

Handout 1: Judges Lesson 4

The narrative itself can be divided into three parts, each representing a stage in Abimelech's career that begins after 40 years of peace and followed by Gideon's death:

1. Abimelech becomes king after murdering his Israelite kinsmen (9:1-6)
2. Jotham's fable (9:7-21)
3. Abimelech's decline and fall (9:22-57)

The four stages in the fall of Abimelech begin with God's intervention in 9:23-24:

1. The first battle of Shechem (Judg 9:25-41)
2. The second battle of Shechem (Judg 9:42-45)
3. The battle at the Tower (Judg 9:46-49)
4. The battle of Thebez and Abimelech's death (Judg 9:50-54)

A good argument can be made from the text that Abimelech's mother was a Canaanite slave:

1. Abimelech went to his uncles in Shechem and reminded them of their blood tie by using the language of covenant kinship: "I am your own flesh and bone" (9:2b). They took his case to the leaders of Shechem by arguing "He is our brother/kinsman" (9:3b). If the men of Shechem were Ephraimites they would also consider Gideon's sons and grandsons kinsmen since they were from the tribe of Manasseh and also descendants of Joseph.
2. The rulers of Shechem are described in verses 2, 3 and 6 as the baals (*baalim* meaning "lords") and not the Hebrew word for town rulers which is "elder" (in Hebrew *zaqen*).
3. The Shechemites preferred to have a half-Shechemite kinsman rule over them rather than Israelites (Judg 9:1-3).
4. Abimelech's kinsmen worshiped and obtained money at the pagan temple of Baal-Berith in Shechem (Judg 9:4, 6).
5. Abimelech was not accepted by his Israelite kinsmen because his mother was a non-Israelite slave (Judg 9:18); one's ethnic identity came from the mother for the Israelites.
6. The men of Shechem are referred to as "the men of Hamor, father of Shechem" the pagan founder of the city (Judg 9:26; also see Gen 34:19).

Jotham's parable in Judges 9:7-15: The key to the symbolic elements of the parable are found in Judges 8:22 in the offer of kingship that was made and declined by Gideon for himself, for his son and for his grandson. The "sons" of a man mean his male descendants in Scripture.

Symbolic element	What the symbolic element represents
The trees searching for a king	Men of Israel searching for a king
The olive tree	Gideon
The fig tree	Gideon's son(s)
The vine	Gideon's grandson(s)
The thorn bush	Abimelech
Cedars of Lebanon	Leaders of Shechem

The olive tree, fig tree, and the vine all have something of value to offer: the fruit of their labors, but the thorn tree/Abimelech has no "fruit" to offer only sharp thorns good for nothing. Instead he lies when he promises shade/protection since the throne tree is not big enough to provide shade. His threat is if he is not made king that he will destroy the other "trees," including the great men of the city who are like the tall cedars of Lebanon, with fire.

Handout 2: Judges Lesson 4

Shamgar, Tola, and Jair are listed among the six minor judges (also Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon). The rule of each of the minor judges is announced by the word “after” (Judg 3:31; 10:1, 3; 12:8, 11, 13). While variations of the phrase “the Israelites did what was evil in Yahweh’s eyes” introduces each of the major judges (Judg 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1).

Judges 10:6-12:7 is presented in five dialogues within five episodes:

1. Yahweh and Israel (Judg 10:6-16)
2. The elders of Israel and Jephthah (Judg 10:17-11:11)
3. Jephthah and the Ammonite king (Judg 11:12-28)
4. Jephthah and his daughter (Judg 11:29-40)
5. Jephthah and the Ephraimites (Judg 12:1-7)

There are no dialogues between God and Jephthah. Jephthah is the people’s choice not God’s choice, but God does give their choice the power to succeed by covering Jephthah with His Spirit.

Compare the stories and the dialogues between Yahweh and Israel in 10:6-18 and between Jephthah and the elders in 11:1-11. Both episodes follow the same basic pattern:

Yahweh and Israel	Jephthah and the Elders of Gilead
The Israelites reject Yahweh.	The Gileadites reject Jephthah.
The Israelites find themselves in a dangerous situation they cannot resolve.	The Israelites find themselves in a dangerous situation they cannot resolve.
The Israelites seek help from Yahweh, the One they rejected.	The Israelites seek help from Jephthah, the one they rejected.
Yahweh rebuffs their appeal.	Jephthah rebuffs their appeal.
Yahweh relents.	Jephthah relents.

The role of women in the narrative of Abimelech and Jephthah:

- Abimelech’s narrative begins with his birth by an unnamed Canaanite slave and ends with his death at the hands of a Canaanite woman.
- Jephthah’s narrative begins with his birth by an unnamed prostitute who gave him life and near the story’s end Jephthah takes the life of his unnamed daughter.

The deliverer cycle for Jephthah:

1. Announcement of Israel’s wrong doing (Judg 10:6)
2. Statement of Yahweh’s response (Judg 10:7)
3. Notice of how long Israel was oppressed by the enemy (Judg 10:8)
4. Reference to Israel’s repentance in “crying out” to God (Judg 10:10)
5. Announcement of God “raising up” a deliverer is missing, but God does clothe Jephthah in His spirit (Judg 11:29)
6. Description of how deliverance was achieved (Judg 11:32-33)
7. Concluding statement of how long peace lasted (Judg 12:7)