

The Book of Judges
Abimelech, The Man Who Would Be King
February 8,2017

Session Five

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2
3 Brief Review:

4
5 When Joshua died, a period of nearly 400 years began in which a number of leaders
6 (deliverers or judges) came into prominence. Some of these were known only in small
7 areas while others were nationally recognized.

8
9 The people of Israel went through a time of SEVEN spiritual cycles. At the top of the
10 cycle the people were right with God and in a period of Godly renewal. Then
11 backsliding or apostasy set in and the people drifted away from God. At the bottom of
12 each cycle, they were overrun by other nations, pagan ones, who led them through
13 decades of degradation. In crying out for help, God sent them key leaders such as
14 Gideon and Samson and Deborah who brought them victory.

15
16 In today's lesson we take a look at several of these judges.

17
18 **ABIMELECH, THE USURPING JUDGE**

19
20 What happened in Israel when the great Gideon passed away?

21
22 Judges 8:33-35

23 **And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel**
24 **turned again, and went a whoring after Baalim, and made Baal-berith their god.**
25 **[34] And the children of Israel remembered not the Lord their God, who had**
26 **delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side: [35] Neither**
27 **shewed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely, Gideon, according to all**
28 **the goodness which he had shewed unto Israel.**

29
30 We remember from our previous study that Gideon had many wives who bore him 70
31 sons. Besides that, Gideon also had a concubine (mistress) who bore him yet another
32 son, this one, a disaster!

33
34 Judges 8:30-32

35 **And Gideon had threescore and ten sons of his body begotten: for he had many**
36 **wives. [31] And his concubine that was in Shechem, she also bare him a son, whose**

1 name he called Abimelech. [32] And Gideon the son of Joash died in a good old
2 age, and was buried in the sepulchre of Joash his father, in Ophrah of the
3 Abi-ezrites.
4

5 Before we jump all over Gideon for having all those wives, let's remember that was part
6 of his day's sociology. It seems to me that having 71 sons would be penalty enough!
7 Think of supporting that crowd!
8

9 But let's consider a noble act on his part. After the historic and supernatural defeat of the
10 Midianites, under whose cruel regime the Jews had lived for seven years, the victorious
11 Israelites wanted to make Gideon their king. His response was remarkable: Judges
12 8:22-23 **Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and**
13 **thy son, and thy son's son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian.**
14 **[23] And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule**
15 **over you: the Lord shall rule over you.**
16

17 Gideon was wise enough to know he was "king material."
18

19 "A man's gotta know his limitations." – Saint Eastwood

20
21 Gideon understood the victory over the Midianites was totally because of God, not
22 himself. That victory did not qualify him to be a king. Besides, as we will learn in I
23 Samuel, it was not the will of God for Israel to even have a king. God raised up Gideon
24 to be a JUDGE, not a monarch.
25

26 He did well in not allowing the opinion of the people, even if it was a majority, to
27 influence his life more than God's will for it. Gideon knew who was in charge. He said
28 so matter of factly: **THE LORD SHALL RULE OVER YOU!**
29

30 However, our man was not perfect. We learn in verse 24 he wanted something: Judges
31 8:24 **And Gideon said unto them, I would desire a request of you, that ye would**
32 **give me every man the earrings of his prey. (For they had golden earrings, because**
33 **they were Ishmaelites.)** The weight of the gold he wanted was about 43 pounds - so we
34 are talking about a real haul here! Gideon is now well-off financially. Sadly he doesn't
35 think he needs God as much as he did previously. He did not leave a great spiritual
36 legacy, unfortunately.
37

38 The "down-slide" was not ready for the decline of the people once again. A corner has
39 been turned.

1 Now a new judge will lead Israel - and this one will be simply awful:

2
3 Judges 9:1-6

4 **And Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem unto his mother's brethren,**
5 **and communed with them, and with all the family of the house of his mother's**
6 **father, saying, [2] Speak, I pray you, in the ears of all the men of Shechem, Whether**
7 **is better for you, either that all the sons of Jerubbaal, which are threescore and ten**
8 **persons, reign over you, or that one reign over you? remember also that I am your**
9 **bone and your flesh. [3] And his mother's brethren spake of him in the ears of all the**
10 **men of Shechem all these words: and their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech; for**
11 **they said, He is our brother. [4] And they gave him threescore and ten pieces of**
12 **silver out of the house of Baal-berith, wherewith Abimelech hired vain and light**
13 **persons, which followed him. [5] And he went unto his father's house at Ophrah,**
14 **and slew his brethren the sons of Jerubbaal, being threescore and ten persons, upon**
15 **one stone: notwithstanding yet Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left; for**
16 **he hid himself. [6] And all the men of Shechem gathered together, and all the house**
17 **of Millo, and went, and made Abimelech king, by the plain of the pillar that was in**
18 **Shechem.**

19
20 We don't know much about justice in this world. Abimelech should have been tried for
21 murder; instead he is handed the reins of government. With money given to him by his
22 clueless following, Abimelech hired trained assassins.

23
24 We don't know the details of this man's plan to kill his brothers. We know that he
25 somehow got them together in their father's home - Gideon's place. The town was
26 known as Ophrah, several miles north of Jerusalem. It was a brutal, calculated act of
27 cold-blooded murder. But in the blood-bath, the youngest brother somehow managed to
28 escape. His name was JOTHAM.

29
30 Abimilech's goal was reached: Judges 9:6 **And all the men of Shechem gathered**
31 **together, and all the house of Millo, and went, and made Abimelech king, by the**
32 **plain of the pillar that was in Shechem.** The house of Millo was a mound or rampart
33 built up and filled in with earth and stones to raise. It was a fortification near Shechem,
34 which is a city in north-central Israel, one of the places where God made an eternal
35 commitment to Abraham to bless the Jews.

36
37 J. Vernon McGee made an fascinating observation about this scenario with Abimilech:
38 *Some Bible expositors rate Abimelech as a judge., He may have been a judge, at least it*
39 *is said that he "reigned three years over Israel." But the fact is he brutally murdered*
40 *the seventy sons of Gideon and set himself up as king. His abortive reign reveals, I feel,*



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25 *the truth of the statement in Daniel 4:17 : This matter is by the decree of the watchers,*
26 *and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know*
27 *that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will,*
28 *and setteth up over it the basest of men.* Even today when a good ruler comes into
29 *office, many folk say, "God raised him up." What about the wicked ruler? God permits*
30 *him to come to the throne also. Do you know why? Because the principle is, "...like*
31 *priest, like people." That is, people get the ruler they deserve. The people of Israel*
32 *wanted this boy Abimelech to rule over them; and they got the calibre of man they*
33 *deserved. Friend, when we look around our world today, we find this principle is still*
34 *true.*

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36

37 At the top of this page is a photo of great historical importance. Many my age remember
38 the fate of Benito Mussolini. In the 1920's, he was cheered and respected. In April of
39 1945, his bullet-pierced dead body was strung up (upside down, hanging by his feet)
40 along with his mistress Clara Petacci at a filling station in Milan. I point this out because

1 Abimelech is going to suffer at the very hands of the people who thrust him into his
2 illegitimate power three years earlier. While attempting to stop an insurrection against
3 him, in the very place where he had been coronated, he met a fatal fate: Judges 9:52-57
4 **And Abimelech came unto the tower, and fought against it, and went hard unto the**
5 **door of the tower to burn it with fire. [53] And a certain woman cast a piece of a**
6 **millstone upon Abimelech's head, and all to brake his skull. [54] Then he called**
7 **hastily unto the young man his armourbearer, and said unto him, Draw thy sword,**
8 **and slay me, that men say not of me, A woman slew him. And his young man thrust**
9 **him through, and he died. [55] And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was**
10 **dead, they departed every man unto his place.**

11 **[56] Thus God rendered the wickedness of Abimelech, which he did unto his**
12 **father, in slaying his seventy brethren: [57] And all the evil of the men of Shechem**
13 **did God render upon their heads: and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son**
14 **of Jerubbaal.**

15
16 The Bible declares emphatically that we reap what we sow. But we should remember
17 that despite Gideon's final heroics in the earlier chapters, he also fathered a son
18 (Abimelech) by his mistress. This is a sad ending for the life of Gideon. God had
19 elevated him to a place as deliverer and judge for the nation. How sad that a man who
20 had accomplished so much, should allow this in his life of which God did not approve
21 and which resulted in civil war in Israel.

22 23 TOLA, THE NEXT JUDGE

24
25 You may be thinking, "Tola? I've never heard of him." Don't be sad for neither have
26 most people. We have only two verses about him:

27
28 **Judges 10:1-2 And after Abimelech there arose to defend Israel Tola the son of**
29 **Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar (of the tribe of Issachar who was one of the**
30 **sons of Jacob, the ninth, and a brother to Joseph); and he dwelt in Shamir in mount**
31 **Ephraim. [2] And he judged Israel twenty and three years, and died, and was buried**
32 **in Shamir.**

33
34 Shamir – we don't know the exact location of that ancient community, but probably on
35 the hill slopes near Shechem. (Sidebar: a man named Yitzhak Shamir was a two-time
36 prime minister of Israel in the 80's and early 90's. He was a good man who died at the
37 age of 96.)

38
39 All we know about Judge Tola is that he lived and died after serving as a deliverer (from
40 what we don't know) in Israel, a judge, for 23 years.

JAIR - AND HIS DONKEYS

Judges 10:3-5

And after him arose Jair, a Gileadite , and judged Israel twenty and two years. [4] And he had thirty sons that rode on thirty ass colts, and they had thirty cities, which are called Havoth-jair unto this day, which are in the land of Gilead. [5] And Jair died, and was buried in Camon.

This fellow came from the eastern side of the Jordan River, a region known as Gilead. It extended from the lower end of the Sea of Galilee to the northern part of the Dead Sea – all in the nation we know today as Jordan. It was in Gilead where we found Jacob running for his life from his father-in-law Laban. Camon was a town in the area of Gilead.

Finding information about Jair, outside of Scripture, is a tough task. Not much is known about him. Here is what we DO know:

- He led Israel for 22 years. That’s pretty impressive when you think that no president of the U.S. has ruled for longer than 12 years and 3 months (FDR).
- Jair apparently had lots of money. Each of his sons owned a donkey, which in those days was like owning a Mustang car today.
- He had 30 such sons (and so at least 30 donkeys). A donkey was known as the “animal of peace” and was the mark of prosperity.
- Each of those sons had authority over a community. The word “cities” in verse 4 is probably better expressed “tent encampment.”

As I pursue various commentary resources regarding Jair, I find that many of the writers give a lot of negative remarks about this man - probably because Scripture says so little. I don’t agree with them. Why not? Because Jair ruled Israel for 22 years and it was a time of peace and tranquility. When he died, Israel went into another cyclical collapse spiritually: Judges 10:6-10 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the Lord, and served not him. [7] And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon. [8] And that year they vexed and oppressed the children of Israel: eighteen years, all the children of Israel that were

1 on the other side Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead. [9]
2 Moreover the children of Ammon passed over Jordan to fight also against Judah,
3 and against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim; so that Israel was sore
4 distressed.

5 [10] And the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, saying, We have sinned
6 against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim.

7
8 Some people are really slow learners! Wouldn't you think that after all these cycles the
9 people of Israel would know better than to turn to idolatry?

10
11 I am sadly amused by some TV preachers who tell us how wonderful we are. One of
12 those fellows told his audience recently that he believed 99.9% of all human beings are
13 just plain old good people. Really? Here's what the Bible says: Jeremiah 17:9 **The**
14 **heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?**
15 Someone might fire back, "Well...that was just Jeremiah's opinion." No, Scripture is
16 given to us by the Holy Spirit through people such as Jeremiah. So it is God's opinion
17 that the human heart is wicked. What does the New Testament teach? Romans
18 1:21-25 **Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither**
19 **were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was**
20 **darkened. [22] Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, [23] And**
21 **changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible**
22 **man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. [24] Wherefore God**
23 **also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour**
24 **their own bodies between themselves: [25] Who changed the truth of God into a lie,**
25 **and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for**
26 **ever. Amen.** And God adds: Romans 3:9-18 (From the Living Bible)

27 Well, then, are we Jews better than others? No, not at all, for we have already
28 shown that all men alike are sinners, whether Jews or Gentiles. [10] As the
29 Scriptures say,

30 "No one is good--no one in all the world is innocent."

31 [11] No one has ever really followed God's paths or even truly wanted to.

32 [12] Every one has turned away; all have gone wrong. No one anywhere has kept
33 on doing what is right; not one.

34 [13] Their talk is foul and filthy like the stench from an open grave. Their tongues
35 are loaded with lies. Everything they say has in it the sting and poison of deadly
36 snakes.

37 [14] Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.

38 [15] They are quick to kill, hating anyone who disagrees with them.

39 [16] Wherever they go they leave misery and trouble behind them, [17] and they
40 have never known what it is to feel secure or enjoy God's blessing.

1 **[18] They care nothing about God nor what he thinks of them.**
2

3 This is why we MUST HAVE a Savior! For what you and I consider pretty neat stuff,
4 good works and all that, God considers filthy rags. Nothing more. And unless we cling
5 to God and His sovereign grace, we are in for a world of hurt! Why is that so hard for
6 the modern clergy to understand?
7

8 **GOD'S RESPONSE TO THE IDOLATERS**
9

10 Judges 10:11-16

11 **And the Lord said unto the children of Israel, Did not I deliver you from the**
12 **Egyptians, and from the Amorites, from the children of Ammon, and from the**
13 **Philistines? [12] The Zidonians also, and the Amalekites, and the Maonites, did**
14 **oppress you; and ye cried to me, and I delivered you out of their hand. [13] Yet ye**
15 **have forsaken me, and served other gods: wherefore I will deliver you no more. [14]**
16 **Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of**
17 **your tribulation.**

18 **[15] And the children of Israel said unto the Lord, We have sinned: do thou unto**
19 **us whatsoever seemeth good unto thee; deliver us only, we pray thee, this day. [16]**
20 **And they put away the strange gods from among them, and served the Lord: and his**
21 **soul was grieved for the misery of Israel.**
22

23 And the cycle goes on and on. By the way, as you read the Old Testament you are going
24 to find this behavior clear up to the time of the Babylonian's third invasion of Israel in
25 586 B.C. The people were such slow learners! But then....aren't we all?
26

27 Now the people search once again for a JUDGE to lead them:
28

29 Judges 10:17-18 **Then the children of Ammon were gathered together, and**
30 **encamped in Gilead. And the children of Israel assembled themselves together, and**
31 **encamped in Mizpeh. [18] And the people and princes of Gilead said one to another,**
32 **What man is he that will begin to fight against the children of Ammon? he shall be**
33 **head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.**
34

35 War clouds are forming once more over Israel - this time from the east, Jordan. The
36 Israelites lacked human leadership. God almost always uses people to accomplish His
37 purposes, thus we are vital to His redemptive plan. When people turn away from God,
38 leadership disappears from among us. As we will see next week, the Israelites turn to a
39 very unusual man for guidance.
40