



This Sunday we considered Gideon ‘part 2’ – the less famous and rather more depressing chapters 8-9 of Judges. We considered this long story in 3 sections:

1. the problem – as Gideon forgot God, so Israel forgot God (7v23-9v6)

After the extraordinary ‘battle’ victory granted by God in 7v21-22, Gideon’s actions become rather more dubious (motivated by desire for vengeance, perhaps, rather than instruction from God – eg. 8v7, 9, 16-17, 20-21). Also, the Israel that had once been so united now seems fractured (eg. 8v1, 6, 8).

Post-battle, the Israelites ask Gideon to rule (8v22). He rightly refuses – stating that God is their ruler (v23) – but then seems to function very much as a king: demanding tributes (v24-26), creating new religious practices (v27), and establishing a house and name for himself (v27, 30).

Upon his death, Israel forget Gideon and forget God (v33-35). Gideon’s son by his Canaanite concubine – Abimelek – manipulates his mother’s relatives, murders his 70 brothers, and gets crowned king at Shechem (9v1-6).

2. the turning point – a rare interjection from a just God (9v7-24)

Jotham, however, escapes (9v5) and speaks a fable against Abimelek and his Shechemite facilitators (v7-21). He tells the story of trees hunting for someone to crown. Unable to find anyone suitable, they end up asking the thorn-bush, who agrees but warns them of the foolishness of their decision. Mutual destruction, says Jotham, will be the end for Abimelek and his Shechemite supporters (v20). The narrator agrees, interjecting in v23-24 to explain God’s plan.

3. the resolution – judgment on Abimelek (9v25-57)

This judgment is played out over the rest of chapter 9: the Shechemites attack Abimelek (v25); newcomer Gaal holds a well-attended anti-Abimelek festival

(v27-29); Abimelek trounces Gaal in a dawn raid (v30-41); he then destroys Shechem and its survivors in the tower (v42-49); then he is stopped in his tracks as he attacks Thebez by a woman who drops a millstone on his head (v50-55).

Why is this grim story preserved for us in Scripture? To show us that **God is Israel’s true king. And that he can and he will deliver his people from the evil caused by their fallen human ‘kings’ who forget him and hurt his people.** God is as able and willing to deal with the evil *inside* his people, as the evil outside it.

This is a relief for us, as it was for Judges’ first readers. Jesus is king, he’s king for good, and he is gracious and compassionate. He will never treat us as Gideon or Abimelek treated Israel. We can also be relieved because he is not a weak king. He will not let his flock be destroyed. He will deal with the sin within the church.

This is also, however, a warning. We, too, can fall into the trap of wanting human leaders over God – investing too much in them, placing them on pedestals, and struggling to cope when they let us down. But God alone is our king. Those of us who lead must heed this warning and the temptations that come with leadership.

Here are a few questions you might want to use with your group...

1. To what degree have you known or experienced evil within the church? Does it ring true that evil within the church can hurt more than evil outside of it? Why is that?
2. What seems to be at the heart of the problem in these 2 chapters? How are we prone to the very same thing?
3. Is God the author of evil in engineering Abimelek’s downfall? Where else might we go in Scripture to explore this concept?
4. Why do you think such a grim story has been preserved in Scripture for us?
5. How are we in so much of a better position than Israel, in having Jesus as our king?
6. In what ways do we choose and follow human leaders over God (in practice, if not in theory)? Why do we do that? What might a healthier approach to Christian leadership look like – both personally and corporately?