

God Can Use Anybody
Abimelech: A Selfish Rebel Who Fulfilled God's Purpose
Judges 9
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Last week we started a short series entitled *God Can Use Anybody*, and we're looking at some Old Testament characters out of the book of Judges. Last week we looked at Gideon and how God worked through him. He was a fearful, backward and unwilling man when it came to trusting God—at least at first he was. But once Gideon chose to follow God, God did incredible things through him. In fact, Gideon took three hundred soldiers and routed an army of over 135,000 Midianites. And we learn today that this introvert, Gideon, had seventy sons; so evidently he did overcome his shyness.

The people were so thrilled with Gideon's leadership and the forty years of peace that his victory produced that they looked to his sons for leadership as well. Unfortunately, the next leader who rose up from Israel from among Gideon's sons wasn't like his father. He was arrogant; he was selfish; he was rebellious toward God. God didn't choose him to lead; he chose himself to be the leader and the king. His name was Abimelech, and it's likely that you haven't heard his name or heard very much about him. You know, when I talk to young couples and ask, "What are you going to name your son?" "Well, we're thinking about Abimelech," you know?

You don't hear that a whole lot, all right? But today we're going to learn

why this guy was a scoundrel, and he was bad news. What we find throughout the story is that somehow God used him—not so much because of what he had done but in spite of who he was. God was still able to unfold His will.

Now I want to remind us today that God's plans and God's purposes are greater than the evil plans of Satan. Even when Satan gets his people in positions of leadership or influence, God still has the power to get His will accomplished. Wouldn't you agree that oftentimes Christian people panic when evil people rise to positions of influence? Whether it's a gang or whether it's corrupt politicians...It doesn't matter what level it might be: local, state, national or even world leaders. In fact every election some in the church get paranoid crazy about the wrong man or woman being elected. Or Maybe it's even closer to home and your parents aren't that godly, yet they're placed in that position of influence over you. Whether you're an adult or whether you're a teenager, that can be rough. Do you work for a tyrant? God has not forgotten you. Do you live with a jerk? God can help you to deal with that. Are you frustrated with certain aspects of our government? God can work through anybody to get done what He wants done. So don't panic; trust Him.

One thing that we learn from this story of Abimelech that we're going to dive into is that God will get His way—no matter what kinds of people He

uses to accomplish His will. So let's take a look at this story. I hope you'll learn a lot today from this story, and we'll also make some applications. Abimelech was a bad example, and bad is an understatement. This guy was terrible. He was rotten to the core. There are four sins that I see in his life that I think really stand out.

1. He manipulated the people.

The first is he manipulated the people. He manipulated the people. Look in your Bible or your bulletin at Judges 9:1 and 2. It says: "Abimelech son of Jerub-Baal..." That's another name for Gideon.

Abimelech son of Jerub-Baal went to his mother's brothers in Shechem and said to them and to all his mother's clan, "Ask all the citizens of Shechem, 'Which is better for you: to have all seventy of Jerub-Baal's sons rule over you, or just one man?' Remember, I am your flesh and blood."

Now back in chapter 8 of Judges we read that Gideon had seventy sons by many wives, but he also had a son named Abimelech by his concubine who was from Shechem. Back in Palestine, many men had concubines. Maybe that's a new term for you. The first time I heard that. I had read it in a book when I was young. And I thought it was like a Porcupine animal or something, you know? Well, a concubine...back in the Old Testament they were legal wives, but they were secondary wives. In the family, they didn't have the status of really being a part of the family. They

were oftentimes acquired first as slaves.

That was not God's design; that was man's intent. Well, Abimelech was the son of a concubine, so in the eyes of the society he was a second-class citizen. To make matters worse, his mother was from Shechem.

Now we have to understand a little bit about the background of Shechem.

Shechem was a city in the Promised Land that had been occupied by the

Canaanites, and when Israel reclaimed the Promised Land it's believed

that they established a treaty with the people of Shechem rather than

doing battle against them. Now why that is significant is because the

Shechemites participated in pagan worship, and they worshipped idols.

And as often happened, the pagan Canaanites influenced the Israelites

who lived there to worship false gods, too. We see that cycle continuing

just like we've talked about for the past two weeks.

So Abimelech goes to his mom's side of the family, over to Shechem, and

he says, "Hey, you don't want my seventy half-brothers ruling over you

guys. Seventy different people?" He said, "Why don't you just choose one,

and help me gain control of this city. After all, I'm one of yours."

Now, also, you need to know that Abimelech's father, Gideon, had made it

quite clear that he didn't intend for any of his sons to rule over the people

of Israel. In fact, in Judges chapter 8 the Lord, he said, was to be the ruler

over the people, not his sons. It's likely that Gideon's sons had very little

intention or interest in trying to rule over the nation of Israel, but through deception and through trickery, Abimelech manipulated the situation and he convinced the people to side with him. So his first mistake was he manipulated the people.

2. He surrounded himself with violent men.

The second mistake that he made was he surrounded himself with violent men. The Bible says, "Bad company corrupts good character." Now I'm not sure if Abimelech started out with having good character, but regardless of that, he surrounded himself with a lot of people who had bad character and no character whatsoever.

Verse 3 says, "When the brothers repeated all this to the citizens of Shechem, they were inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, 'Well, after all, he is our brother.'" Verse 4, "They gave him seventy shekels of silver from the temple of Baal, and Abimelech used it to hire reckless adventurers, who became his followers."

Michael Jackson, died last June. Counting wasn't a problem for Michael Jackson in the 1970 hit "ABC." Love, he chirped in the Jackson 5 song he co-wrote, was as "easy as 1-2-3." When it came to handling the bigger sums the singer would go on to amass, though, Jackson never really got a grip on the numbers or how to hold on to his wealth.

At one point he made just on his royalties for songs over 300 Million dollars, which does not include his money from advertisements, concerts or investments. Yet when he died some estimated his debt was 300 -600 million depending on the accountant you have that is counting! How is that Possible? The Character of the People; who hung around him including his family bled him dry! His lack of Character bled him dry. He lost a good chunk when he divorced Marie Presley. He was accused of Child Molestation and had to settle out of court for 20 Million; plus after that he had almost no offer

to advertise products. Read more:

<http://www.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,1907401,00.html#ixzz0vewYJbCl>

If you want to know how your story ends look at your Character and the morals of those you trust-and that will tell you all you need to know!

Abimelech hires these merciless mercenaries, and he puts them together as a band of people. He hires them, basically, as hit men. You see, Abimelech wasn't a leader because he was gifted or because he rose through the ranks; he bought himself an army of violent people and he kills the opposition.

Now the Bible is quite gruesome in the Old Testament, but it's always honest. Look at verses 5 and 6:

He went to his father's home in Ophrah and on one stone murdered

his seventy brothers, the sons of Gideon. But Jotham, the youngest son of Gideon, escaped by hiding. Then all the citizens of Shechem and Beth Millo gathered beside the great tree at the pillar in Shechem to crown Abimelech king.

Can you imagine that? He hires this group of violent men and they help him corral all of his brothers. They get sixty-nine out of the seventy—one of them gets away—and they murder them right there on the stone. Can you possibly conceive of ever snuffing out the life of another individual? Can you begin to even conceive of taking the life of another family member? And on top of that, sixty-nine different people?

3. He slaughtered his family.

You see, his third sin in my mind was the worst of all: he slaughtered his family. No regard for them at all. It all came back to pride: “I want to be king and I want to make certain that you’re not.” So he slaughters them.

Professional golfer Tommy Bolt has had the reputation for being the angriest golfer to ever play the game. One of the stories told about him is of a time when he giving a group lesson on how to hit a ball out of a sand trap. Tommy called his 11 year old son over and said to him “Show them what you’ve learned from your father to do when your shot lands in the sand.” At that his son picked up a wedge and threw it as high and as far as

he could.

Another story told on Bolt had him dressing down a new caddy who had a reputation for being overly talkative. Bolt made it clear he wouldn't put up with a bunch of chatter---he told the young man, "I don't want you talking to me during the round. And when I ask you a question, you answer with a "yes or no" and nothing more---understood?" The caddy replied "yes, Mr. Bolt."

Later during the round, Bolt found the ball next to a tree, where he had to hit under a branch, over a lake and onto the green. He got down on his knees and looked through the trees and sized up the shot.

"What do you think?" he asked the caddy. "Five-iron?"

"No, Mr. Bolt," the caddy said.

"What do you mean, not a five-iron?" Bolt snorted. "Watch this shot."

The caddy rolled his eyes. "No-o-o, Mr. Bolt."

But Bolt hit it and the ball stopped about two feet from the hole. He turned to his caddy, handed him the five-iron and said, "Now what do you think about that? You can talk now."

"Mr. Bolt," the caddy said, "that wasn't your ball

Why would somebody hit the wrong ball? Why would a football player tackle somebody on their own team? It would be like a basketball player coming up and stealing the ball from another basketball player that he's on the same squad with. It would be like...a Christian taking a shot at another

Christian. It would be like a believer in Jesus Christ saying something behind the back of another believer in Jesus Christ. And God gathers His angels together and He points down at you and He says, "Don't they realize they're on the same team?"

You see, the Bible teaches that when we take a shot at somebody else within the church, another believer...it says that we are crucifying Jesus Christ afresh. You say, "Wow, Roger. You've gone for quite a stretch here. You've gone from making an analogy that this guy who killed sixty-nine dudes on a rock to, all of a sudden, talking about the words that I say about somebody else maybe behind their back or even to their face." Well, Jesus didn't think it was that far of a stretch. That's why in the Sermon on the Mount He said:

You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, "Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment." But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, "Raca," (which was a term saying a person was stupid) is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, "You fool!" will be in danger of the fire of hell. Matthew 5:21-23 NIV

You see, we have to be careful that at times our words and our actions don't slaughter our family and slaughter the family of God.

4. He worried too much about his reputation.

There is another reason why I think Abimelech was a bad example, and that was he worried too much about his reputation. What happens in Judges, Chapter 9 is eventually God changes the hearts of the Shechemites, who have elected Abimelech as the king. They're at odds with one another, so they go after one another and a civil war breaks out. A lot of deaths take place as a result of this. But look what happens in verses 50-55. He's just overtaken several cities. He's just burned one tower to the ground where people were trying to hide. Now he moves on to another community. Look at verses 50 and following:

Next Abimelech went to Thebez and besieged it and captured it.

Inside the city, however, was a strong tower, to which all the men and women—all the people of the city—fled. They locked themselves in and climbed up on the tower roof. Abimelech went to the tower and stormed it. But as he approached the entrance to the tower to set it on fire, a woman dropped an upper millstone on his head and cracked his skull.

Now listen to this: "Hurriedly he called to his armor-bearer, 'Draw your sword and kill me, so that they can't say, "A woman killed him.'" ' So his servant ran him through, and he died." Look at this: "When the Israelites saw that Abimelech was dead, they went home." "Okay, I guess the battle is over now." "Ya, Abimelech died?" "Ya, a woman dropped a rock on his

noodle.” “Okay, all right.” They all head for home with their weapons. Everything is over with.

So here is this guy. He’s going in to burn down this tower and take over a city, and some gal musters up the strength up high to dump out a millstone. It comes flying down and hits him on the head. He knows he’s about to die so he says, “Hey, I don’t want to die at the hand of a woman. Will you kill me?” Do you know what that tells me? Men haven’t changed a whole lot in three thousand years, you know? We still wrestle with things like that.

Abimelech teaches us that; Trust in yourself and you are doomed to disappointment; trust in your friends and they will die and leave you; trust in money and you may have it taken from you; trust in reputation and some slanderous tongue may drop a milestone on your head; but trust in God, and you are never to be confounded in time or eternity

Think about it -Here is Abimelech at the point of death. He should’ve been thinking, “Oh, man! I’m about to die. I’m a murderer. I’m an outlaw. I’m about to stand before a holy and powerful God. I’m in deep trouble.” And instead he’s wondering, “Man, I wonder what the obituary is going to say tomorrow in the paper. I wonder what people are going to think about me.” And he was concerned about his reputation.

Conclusion: Now don’t get me wrong. I want you to be concerned about

your reputation. But guess what? A second before you die, there is not a whole lot you can do to change your reputation. God gives you opportunity after opportunity, day in and day out, to write the legacy through your life and through your choices that you're going to leave behind for others. It's up to you to worry about it now, not then. So what are you going to do now?