

A FOOLISH KING IN ISRAEL

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have prayed for wisdom and read the Bible to learn what the Holy Spirit wants you to teach your students. Then let Him guide you in using these notes below to meet the needs of your students.

Lesson Aim: To flee from pride that leads to certain destruction.

Suggestion: Give next week's Student Lesson to your class to answer the questions. Let them share their answers in class. The questions below will reveal important truths you may want to emphasize.

Introduction: Gideon's refusal to rule Israel as king (8:23) became the dominating desire of his son, Abimelech (9:6). After Gideon died, Israel forgot the LORD's goodness to them during Gideon's leadership and began to worship Baal again (8:33-35). The LORD allowed Abimelech to become a king for a few years during this time of apostasy. He was the son of Gideon by a concubine. Relying on his personal contacts from his mother's side of the family, political intrigue, and mass murder, Abimelech became a king. However, he apparently only ruled over Shechem and its environs. His attempt to rule Israel was aborted by his sudden death at the hands of a woman. His death allowed judges to continue to govern the affairs of Israel. Abimelech was followed by two obscure judges. The LORD used Tola and Jair to bring peace to Israel after the turmoil caused by Abimelech. They may have judged in different parts of Israel at the same time (10:1-5). Here is a verse to memorize: "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov 16:18).

Why can we justly say that Abimelech was a foolish man? 9:1-5

First, he was proud. He did not seek the LORD's will about being a king to rule over His people, but he fashioned a sinful plan that would achieve his will. He went to Shechem where his mother's brothers lived and asked them to speak to the men of Shechem on his behalf. He asked them if it would be better for the many sons of Gideon to rule over them or to have one rule over them who was their brother. His clever plan worked; the men of Shechem claimed him as their brother. Second, he was depraved. His pride led him to discount his need for the LORD. He took seventy pieces of silver given to him from the temple of Baal to hire despicable men for his private army. He served Baal when he took money from the god that his father detested and whose altar he destroyed. This act showed that his conscience was seared. Third, he was a cruel man. His pride caused him and his hired scoundrels to murder the "seventy" sons of Gideon so he would have no one to oppose his rule of Israel. He ignored the LORD's clear command: "You shall not murder." Abimelech was a fool to think that he could escape the LORD's judgment for his acts of pride. Do not let pride control your life. Instead, humble yourself under the mighty hand of God and He will exalt you in due time (see 1 Pet 5:6).

How did Jotham's fable portray Abimelech's pride? 9:7-20

Jotham, the youngest son of Gideon, escaped Abimelech's sword. When he heard that Shechem had made Abimelech their king, he climbed Mt. Gerizim and bravely shouted a fable to the men of Shechem. The fable was about trees that were looking for a king to reign over them. They asked the olive tree to be their king, next the fig tree, and then the vine, but each was too busy making products useful to God and man to be their king. Finally, the trees asked the bramble to be their king, a thorn bush that was worthless, except to start a fire for cooking. The bramble proudly replied that if the trees truly wanted it to be their king, they should come and find shelter in its shade or let fire come out of the bramble to destroy these cedars of Lebanon. The trees were the men of Shechem that trusted Abimelech, a worthless man, to rule over them and provide for all their needs. The good trees and the vine, who refused to be their king, were the sons of Gideon. Jotham's rebuke of the Shechemites also pronounced a curse on them. The curse was fulfilled three years later when Abimelech destroyed Shechem by fire and soon after he was destroyed by fire. Pride is an ugly thing; do not let it rule and ruin your life. Let humility rescue you from its destruction.