

Judges 9:1-21 – Leadership: Corruption in Choosing

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: We have talked a lot about leadership - how important leadership is for the spreading of Christ's kingdom, how leaders must prepare, how leaders must be fair, but tough, and how leaders must take their marching orders from the King of heaven. And there seems to be a great need for this type of teaching, if I can judge by the number of downloads on SermonAudio. Today we will go 1 step further and hear from God about what happens when leadership is not chosen properly – when that selection process is corrupted! Remember: Rotting starts in the head.

Our headings are:

Corruption in Choosing Leadership Displayed

Corruption in Choosing Leadership Illustrated

Corruption in Choosing Leadership Challenged

Our goals are: **That you will see that for the progress and prosperity of Christ's church, you need to choose and submit to leadership that advances Christ's cause, and that you will fight against weak leadership that hurts Christ's cause.**

Corruption in Choosing Leadership Displayed

1 Then **Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal** went to **Shechem**, to **his mother's brothers**, and spoke with them and with all the family of the house of his mother's father, saying, 2 "Please speak in the **hearing of all the men of Shechem**: 'Which is better for you, that all seventy of the sons of Jerubbaal reign over you, or that one reign over you?' Remember that I am your own flesh and bone." 3 And his mother's brothers spoke all these words concerning him in the hearing of all the men of Shechem; **and their heart was inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, "He is our brother."** 4 So they **gave him seventy shekels of silver** from the temple of Baal-Berith, with which Abimelech **hired worthless and reckless men**; and they followed him. 5 Then he went to his father's house at Ophrah and **killed his brothers, the seventy sons of Jerubbaal, on one stone**. But Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, because he hid himself. 6 And all the men of Shechem gathered together, all of Beth Millo, and **they went and made Abimelech king** beside the terebinth 橡木 tree at the pillar that was in Shechem.

1. Abimelech was Gideon's son, but he was nothing like his father. He was more like his mother, a Shechemite. So he went to his mother's family and riled 激发 up their support in his attempt to become king of Israel. He also wanted his family to convince other Shechemites to support him as leader. He did not argue that he was godlier than others, that he was more qualified, or that he would promote God's cause. He only claimed blood relations. **And isn't it true that the person who is most undeserving of honor is often the one pursuing it with greater determination than the one who deserves it?** Remember this.

2. Did Abimelech have a right to do this? No. Not only did God not want a king for Israel, but Abimelech was a son of concubine 妾. He had no right of inheritance 遗产. (Fact: The sins of the parents came upon children to dissuade 劝阻 parents from sinful the lifestyle of having concubines.) Abimelech **was therefore usurping 篡夺 authority**. Order was important to God and he never dealt lightly with those who tried to take on authority that did not belong to them.

3. Abimelech's ploy 策略 worked. His family conspired with him and convinced the other men of Shechem to support him as king. They ignored the fact that Abimelech's own father, Gideon, had turned down Israel's clamor for him to be their king 已经拒绝了以色列的叫嚣他是他们的国王。 But **the Shechemites did not do this simply because Abimelech was their relative**. They knew that supporting Abimelech would help them to get **insider access to Abimelech if he became their king**. Many people like access. (A conservative candidate in the PC leadership race left the race and gave support to a quite liberal candidate. The 2 were quite different, but he seems to believe that she would win and that would be to his advantage.) Two lessons: **No one should be appointed to office by virtue of who their friends are**. In the election of officers, the congregation must chose based on those who are qualified. There is no divine right to rule. **When you have to choose a leader, chose not only those who have the ability, but those who would advance the cause of Christ also**. A man may be hardworking, but if he is greedy and would not use his money for good cause, he would not make a good husband. A man could have great knowledge and be able to give guidance to the weak, but if he is lazy and watches TV all the time, he is not fit to serve as an elder in the church. Leaders are not there to advance Christ's kingdom, not their own comforts. (Good warning to politicians.) At the same time, when **the good leader advances the cause of Christ and brings honor to him, it is best for him and for you also!** So you can't lose when you choose the right ruler.

Matthew 12:49 And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! 50 "For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother."

4. The Shechemites first act to the king was to give money to Abimelech. (Even the wicked know to put their money where their mouths are!) And you get a sense of the hearts of these people by the way they kept their money. They entrusted their money to their god in his temple. Abimelech used that money to hire a band of thugs 打手.

Don't corrupt the church of a holy Savior by giving your money to buy influence among leaders. That is bribery.

5. He used his thugs to slaughter his brothers. Was he thinking of Christ's kingdom? Was he thinking of the coming Savior and setting the stage for him to come like Abraham? No. He was thinking of his own kingdom. Consider another example: Jehoram, (God is exalted.) Ahab's son, did the same thing.

2Chronicles 21:4 Now when Jehoram was established over the kingdom of his father, he strengthened himself and killed all his brothers with the sword, and also *others* of the princes...

Trapp: **Sinful ambition rides without reins 缰绳.** Henry: **Sinful ambitions turn men into beasts.** There was no evidence that any of Gideon's sons was trying to become king of Israel, yet he slaughtered 屠宰 them—all of them.

6. Then the Shechemites made him king of the whole country. They didn't pray and asked God for advice. They did not ask for the priests. They did not seek out the prophets. **Their kinship 亲属关系** and **personal advantage** drove them. To not pray for wisdom to make choices about leaders is like putting your hand in the fire when you have tongs. Or it is may be a sign of arrogance, thinking you know everything.

7. With such corruption in leadership and such a blatant 明显的 usurping of authority, Israel did nothing. They forgot all that Gideon did for them. They forgot what God did for them. Israel kept to the own quiet life while wickedness ran the country.

"Evil triumphs when good men do nothing." How willing are you to speak up against wicked leaders?

Corruption in Choosing Leadership Illustrated

7 Now when they told Jotham, he went and stood on top of Mount Gerizim, and lifted his voice and cried out. And he said to them: "Listen to me, you men of Shechem, That God may listen to you! 8 "The trees once went forth to anoint a king over them. And **they said to the olive tree**, 'Reign over us!' 9 But the olive tree said to them, 'Should I cease giving my oil, With which they honor God (**gods**) and men, And go to sway over trees?' 10 **"Then the trees said to the fig tree**, 'You come and reign over us!' 11 But the fig tree said to them, 'Should I cease my sweetness and my good fruit, And go to sway over trees?' 12 **"Then the trees said to the vine**, 'You come and reign over us!' 13 But the vine said to them, 'Should I cease my new wine, Which cheers both God (**gods**) and men, And go to sway over 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 truth you anoint me as king over you, Then **come and take shelter in my shade**; But if not, let fire come out of the bramble 荆棘 And **devour the cedars of Lebanon 吞噬黎巴嫩的雪松!**

1. Jotham, one of Gideon's sons, probably the youngest who managed to escape Abimelech's slaughter 屠宰, adjured 恳请 the men of Shechem to listen to him. He pointed out that if they did not listen to him, God would not listen to their prayers when they cried to him.

Proverbs 28:9 One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, Even his prayer *is* an abomination 厌恶.

If you don't listen to God, you can't expect him to listen to you. God is not a sappy Grandpa. He is holy and just!

2. Jotham's then used illustrations to make things clearer. He called the Israelites "trees." God commonly called people trees. (BTW, this shows the foolish misinterpretation 误解 of popular TV preachers who think that when the Bible says we must plant trees in Israel, we must plant olives and figs!) Hinn. Look at the 4 illustrations:

a. The trees (Israelites) wanted a king, so they asked the Olive Tree – a most profitable tree- (possibly Othniel or Ehud) to reign over them. But he wouldn't. He chose freedom rather than kingship. Trapp: He did not want to go **haliprancing**... working constantly and not having a normal life.

b. The trees (Israelites) then asked the fig tree –a most fruitful tree (possibly Deborah) to rule over them, but she declined, choosing rather to enjoy the comforts of life rather than be leader.

c. The trees (Israelites) then asked the vine-a most enjoyable plant (possibly Gideon who had many offspring), to be king, but he wouldn't. (Wine is used positively as a blessing, but see how it has become a curse because of abuse.)

Psalms 104:15 And *wine that makes glad the heart of man*, Oil to make *his* face shine, And bread *which* strengthens man's heart.

d. The trees (Israelites) asked the useless bramble/thistle/thorn – (Abimelech) to be their king and he accepted. It was obviously he was inadequate, as bramble does not have much shade but is thorny. A sheep that went to the thistle

for shade would lose some of its wool. Further, the bramble became violent and attempted to take down those who were bigger than he (cedars of Lebanon.)

Ecclesiastes 10:6 Folly 蠢事 is set in great dignity 尊严 While the rich sit in a lowly place. What a sad illustration this was of wicked leadership! Yes, sometimes fools are in position of leadership.

3. Do you notice that Jotham did not try to make himself king? He did not start an army to fight against Abimelech. So Gideon's sons were not interested in being king. What a rotten soul Abimelech was!

Corruption in Choosing Leadership Challenged

16 "Now therefore, if you have acted in truth and sincerity in making Abimelech king, and if you have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have done to him as he deserves—17 "for my father fought for you, risked his life, and delivered you out of the hand of Midian; 18 "but you have risen up against my father's house this day, and killed his seventy sons on one stone, and made Abimelech, the son of his female servant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your brother—19 "if then you have acted in truth and sincerity with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, then rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you.

1. Jotham then challenged the Shechemites to search their hearts to see if they did well by selecting such a leader. He knew they didn't do well, but he wanted them to see that themselves. So he asked 2 poignant 刺激的 questions.

a. Are you acting from truth and sincerity or are you acting from personal benefits and nepotism 裙带关系?

b. Have you treated your leaders with the proper honor that belonged to them? Do you realize how much danger Gideon put himself through to protect you? Do you see Gideon's love for the people? Have you done well by murdering his 70 sons on one stone?

Isn't this what many have done, though in a worse way, to Jesus? They ignore his great work on the cross and choose a false gift – like moralistic 道德 preaching, only to end up disappointed. They see Jesus as simply a good man who taught self-sacrifice! Or they see Jesus as only a means to health and wealth! What a robbery of Christ's honor!

20 "But if not, let fire come from Abimelech and devour the men of Shechem and Beth Millo; and let fire come from the men of Shechem and from Beth Millo and devour Abimelech!"

2. And then Jotham warned the Shechemites what would happen to them for their selfishness in seeking their own advantage, and for their ungratefulness to Gideon and the Lord. He said that Abimelech would devour the very ones who conspired to put him in office. He would turn against them with great rage (fire) and destroy them. So they would get no personal favors as they expected. This was an imprecatory 咒诅 prayer, a prayer of judgment, made as the voice of Christ. And it came true. **The mongoose 猫鼬 and the snake would both die.**

Isn't this what would happen to those who reject Jesus and put their trust in other people and things? People who think that the government will take care of them from the cradle to the grave 从摇篮到坟墓 will be disappointed. **The will find they might not be able to do that...and surely governments can't provide for eternity.** This is why you must rely upon your Savior alone and on the means he has put in place for you to have godly leaders over you who will not be afraid to warn you when you take your eyes off of Jesus and become selfish.

21 And Jotham ran away and fled; and he went to Beer and dwelt there, for fear of Abimelech his brother.

3. Considering that Abimelech had already killed 68 siblings, Jotham did not stay. And this is wisdom.

Sometimes you have to flee from those who don't want to hear the message. If wicked don't want to follow the true leader who will bring them to the Father, leave them. Go elsewhere.

Conclusion:

Abimelech usurped authority and used his relatives to become king. His relatives helped him so they could get benefits from him. It was a wicked marriage. And the rest of Israel were too busy with their own pleasure and profit to care. Emboldened 底气 by the encouragement he received and the indifference of Israel, Abimelech murdered his brothers. Jotham then challenged Shechemites to rethink their actions, otherwise they would be consumed by Abimelech.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: It is most important to have good and godly leaders in the home, church, and state. Christ's kingdom's work is at stake. It is your most important work! **This means you have to choose well.** Don't choose the "nice and shiny" person, or the smooth talker, or the one who promotes himself. Choose the one who will advance Christ's cause. Don't choose a husband because he will treat you well. (He could be nasty to others, while he is nice to you.) Don't choose a minister because you will have his attention. (He could be ignoring his family. Can you live with that?) Don't choose a member of parliament because he will raise the minimum wage. (He might cause others to suffer to do it.) **Choose the one who advances Christ's cause and serves the Savior.**

Finally, if Jesus isn't your Lord, you will be consumed by the fires of hell for eternity. May you flee the judgment to come by calling on God for mercy, mercy that comes through Christ's sacrifice on the cross.