

# The Christian Arsenal

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## JUDGES 9:1-12:15

As I looked at this week's lesson, which is supposed to begin in **Judges 10**, I remembered that we didn't even touch on the life of Gideon's son, Abimelech, last Sunday. And as I thought about the life of Jephthah, I couldn't help but notice the sharp contrast in the lives of these two men. So, with that in mind, let's turn to **Judges 9** and look first at the life of Abimelech and then we'll look at the life of Jephthah.

The Bible tells us that Abimelech was the son of Gideon by his concubine who lived in Shechem. We don't know how many wives and concubines Gideon had. **Judges 8** simply makes the statement... "he had many wives..." We do know he had seventy sons.

**Chapter 9** tells us that after Gideon died, Abimelech went to his mother's people who lived in Shechem and made a proposal to them...

### **Judges 9:1-2...**

Do you see what's happening? Abimelech is craftily garnering **political support**. Somehow, Abimelech has convinced himself and his relatives that they need a ruler and that ruler needed to be Abimelech.

### **Verses 3-5...**

There was only one thing that stood in Abimelech's way...he had some half brothers who needed to be done away with. So, he took seventy pieces of silver from his mother's relatives and (by the way, this money came from the Baal temple) he hired some "hit men" to kill his half brothers.

However, **one** escaped...**a man named Jotham**.

### **Verse 6...**

Now, to begin with, the demands of God's law called for Abimelech and his thugs to be put to death for this mass murder, but nobody raised a hand against him. **As a matter of fact, when Abimelech returned to Shechem, he wasn't exposed as a murderer, he was crowned as king.**

This brings us to a very interesting parable. Jotham was the only son of Gideon who escaped being killed by Abimelech's hit men. When Jotham was told that his half brother had been made king by all the men of Shechem, he went and stood on top of Mt. Gerazim...Let's hear what he said...

### **Verses 8-16...**

What does this parable mean?

Well, a nominating committee from the realm of trees came to three different species of trees...**the olive tree, the fig tree and the vine**...and asked each one to be king over them. And each, in turn, said, "No."

The reason they said, "No," is because they each recognized the fact that they already had a King...God. Not only that, they each recognized God created them to do a certain thing...**to bear fruit**...and they were content to do what God had created them to do.

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But, then they came to the bramble and the bramble had a different answer for them, didn't it? The bramble was a bush that bore no fruit. It was a nuisance because it could suddenly catch on fire in the heat of the desert. The bramble was a product of God's curse on the earth in **Genesis 3**.

**It gave no fruit...it gave no shade...it was worthless...**but it was more than willing to reign over the other trees.

Now, Jotham's point is obvious, isn't it? When the people crowned Abimelech king, they were choosing an absolutely worthless man who was willing to be king.

This parable of Jotham also contains a lesson the Holy Spirit wanted you and me to see in this chapter. The spiritual vacuum in Israel wasn't filled by fruit-bearing, useful, godly men. The vacuum was filled by a useless, worthless, dangerous, violent bramble named Abimelech.

**If God is not King, someone or something will arise in His place. If God had been kept in His place as King, Abimelech would never have been successful. Where there is a spiritual vacuum, Satan is always ready to rush in and fill it.**

This same principle operates within Christians. If we aren't practicing the Lordship of Jesus Christ, there is a spiritual vacuum in our lives which will be filled by something or someone.

How many of us know that from experience? How many of us have walked around under the control of someone or something else besides the Lord Jesus Christ? AM I THE ONLY ONE? How many of you have been controlled by a "bramble"?

Beloved, our flesh is a bramble. If it takes control of my life and your life, it won't produce fruit, it won't give you the comfort of a shade, it won't give you any protection. Let me tell you what the bramble of the flesh will produce in you...just a few of the things that Paul tells us in Galatians 5...

***immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery...***

Well, you say, "My flesh will never produce those ugly things...well, maybe not...but let me tell you a few more..."

***enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envyings...***

Have any of these things ever controlled your life? My life and your life, Beloved, will show the results of who or what controls it. The flesh will produce nothing but brambles...but the Holy Spirit will produce Christlike character.

**Paul tells us that if we walk according to the Spirit we will not do the desires of the flesh.**

Well, let's get back to Abimelech.

Abimelech ruled over Israel three years...but he was never God's choice...and one day a man named Gaal mounted a conspiracy against Abimelech and to make a longer story shorter, Abimelech came against the very men who had chosen him to be king. These men didn't cry out

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to Jehovah to save them...these men ran into an idol temple and Abimelech set fire to it and they were all burned up.

Then Abimelech went to the city Thebez and captured it...and all the people of the city rushed into a tower and Abimelech was killed there as he attempted to burn the tower down. He died as he lived. He lived violently and he died violently...**in fact, he died when a woman who was up in the tower threw a millstone down on his head, crushing his skull.**

Well, on that happy note, let's see a very brief overview of **chapter 10**. This chapter tells of two more men who judged Israel...Tola and Jair. But, what I want us to see is the condition of Israel...

## **Judges 10:7-16...**

Do you see the grace of God operating here? Many times God will simply take His hands off us and allow us to reap what we have sown. And that's what we see in verse 14.

And again, the people cried out for deliverance and turned to God...at least for awhile...

**Don't ever believe that God's grace is nowhere to be found in the Old Testament! It's there in great measure!**

**Verse 17** opens up for us yet another crisis. The Ammonites have come and camped in Gilead.

In **Chapter 11**, we're introduced to a man named Jephthah. This man's life is a sharp contrast to the life of Abimelech.

The first thing we see about Jephthah's life was his family background. His mother was a common prostitute, **and Jephthah was the unwanted, illegitimate son of a man Gilead.**

Apparently his father had enough concern for him to take him into his own house, and to give him some kind of legal status, but Jephthah grew up with the scars of his parents' sins. Then, when his younger half brothers became old enough, they drove Jephthah away from his family and his home, and he became a social outcast. In the society of that day, this was a terrible situation in which to be.

Jephthah fled from his father's home and he gathered around him a rather motley crew of men.

Then, the Ammonites came against Israel, and who did the sons of Gilead send for to deliver them? JEPHTHAH

Jephthah, the one born to a harlot!

Jephthah, the one who would have been forbidden to enter the temple because he was illegitimate!

Jephthah, the one they had sent away in anger.

Jephthah had lived a hard life. Life's hardships will do one of two things...

- 1) They will drive us **away from** the Lord
- 2) They will drive us **to** the Lord.

Let me just say this...the Lord doesn't produce Christians like Ford or General Motors produce automobiles. I mean, Christians don't come off the assembly line...all looking alike...all thinking alike...all from the same kinds of backgrounds and families. All Christians don't fit in the same kind of mold.

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Jephthah looks so unlike a man God could ever use...but God did!

**God never wastes anything in one of His children's lives. Sometimes we, as Christians, fall into the trap of viewing our preconversion experience as a vast wasteland from which nothing can be redeemed.**

But that's not so! The same Lord who was sovereign in our salvation was also sovereign before our salvation. **Nothing is ever wasted if we give it to Jesus! He can take ever broken fragments and give them purpose and meaning.** He can use even sad and dark pages of our lives for our good and His glory if we'll just let Him!

## **Verses 4-11...**

Well, the first thing Jephthah did was to pursue a negotiated settlement. Jephthah sent messengers to the king of Ammon, asking him why they had gathered to fight against Israel.

## **Verse 13...**

Let me just summarize what Jephthah said to the king of Ammon.

I don't know where Jephthah gained his knowledge of Jewish history, but he knew it... He told the Ammonite king...

“Look, we didn't take your land from you. When the sons of Israel were passing through the wilderness to the Red Sea, they sent messengers to the king of Edom, the king of Moab, and the king of the Amorites and none would allow them to pass through their land.

So, our God gave our fathers the land of the Amorites from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok and from the wilderness as far as the Jordan...”

In other words, what Jephthah was saying is this...

“Look, fella, **check your history**...we captured the land from Sihon, the king of the Amorites, not the Ammonites...”

And he was also saying,

“**Check your theology**...the LORD God of Israel gave us this land and we cannot surrender His gift.”

(I wish some of the Jews in Israel today would read a page out of Jephthah's book!)

## **Verses 23-27...**

Jephthah's answer was grounded in truth! He stood firmly on fact!

Our calling is the same, Beloved. We don't go into the world telling man our opinions or even our experiences. We must proclaim the fact of Jesus Christ...who He is, what He did, and what He is doing and what He will do.

We may add our personal testimony to that, but we attack Satan on the ground of truth, not on the ground of experience and feelings!!

Well, the bottom line is that the king of Ammon came against Israel anyway, and God gave Jephthah the victory...**Verses 29 and 32**

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Let's look at Jephthah's vow...

**Verses 30-31; 34-40...**

**Now, let me tell you there is much disagreement among theologians about this passage of Scripture.**

There are basically two views on this...

1) Jephthah did **not** offer his daughter as a burnt offering. She was simply kept a virgin, perhaps as a servant in the Temple, until the day she died. This would mean Jephthah would die without someone to carry on his line. This was, of course, a huge thing back then in that culture.

2) Jephthah actually **did** offer his daughter as a burnt offering.

**I don't know whether he did or he didn't.** I find it hard to believe that a man who knew as much Jewish history didn't know any Jewish law. The Law of Moses made it very clear that humans were not to be sacrificed.

**Having said that...I think we need to acknowledge the fact that as painful as this was...whichever way it went...both Jephthah and his daughter were willing to honor his vow. And that is more than we can say for many folks today.**

Let's just say this about vows...

- 1) As believers, we must make certain commitments to the Lord.
- 2) Our commitments should be made only after much soul searching and prayer.
- 3) Our commitments should then become a reality... we must follow through!!

**Ecclesiastes 5:4-5...** "When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying, for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you owe.

It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay."

Well, again, I know we've raced through this Scripture. We've see today a man named Abimelech, born of a concubine.

This man never consulted the LORD God Jehovah.  
This man was a murderer of his brothers.  
This man was never used by God for good.  
This man never helped anybody but himself.

And we've also met a man named Jephthah, born of a harlot.

This man was thrown out of his family.  
This man became a leader of his people.

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This man knew Jewish history, he knew what God had done for his fathers.  
This man gave God glory and honor.  
This man's name is found in **Hebrews 11**, along side David and Samuel.

I don't believe there is any one of you who is an Abimelech. But there may be a Jephthah in here this morning.

**If you have anything in your past...something you have done or something that has been done to you...and you think that God cannot use you because of it...THINK AGAIN!!**

If God can use Jephthah, He can use me and He can use you!!

Let me just say a couple more things and then I promise we'll be through...

Beloved, HOW WILL YOU BE REMEMBERED? Will folks remember you as someone who lived a **nominal Christian life? What kind of heritage or legacy are you leaving to your children and grandchildren?** Will folks remember you as being **completely committed to God**, even if it meant going the second and third and fourth mile?

May God enable us to leave behind this kind of legacy for our children.