

THE BRAMBLE KING: ABIMELEK

FLAWED HEROES | JUDGES 9:1-57 | JULY 16/17, 2016 | PASTOR MATT ERICKSON

"Then all the trees said to the bramble, 'You come and reign over us.'" (Judges 9:14 ESV)

The Beginnings of the Bramble King (Judges 8:27-32; 9:1-6)

- The end of Gideon/Jerub-Baal (8:27, 32)
- What's in a name? (8:31)
- The aims of Abimelek (9:1-6)

A Voice Against the Bramble King (Judges 9:7-21)

- A Parable of Trees (9:7-15)
- The Curse of the Treacherous Trees (9:16-18)
- The Curse of the Bramble King (9:19-21)

Rebellion Against the Bramble King (Judges 9:22-29)

- God working behind the scenes (9:22-24)
- The lords of Shechem as terrorists (9:25)
- Gaal son of Ebed leading revolt (9:26-29)

The Wrath of the Bramble King (Judges 9:30-57)

- Wrath against Gaal (9:30-41)
- Wrath against the people of Shechem (9:42-49)
- Wrath against Thebez (9:50-52)
- The end of the Bramble King (9:53-57)

1. Answer one of these two questions:
 - Who would you describe as one of the greatest leaders of the last 100 years, and why?
 - Who is someone that you know personally that you respect as a leader, and why?
2. This week, as we continue our "Flawed Heroes" series, we look at one of the lowest points of the book of Judges with the character of Abimelek in Judges 9. There is a lot to learn here, so take a moment to prepare your heart, asking God to speak to you through His word. After that, read the entire passage out loud.
3. The story of Abimelek is connected to the story of Gideon (also known as Jerub-baal) in Judges 6-8. What do we know about Abimelek, the end of his father's life, and the attitudes of the tribes of Israel at this time (see especially Judges 8:22-35)?
4. What happens in Judges 9:1-5? What does this tell us about Abimelek's character and the character of the leading citizens within Shechem? (Note: the word translated 'citizens' of Shechem in the NIV has the sense of 'lords' or 'leaders'; see the ESV, NASB and NLT.)
5. Jotham, the youngest son of Gideon, survives the massacre of his siblings and offers a prophetic message against Abimelek couched in a parable in 9:7-21. When he describes Abimelek as a thornbush seeking to shade the other trees, why is this both ridiculous and foolish?
6. Have you ever sought to find refuge or help from an untrustworthy person or source? What happened? How might Jotham's words guide us here?
7. The uprising against Abimelek is guided by God (9:22-24). What does this tell us about both the power and character of God?
8. The rebellion by Gaal son of Ebed (9:25-41) is short-lived and ends poorly for all involved. Why do you think the people of Shechem were drawn to Gaal?
9. As Abimelek's wrath is poured out on Gaal and his army, then the people of Shechem, and the neighboring town of Thebez, we see an ironic answer to Abimelek's promise in 9:2. What does this tell us about appearances and empty promises?
10. Abimelek's death is a dishonorable finish to a dishonorable life. Judges 9:56-57 serve as a commentary on the life and wickedness of Abimelek and Shechem. There's a saying that people get the leaders they deserve. What does Abimelek's story tell us about true leadership? What are the spiritual issues underlying the disasters of this chapter?
11. What is one thing that God is speaking to you through this study today? If you are on your own, take a moment to write it down, pray about it, and then commit to sharing that with one person this week. If you are with a small group, share your answers together and then pray for each other.

[Next week we continue the "Flawed Heroes" series by looking at the story of Jephthah in Judges 10:6-12:7. Read that passage ahead of time and pray that God speaks to us through this story.]