

The Judges 3

Lesson 7

Judges 9 - 12



What happened before?

The Israelites continued the cycle of obedience and disobedience. God had called Gideon to lead Israel. Although Gideon was reluctant to accept the challenge he was a good leader. He threw down the altar of Baal and led 300 men to battle against the huge Midianite army. God gave Gideon the victory.

BIBLE STORY:

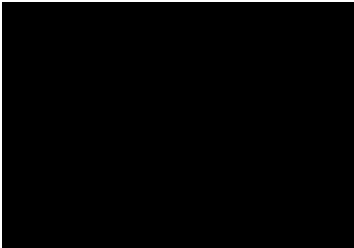
After Gideon died, once again Israel forgot God and how He had delivered them from their enemies. They also forgot all the things that Gideon had done for them and did not treat his family with kindness.

Gideon had 70 sons. Then he had another son named Abimelech. Abimelech had a different mother than the other sons of Gideon. He was nothing like his father. Abimelech talked with his mother's kinspeople and convinced them that it would be better to have one ruler (himself) instead of 70 (referring to the 70 sons of Gideon). The men of Shechem liked his plan so well that they gave him money out of the house of their idol and made him their ruler. Abimelech used the money to hire some rough fellows and they went to Ophrah and killed 69 sons of Gideon who were there. They thought they had killed all 70 of them, but the youngest son, Jothan, escaped. The people made Abimelech their king. When Jothan heard that Abimelech had been made king, he went to Mount Gerizim and declared that the men of Shechem had set an evil man over them.

After about three years, a man named Gaal urged some of the men of Shechem to follow him as their new leader and promised to destroy Abimelech. He fortified the city and prepared to fight Abimelech.

When Abimelech learned of Gaal's conspiracy against him, he gathered his men surrounded the city of Shechem at night. In the early morning, Gaal saw Abimelech's army and went out to fight, but was chased back into the city. Eventually Abimelech captured the city and destroyed it.

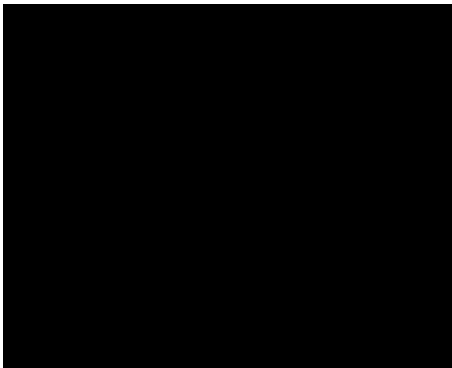
During the fighting, a large number escaped and took refuge in the temple of the god Berith. When Abimelech heard they were there, he had his men cut down boughs and carry them to the stronghold. They set the



boughs on fire and the place was burned with all the people inside. The last people of Shechem were destroyed.

Soon afterward, Abimelech attacked the town of Thebez. The people fled to the strong tower in the city and hid in it. Many people were on top of the tower. Abimelech tried to burn the tower with the people in it, but this time it did not work. One of the women on the tower threw a great stone down and hit him on the head. He did not die instantly, but knew he was mortally wounded. He was so vain that he did not want it said that he had been killed by a woman. He asked his armor bearer to kill him with his sword and he did. It was a violent death for a violent man. God punished him for killing his brothers.

After Abimelech was killed there followed two judges about whom very little is written. Tola became the seventh judge of Israel. He was of the tribe of Issachar, but lived in the hill country of Ephraim. He judged Israel 23 years. The eighth judge was Jair, who lived in Gilead. He had 30 sons, and they had 30 cities. He judged Israel 22 years.

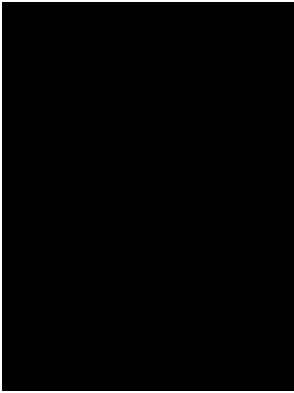


After Jair died, the Israelites were in trouble again. They bowed down to the gods of their heathen neighbors. They turned away from God and would not serve Him. The Israelites were very much oppressed by the Philistines on one side and the Ammonites on the other. After suffering for 18 years, the Israelites remembered God and what He had done for them in the past. Once again, they called on the Lord to save them. They got a surprise. God told them He would not save them this time. He told them to go and cry out to their new gods. Let them get them out of trouble. The people were really sorry, though, and got rid of their idols, and worshipped God. When God saw that they were obedient to Him again, He was grieved for the misery of Israel.

The Ammonites came up into the land to make war against Israel. The elders of Gilead sent for Jephthah telling him they needed him to lead the army against Ammon. Jephthah agreed to help them if they would make him their leader.

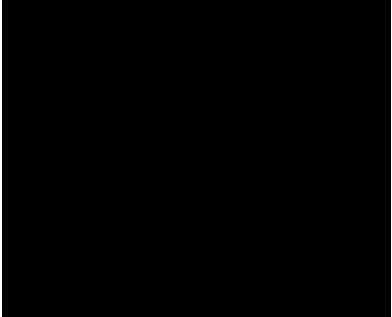
The king of the Ammonites wanted to take back all the land the Israelites had taken from the Ammonites. Jephthah tried to reason with the king of the Ammonites. He told them that when the Israelites came up from Egypt they had asked permission to pass through the land of the Ammonites without harming the land. The Ammonites had refused to allow them to pass through and came out to battle against the Israelites.

He reminded the king that the Israelites won the battle against the Ammonites and God gave the land to them. The Ammonites insisted that they have the land back. Nothing would persuade the Ammonites to leave them alone so Jephthah went out to fight the Ammonites.



Jephthah made a vow that if God would give him this battle, he would offer as a burnt offering the first thing that came out of his house to meet him when he came home from battle. This vow was totally unnecessary, for the Spirit of the Lord had already come upon him.

Jephthah won the battle and went back home. As he approached his house, he saw his daughter coming out of their house, leading a procession in celebration of her father's victory. Jephthah loved his daughter very much and was grieved when he remembered his vow. He told his daughter about the vow. She was a brave girl and told him he must keep the vow. She asked that she be allowed to go up on the mountain for two months before he kept his vow. He allowed her to go. She returned and he carried out his vow. It is unlikely that Jephthah offered her as a burnt offering—though he was obligated to honor his vow in some way. It is more likely that she was given to the service of the Lord. The Law of Moses forbids the offering of humans as a burnt offering, (Deuteronomy 12:31).



After the fighting was over, the men of the tribe of Ephraim came to Jephthah and complained that they had not been given a chance to help in the victory. Jephthah tried to explain that he had called for them, but they did not come. He had to fight without them. The men of Ephraim were determined to fight so Jephthah's men fought them. Jephthah's men were winning the battle and the Ephraimites ran away and tried to cross the Jordan River to get to safety. The men of Jephthah beat them to the river. When an Ephraimite came to cross over the river, they asked him if he was an Ephraimite. Naturally he would say "No." Then he was told to say the word "Shibboleth." The men of Ephraim could not pronounce the word correctly and would say, "Sibboleth." By that they knew he was an Ephraimite and they killed him right there.

Jephthah judged Israel 6 years and died. He is listed among the men of faith in Hebrews 11:32.

We are not told much about the next three judges. After Jephthah, Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel for seven years. After Ibzan, Elon the Zebulite judged Israel for ten years, then Abdon judged eight years.



This was not a good time for Israel. It was a time of violence and danger, but God continued to preserve Israel because of His promises to Abraham. God's plan was to bring the Savior through Israel.

