

# Give Me Leadership, Or Give Me Death!

Taken from Judges 8-9

## Foundation

Take a moment to stop and pray. Tell God about the things you struggle with in your heart and mind, and what things you desire with a passion. Ask Him to help you keep them in perspective.

### Focus

*Do you know people who will do just about anything to be the one in control?*

Abimelech scoffed in his heart as he remembered how his father, Gideon, turned down the opportunity to rule over the Israelites. “Become our king!” they had begged after seeing Gideon deliver them from the Midianites. “Not only you, but also your sons and their grandsons!” they offered.

“No,” Gideon had replied. “It is not for me or my sons to be your king, but God.” Abimelech spat on the ground in disgust as he remembered those words.... *Not for me or my sons to be your king*, he mocked in his heart. *Speak for yourself!*

Now that Gideon had died, Abimelech determined in his heart to move in and fill that position. He felt it was his right. Abimelech’s only obstacle was his seventy half-brothers. *That’s seventy threats to my becoming King*, he realized. *I’ll have to come up with a way to eliminate the competition!* Abimelech knew if anyone were

going to stand in his way, it would be one of them, so he devised a plan and traveled to his mother's relatives in Shechem for help.

"Who would you rather have as your ruler?" Abimelech charged the people of Shechem. "All seventy of Gideon's sons, or one man? Remember, I am your relative!"

Deciding to support Abimelech, the people took seventy silver coins from their temple and gave them to his cause. With this cash Abimelech hired money-hungry adventurers as his supporters, who then journeyed back with him to Ophrah. There they put to death all of his brothers—except one. Jotham had hidden and escaped being killed.

*Now I am the guaranteed ruler!* Abimelech announced, satisfied over what he had done. Little did he know...

On the day Abimelech was to be crowned king back in Shechem, Jotham climbed to an overhang and shouted out his warning to all who would hear. He announced Abimelech's unworthiness to rule, telling how he ruthlessly killed his brothers. He then pointed out that a man who attempts to control others isn't worthy.

"Those who are truly worthy to rule are too busy doing useful things to seek places of honor for themselves," he stated.

Jotham then accused the people of crowning Abimelech king only because he was their relative—not because he deserved it. Having finished his speech, Jotham jumped down and escaped to Beer to live. He was afraid of Abimelech—and rightly so!

After three years, the Shechemites weren't so happy with their new king.

"Who is this Abimelech, and why should we citizens of Shechem serve him?" Gaal, a newcomer ridiculed. "If I were in command..."

Things were turning sour, and the people were rising against

***Just because Gideon was a hero in battle, it didn't make him a hero in daily life. Gideon not only married many women, he also had a concubine through whom Abimelech was born.***

Abimelech. Already Gaal's boasting had won the confidence of the people—something Abimelech knew he would need to stop.

Gathering together a small army, Abimelech journeyed at night with his men to take positions around Shechem. At sunrise, they planned to advance upon the city and kill Gaal and his men.

***It was not uncommon during a battle for women to join the men at the city wall and drop heavy objects down upon the enemy. The one-and-a-half foot diameter millstone, a simple farmer's tool, became an excellent weapon!***

*We'll see where all his boasting gets him now,* Abimelech hissed through clenched teeth.

After defeating Gaal and his men, the victory brought Abimelech little satisfaction and no relief from his fears. *What if others in Shechem become disloyal and rise up against me?* he worried.

In an effort to protect his self-claimed authority, Abimelech returned and brutally killed the people of Shechem who were out working in their fields. He then pressed his attack against the remainder of the city, causing nearly a thousand people to run into the stronghold tower of Shechem for safety. Driven by his rage, Abimelech took branches and set them on fire near the tower entrance, causing all within to die of

suffocation. He then threw salt around the city, proclaiming it a destroyed area, worthless to be built upon again.

Just northeast of Shechem lay another town named Thebez. Not sure how far Gaal's influence had spread, Abimelech attacked that city too, trying to kill anything and everything in sight. Fearing for their lives, people ran screaming for safety, locking themselves in the tower at Thebez and climbing out upon its roof. Abimelech advanced upon the tower with the intent of burning it as well. As he drew near the tower door to set it on fire, a brave woman dropped a heavy millstone on his head, and he was struck down. Upon seeing the death of their leader, Abimelech's followers simply disbanded and went home.

Unfortunately, Abimelech's "Give me leadership, or give me death" had resulted in him getting just what he asked for.

### **Footwork**

Turn in your copy of the Scriptures to Judges 9:53-54. When this happened, what did Abimelech request of his armor bearer? Even on his deathbed he was consumed with his own pride!



Although this chapter in Israel's history is gruesome, it holds an important warning for us. The desire to be "numero uno" lies within us all. It's called the sin nature, and we each come fully equipped with it! If left unchecked, the desire for control becomes consuming. Don't get drawn into its clutches. When you have the urge to "control" others, use that as a signal to remember Jotham's words: those truly worthy to rule don't get caught up in seeking places of honor for themselves. Guard yourself and don't fall into the same trap as Abimelech.