

Lesson 6: Abimelech, the Anti-judge

Thesis: Sinful choices spiral our lives out of control. We can either let it bring us back to God or to ruin.

Key Scripture: Judges 8:22-9:57

ICEBREAKER:

- What is something you wish your father has passed down to you. (It can be knowledge or items)?
- What is something you hope your children will learn from you? What do you hope they won't learn from you?

REVIEW:

- When we first met Gideon an Angel of the Lord called him a "Valiant Warrior." What has been your impression of Gideon over the past two weeks?
- What have you grown to like about him?
- How have you seen him grow and change?

Read: Judges 8:22-35

- How does this passage alter your view of Gideon? Why?
- What did the people want Gideon to do and why do you think he turned down their offer?
- What were some of the errors that he made in this section?
What is an Ephod? "The ephod was worn by the high priest in the tabernacle, the tent where God was present among his people, which at this point was sited in Shiloh... The ephod designated the true place of God's dwelling, and was a way to discern God's will in times of crisis. In making his own copy, Gideon essentially sets up his home town as a rival place of worship. He wants to encourage people to come to him for guidance," as opposed to God can be found. (from *Judge for You* page 98)
- How did his mistake affect others? What does this tell us about the example leader can have on others and the need to take that role seriously?

For additional insight on this passage read "**King Gideon?**" on pages 97-99 in *Judges For You*.

SERMON DISCUSSION: This week's sermon was on Abimelech and his destructive power over God's people.

- What are some things you learned through this week's sermon?
- What are some questions you have or items you were confused about?
- What is your impression of Abimelech based on the sermon?
- How did this week's sermon help you understand the cycle of sin and redemption in the people of Israel?
- What did you learn about the cycle of sin and redemption in your life?

This verse is setting the stage for what we are about to see through the life of Gideon's son Abimelech

Read Deuteronomy 5: 8-10

Do not make an idol for yourself in the shape of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. Do not bow in worship to them, and do not serve them, because I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, bringing the consequences of the fathers' iniquity on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me, but showing faithful love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commands,

MEET ABIMELECH:

Read Judges 8:30-32.

- Who is Abimelech? Read the second paragraph on page 101 in *Judges For You* for more insight.
- How is the author setting us up the tension between Abimelech and his family?

Read Judges 9:1-6

- How does Abimelech manipulate his mother's family into giving him money?
- What does he use the money for?
- Why do you think he does this evil plan?
- Why is it a problem that Abimelech is made king? How is that God's plan for Israel at that time?

Read the first three paragraphs from "**Grasping Power**" (page 101-102) in *Judges For You*.

- How does Keller differentiate Abimelech from the judges in Judges?
- How do you think Abimelech's obsession with power and control will be his downfall?

JOTHAM'S PARABLE:

Jotham is Gideon's (aka Jerubbaal) youngest son, the only one to survive execution from Abimelech. In Judges 9:7-21 we are given a parable (and interpretation) from Jotham about Abimelech. In this parable he warns that Abimelech might not be what they are hoping for. Verses 19-20 sum up the warning that Jotham is giving to the people if they choose Abimelech as king. [You may also want to read the first two paragraphs on Page 103 in *Judges For You* for a deeper insight.]

- What are the two possibilities that Jotham suggests? Which do you think is going to come to fruition?
- What symbolic role will fire play in the outcome of this story (also see verse 14-15)?
- How do you think fire will play a role in the rest of Abimelech's story?

ABIMELECH'S DOWNWARD SPIRAL

Judges 9:22-55 reveals the downward spiral of evil done that Abimelech brought on others and himself. Consider reading verse 22-25, 43-52 along with "**The Fire of the Thornbush,**" pages 103-104) in *Judges for you*.

- How does Abimelech's ego drive him to do more and more evil things?
- How does his evil deeds escalate and what disastrous effect does it have on the people and himself.
- How have you seen your ego and sinful choices lead you in a downward spiral?
- Abimelech's life come to an tragic end, read verse 53-55. How do the people react to his death and what does that say about his legacy?

GOD AT WORK:

Read Judges 9:22-24 and 56-57.

- How is God working in this story and how does that shape your understanding of God's work in your life?
- Why does God allow people to face consequences of their sinful choices?
- How can that be an act of justice and mercy?
- How have facing the consequences of sinful choices helped strengthen your faith?

PERSONAL REFLECTION:

Abimelech is no where close to being a hero of the faith, in fact he is the exact opposite. Yet, sometimes the worst examples are the stories we need to hear, they help us see how our choices may lead us further and further from God and damaging others along the way.

- How has Abimelech's story helped you see the need for God's grace in your life?

Read 1 John 1: 5-9

⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in him. ⁶ If we say, "We have fellowship with him," and yet we walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth. ⁷ If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say, "We have no sin," we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say, "We have not sinned," we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

- Do you find yourself in fellowship with him or walking in darkness?
- How is that shaping your faith and your life?

Reflect on what do you need to confess and know that God will forgive and cleanse. Do not let your ego, like Abimelech, make you in to a liar. Invite God's Word (Jesus – John 1:1) to be in you.

Prayer Request: How can the group be praying for you this week?

Close in prayer: Spend time praying for each other in the group.