to be the boss. He doesn’t want God to be the boss of his life. If boys and girls don’t have parents to teach them to obey, they won’t! They will just naturally do what they want to do, regardless of how it hurts anyone else.

We all have that depraved nature. That’s why every person born into the world (except Jesus, of course) must be saved before they can be right with God.

In our story today we will see a good example of natural depravity. It’s about a boy who grew up to do the most horrible things imaginable just so he could be the boss.

The Story

We learned about Gideon and how he learned to be courageous and trust the Lord. He did some good things, like helping to deliver the Israelites from the wicked Midianites. But, Gideon also made some great big mistakes.

The golden monument he built was one bad mistake. Maybe he meant it to be a

monument to the Lord, but before long the people were worshiping it as a god. Those foolish Israelites! It seems they just wouldn't learn to be faithful to the true God.

The second bad thing that Gideon did was marrying a lot of women. We don't know exactly how many, but there must have been lots and lots of wives because he had 70 sons. We don't know how many daughters he had. He had many concubines, too. They were women that he lived with as if they were wives, but they weren't really married.

One of the concubines had a son named Abimelech. He's the one we'll learn about in our story today.

After Gideon died, everyone went back to being just as bad as they could be. They forgot all about God and about Gideon. They worshiped idols and did as they pleased. The 70 sons of Gideon ruled the land, but mostly everyone did what they wanted to do.

Abimelech wasn't one of the 70 sons who ruled, and he thought he should be a ruler, too. In fact, he didn't want to be *one* of the bosses. He wanted to be *the* boss.

Abimelech went to Shechem where his mother's family lived.

"Which is better, to have 70 people ruling you, or just one? Remember that I am related to you," he told his uncles and cousins. "If you want me to be the ruler, speak to the other men of Shechem about it. I need help to overthrow my brothers."

Abimelech's relatives agreed.

"He's related to us," they said. "He'll probably treat us better than a stranger would."

The men of Shechem gave Abimelech money to hire soldiers to go with him to attack his brothers in Ophrah where they lived. He hired men who were "vain and light persons." That

means they didn't care about anything but earning some money.

Abimelech and his hired soldiers marched to Ophrah and attacked his brothers. He killed almost all of them! Can you imagine doing something so terrible as killing your brothers just so that you could be the boss? That's what Abimelech did.

In the confusion one of the brothers slipped away unharmed. His name was Jotham.

Abimelech was declared ruler of the land. When Jotham heard that, he went up to the top of Mount Gerizim and cried, "Listen to me, people, and I will tell you a story.

"The trees decided they needed a king, so they asked the olive tree, 'Please come and rule over us.'

"'What?' exclaimed the olive tree. 'Should I quit producing olives by which men are fed and God is honored and go just to be promoted over the trees? No, I'm too busy.'

"So they asked the fig tree to be the tree-king.

"'You want me to quit producing sweet fruit and go and be king? No thanks. Get someone else,' the fig tree replied.

"Next they asked the grapevine. He had the same reply. He was too busy doing useful work to be the king.

"Last of all they asked the bramble (which is a big, worthless weed, full of thorns.)

"'Come and reign over us,' they said.

"'Sure,' replied the bramble. 'I'll be the king if you want me to. If you don't want me to, I'll be the king anyway. I'll just set fire to you if you don't want to follow me.'

“That’s what you’ve done,” said Jotham. “There were many men who would have made a good king. You’ve picked someone who is no good at all, and you’ll be sorry.”

Jotham ran to hide from his wicked brother. Abimelech wanted to kill him, too, because he spoke the truth.

God always judges sin. Sometimes the payment for sin comes quickly. Sometimes it takes years. People will always see the results of their sin. For Abimelech it was about three years after he became king that the judgement came.

God sent an evil spirit between the men of Shechem and Abimelech. They decided they wanted to get rid of him, just as he got rid of his brothers.

He gathered his supporters together and fought a long hard battle to keep his throne. In the middle of the battle he was trying to burn down a tower. The men and women of the city were in that tower hiding, and he wanted to kill them all.

The men were fighting with spears and arrows, but one woman decided she wanted to help. She took a big stone that was used for grinding grain. She put it on the edge of the tower wall and waited for her chance. When she saw Abimelech beneath her, she gave a mighty push. That big millstone fell down right on top of Abimelech and cracked his head!

He thought he was so brave and mighty that no one could beat him. He was the boss. God allowed just a little old lady to kill him to show that he wasn’t so big after all.

The Life Lesson

People, because they have a depraved nature, will do anything to be the boss. That’s just the way we all are. That’s why we need to surrender to God, to ask forgiveness and ask him to be the boss of our lives.

Maybe you haven't yet given up to God. Maybe you are still trying to be your own little god. It won't work. Sooner or later you will wind up like Abimelech, because God always judges sin.

Review Questions

How many sons did Gideon have?

71, counting Abimelech

What does “natural depravity” mean?

Wanting to be the boss, the one in charge, no matter what.

What did Abimelech do to get rid of his brothers?

He killed them.

What brother escaped?

Jotham

To what plant did Jotham compare Abimelech?

A bramble -- a big thorny weed.

How did Abimelech die?

A woman threw a millstone off the tower and broke his head.