

Introduction

Joshua's final charge to Israel was, "choose this day whom you will serve" ([Josh 24:15](#)). Each day, we make a decision of to whom or what we will be devoted. Sometimes, we choose to devote ourselves to the Lord. Other times, we choose to devote ourselves to ourselves, to our own glory. Sometimes, we choose to sit on the fence, devoting ourselves to both God and self, which in reality, is a devotion to self.

[Judges 9](#) describes a self-appointed judge in Israel. This chapter **focuses** on one city, Shechem. Abimelech was not appointed by God to save Shechem. Abimelech appointed himself to save Shechem. As with most self-appointing leaders, he did not serve the people; he served himself.

The book of Judges is a warning about not submitting to the Lord as king. [Judges 21:25](#) "25 In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." [1 Samuel 8:7](#) "7 And the Lord said to Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them."

[Judges 9](#) warns us about carefully choosing the king to whom we submit our lives. If we devote ourselves to the things of the world, we will receive the wages of that devotion - destruction. If we devote ourselves to the Lord, we will receive the reward of that devotion - eternal life.

Abimelech's Plot

Abimelech's proposal

[Judges 9:1-2](#) "1 Now Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem to his **mother's** relatives and said to them and to the whole clan of his mother's family, 2 "Say in the ears of all the leaders of Shechem, 'Which is better for you, that all seventy of the sons of **Jerubbaal** rule over you, or that one rule over you?' Remember also that I am your bone and your flesh.""

What was Abimelech's connection to the city of Shechem? Abimelech's mother was from Shechem. Shechem was an ancient city, mentioned in early Egyptian texts. God first promised Abraham the Canaanite lands at Shechem ([Gen 12:5-7](#)). Abraham built an altar to the Lord at the oak of Moreh at Shechem ([Gen 12:6](#)). When Jacob came to Shechem, he bought land from Hamor and set up an altar to the Lord (El-Elohe-Israel) ([Gen 33:18-19](#)). Jacob later buried all of his family's idols under a terebinth tree near Shechem ([Gen 35:4](#)). When Joshua led Israel into Canaan, they renewed their covenant with the Lord at Shechem on Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim ([Josh 8:30-35](#)). Before his death, Joshua set up a stone

under a terebinth tree at Shechem as a witness of the nation's commitment to follow the Lord ([Josh 24:25-28](#)).

Who was Jerubbaal? Gideon was called Jerubbaal (let Baal contend) because of his stand against Baal worship ([Judg 6:32](#); also, [Judg 7:1](#); [8:29-30](#)).

Shechem's agreement

[Judges 9:3-4](#) “3 And his mother's relatives spoke all these words on his behalf in the ears of all the leaders of Shechem, and their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, “He is our **brother**.” 4 And they gave him seventy pieces of silver out of the house of **Baal-berith** with which Abimelech hired **worthless and reckless fellows**, who followed him.”

Why did Shechem choose to follow Abimelech? Shechem followed Abimelech because he was their relative.

What did Abimelech do with his payment? Abimelech hired “worthless and reckless fellows). Notice that the payment came from “the house of Baal-berith,” which means “master of the covenant.” This was a place of idol worship. [Judges 8:33](#) “33 As soon as Gideon died, the people of Israel turned again and whored after the Baals and made Baal-berith their god.”

Abimelech, the murderer

[Judges 9:5-6](#) “5 And he went to his father's house at Ophrah and killed his brothers the sons of Jerubbaal, seventy men, on **one stone**. But **Jotham** the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, for he hid himself. 6 And all the leaders of Shechem came together, and all Beth-millo, and they went and made Abimelech king, by the **oak of the pillar** at Shechem.”

Where did Abimelech kill his brothers? He killed them all on one stone at Gideon's house in Ophrah. The fact that he killed them on one stone shows this was not a battle. They were executed one by one.

Who escaped Abimelech? Jotham, Gideon's youngest son, escaped. He had hidden himself from Abimelech.

Where was Abimelech made king? Abimelech was made king at “the oak of the pillar at Shechem” ([Judg 9:6](#)). This probably refers to the tree where Joshua had set up the memorial stone.

Jotham's prophecy

Jotham's parable

[Judges 9:7-15](#) “7 When it was told to Jotham, he went and stood on top of Mount **Gerizim** and cried aloud and said to them, “Listen to me, you leaders of Shechem, that God may listen to you. 8 The trees once went out to anoint a king over them, and they said to the olive

tree, 'Reign over us.' 9 But the olive tree said to them, 'Shall I leave my abundance, by which gods and men are honored, and go hold sway over the trees?' 10 And the trees said to the fig tree, 'You come and reign over us.' 11 But the fig tree said to them, 'Shall I leave my sweetness and my good fruit and go hold sway over the trees?' 12 And the trees said to the vine, 'You come and reign over us.' 13 But the vine said to them, 'Shall I leave my wine that cheers God and men and go hold sway over the trees?' 14 Then all the trees said to the **bramble**, 'You come and reign over us.' 15 And the bramble said to the trees, 'If in good faith you are anointing me king over you, then come and take refuge in my **shade**, but if not, let **fire** come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon.'"

Where did Jotham deliver his parable? Jotham delivered his parable from Mount Gerizim. Mount Gerizim stood opposite of Mount Ebal at Shechem. In about 400-300 B.C., The Samaritans built a temple on Mount Gerizim. It was destroyed, in the second century B.C., possibly by John Hyrcanus I.

Whom did the trees eventually appoint as their king? The trees appointed the bramble to rule over them. This refers to a plant with thorns.

What did the bramble offer the trees if they were faithful? He offered them shade.

What did the bramble promise if they were unfaithful? He promised to set fire to them. This promise is fulfilled later in [Judges 9](#).

Jotham's explanation

[Judges 9:16-21](#) "16 "Now therefore, if you acted in good faith and integrity when you made **Abimelech** king, and if you have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house and have done to him as his deeds deserved— 17 for my father fought for you and risked his life and delivered you from the hand of Midian, 18 and you have risen up against my father's house this day and have killed his sons, seventy men on one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his female servant, king over the leaders of Shechem, because he is your relative— 19 if you then have acted in good faith and integrity with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, then rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you. 20 But if not, let **fire** come out from Abimelech and devour the leaders of Shechem and Beth-millo; and let **fire** come out from the leaders of Shechem and from Beth-millo and devour Abimelech." 21 And Jotham ran away and fled and went to Beer and lived there, because of Abimelech his brother."

Who is the bramble in Jotham's parable? The bramble is Abimelech.

What did Jotham say should happen if they acted without integrity? He said that fire would come from Abimelech and devour the leaders of Shechem and Beth-millo ([Judg 9:20](#)).

Mutiny against Abimelech

Division from God

[Judges 9:22-25](#) “22 Abimelech ruled over Israel three years. 23 And **God sent an evil spirit** between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem, and the leaders of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech, 24 that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might come, and **their blood be laid on Abimelech** their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers. 25 And the leaders of Shechem put men in ambush against him on the mountaintops, and they **robbed** all who passed by them along that way. And it was told to Abimelech.”

What caused resentment between Shechem and Abimelech? The Lord caused this resentment. God did the same thing to incite strife between Saul and David. When the Holy Spirit left Saul, the Lord sent a harmful (evil) spirit to torment him ([1 Sam 16:14](#)). Twice when this spirit came on Saul, he tried to spear David to death ([1 Sam 18:10-11](#); [19:9-10](#)). This was God’s means of removing Saul from the throne and establishing David.

Why did God create strife between Shechem and Abimelech? God caused this division to bring judgment against Shechem and Abimelech for their treachery and murdering Gideon’s sons.

Gaal’s proposal

[Judges 9:26-29](#) “26 And **Gaal** the son of Ebed moved into Shechem with his relatives, and the leaders of Shechem put confidence in him. 27 And they went out into the field and gathered the grapes from their vineyards and trod them and held a festival; and they went into the house of their god and ate and drank and **reviled Abimelech**. 28 And Gaal the son of Ebed said, “Who is Abimelech, and who are we of Shechem, that we should serve him? Is he not the son of Jerubbaal, and is not **Zebul** his officer? Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem; but why should we serve him? 29 Would that this people were under my hand! Then **I would remove Abimelech**. I would say to Abimelech, ‘Increase your army, and come out.’ ””

Who did Gaal say was an officer (overseer) of Abimelech? Gaal said that Zebul was Abimelech’s officer. This implies that while Abimelech ruled Shechem, he had appointed Zebul to govern the city while he lived elsewhere.

What did Gaal propose he would do to Abimelech? Gaal said he would remove Abimelech and would call him out to battle.

Zebul’s warning

[Judges 9:30-33](#) “30 When Zebul the **ruler** of the city heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was kindled. 31 And he sent **messengers** to Abimelech secretly, saying, “Behold, Gaal the son of Ebed and his relatives have come to Shechem, and they are stirring up the

city against you. 32 Now therefore, go by night, you and the people who are with you, and set an ambush in the field. 33 Then in the morning, as soon as the sun is up, rise early and rush upon the city. And when he and the people who are with him come out against you, you may do to them as your hand finds to do.””

What did Zebul tell Abimelech about Gaal? Zebul warned Abimelech that the Gaal had stirred up the city against Abimelech. They were no longer loyal to Abimelech. Unfortunately, this also shows Abimelech that Zebul was not keeping Shechem loyal to him.

Abimelech vs Shechem

Abimelech vs Gaal

[Judges 9:34-41](#) “34 So Abimelech and all the men who were with him rose up by night and set an ambush against Shechem in **four** companies. 35 And Gaal the son of Ebed went out and stood in the entrance of the gate of the city, and Abimelech and the people who were with him rose from the ambush. 36 And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, “Look, people are coming down from the mountaintops!” And Zebul said to him, “You mistake the **shadow** of the mountains for men.” 37 Gaal spoke again and said, “Look, people are coming down from the center of the land, and one company is coming from the direction of the Diviners’ Oak.” 38 Then Zebul said to him, “**Where is your mouth now**, you who said, ‘Who is Abimelech, that we should serve him?’ Are not these the people whom you despised? Go out now and fight with them.” 39 And Gaal went out at the head of the leaders of Shechem and fought with Abimelech. 40 And Abimelech chased him, and he fled before him. And many fell wounded, up to the entrance of the gate. 41 And Abimelech lived at Arumah, and Zebul drove out Gaal and his relatives, so that they could not dwell at Shechem.”

What did Zebul say Gaal mistook for men? He told him that he only saw shadows. Of course, Zebul knew that Abimelech was coming with an army, so he was just taunting Gaal.

How did Zebul push Gaal into battle? Zebul reminded Gaal that he had been running his mouth about overthrowing Abimelech. This was his opportunity to put action behind his words.

Attack against Shechem

[Judges 9:42-45](#) “42 On the following day, the people went out into the field, and Abimelech was told. 43 He took his people and divided them into three companies and set an **ambush** in the fields. And he looked and saw the people coming out of the city. So he rose against them and killed them. 44 Abimelech and the company that was with him rushed forward and stood at the entrance of the gate of the city, while the two companies rushed upon all who were in the field and killed them. 45 And Abimelech fought against the city **all that day**. He

captured the city and killed the people who were in it, and he **razed** the city and sowed it with **salt**.”

What did Abimelech do to the people of Shechem? Abimelech attacked the people of Shechem while they were outside of the city and killed them.

What did Abimelech do to the city of Shechem? He captured the city, killed everyone inside the city, razed the city, and covered it with salt. After Solomon’s death, Jeroboam rebuilt Shechem ([1 Kgs 12:25](#)).

Attack against the Tower

[Judges 9:46–49](#) “46 When all the leaders of the Tower of Shechem heard of it, they entered the **stronghold** of the house of El-berith. 47 Abimelech was told that all the leaders of the Tower of Shechem were gathered together. 48 And Abimelech went up to Mount Zalmon, he and all the people who were with him. And Abimelech took an axe in his hand and cut down a bundle of **brushwood** and took it up and laid it on his shoulder. And he said to the men who were with him, “What you have seen me do, hurry and do as I have done.” 49 So every one of the people cut down his bundle and following Abimelech put it against the stronghold, and they set the stronghold on **fire** over them, so that all the people of the Tower of Shechem also died, about **1,000** men and women.”

What did Abimelech do to the stronghold? Abimelech set fire to the stronghold. About 1000 people died in the fire. This fulfills Jotham’s parable that fire from the bramble would consume the people of Shechem.

Abimelech’s death

[Judges 9:50–57](#) “50 Then Abimelech went to **Thebez** and encamped against Thebez and captured it. 51 But there was a strong tower within the city, and all the men and women and all the leaders of the city fled to it and shut themselves in, and they went up to the roof of the tower. 52 And Abimelech came to the tower and fought against it and drew near to the door of the tower to burn it with **fire**. 53 And a certain woman threw an upper **millstone** on Abimelech’s head and crushed his skull. 54 Then he called quickly to the young man his armor-bearer and said to him, “Draw your sword and kill me, **lest they say of me, ‘A woman killed him.’**” And his young man thrust him through, and he died. 55 And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, everyone departed to his home. 56 Thus God **returned the evil** of Abimelech, which he committed against his father in killing his seventy brothers. 57 And God also made all the evil of the men of Shechem **return** on their heads, and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal.”

How did Abimelech die? A woman in the tower of Thebez dropped a millstone on his head. He did not die immediately, but his injury was definitely fatal. He asked his assistant to kill him so that people would not say he was killed by a woman.

How does his death relate to [Judges 4](#)? In [Judges 4](#), Jael, not Barak, received the credit for killing Sisera. This was an oral-tradition society, so people would almost certainly have told the story. Additionally, Deborah wrote a song about it, so people would have sung about Sisera being killed by a woman ([Judg 5:24-27](#)).

Why had all of these terrible things come upon Abimelech and Shechem? These things were God's judgment against Abimelech because he murdered Gideon's sons. God also judged Shechem because they supported Abimelech's violence.

Who is your master?

Once again, the book of Judges is a warning about not submitting to the Lord as king. [Judges 21:25](#) "25 In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." [1 Samuel 8:7](#) "7 And the Lord said to Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them."

Gideon similarly warned that only the Lord should rule over His people. [Judges 8:22-23](#) "22 Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, "Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also, for you have saved us from the hand of Midian." 23 Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the Lord will rule over you."

I want to point to two passages in the NT that show how we should understand the warning of the book of Judges about submitting to the Lord as our king.

Every knee

[Philippians 2:9-11](#) "9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should **bow**, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue **confess** that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

To whom will every knee bow? Every knee will bow to Christ. [Philippians 2:9-11](#) refers to [Isaiah 45:22-23](#) "22 "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. 23 By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.'" All people submit to Jesus as Lord.

What will everyone confess about Christ? Everyone will confess that Jesus is Lord. In the context, the likely means they will acknowledge His deity (see [Phil 2:6](#)).

[Psalm 110:1](#) "1 The Lord says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool."

Where does Jesus sit? Jesus sits at God's right hand. Scripture explains that this means that Jesus sits on the right side of God's throne ([Heb 8:1](#); [12:2](#)). Jesus rules over God's kingdom eternally (see [Dan 7:13-14](#)).

What will become of Jesus's enemies? All of Jesus's enemies will become His footstool. This means that his enemies will also be subjected to Him (see also [Heb 2:5-9](#)).

All people will submit to Jesus. Some will submit in faith and will be saved from God's wrath. Some will submit in judgment.

Ongoing Submission

[Romans 6:16-18](#) "16 Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are **slaves** of the one whom you obey, either of **sin**, which leads to death, or of **obedience**, which leads to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the **heart** to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, 18 and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness."

In verse 16, what are the two options to which we may submit? We can submit to sin or to obedience, specifically obedience to the Lord. Notice that verse 17 clarifies that our obedience is "from the heart," meaning that this is not a profession of faith, but a genuine submission.

[Romans 6:20-23](#) "20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21 But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is **death**. 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to **sanctification** and its end, **eternal life**. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

In verse 21, what is the outcome of submission to sin? The outcome of submission to sin is death (see also [Rom 6:23](#)). God promised this outcome before any human had sinned ([Gen 2:17](#)).

In verse 22, what are the two outcomes of submission to God? The outcomes of submission to God are sanctification and eternal life. These two things are inseparable. We are made holy (sanctified) and made alive through faith in Jesus and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. [Titus 3:5-7](#) "5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

Conclusion

[Judges 9](#) teaches us about wrongful submission. We cannot serve two masters ([Matt 6:24](#); [Luke 16:13](#); [Jam 4:4](#)). Jesus rules over us. We should devote ourselves fully to Him.