

Judges Abimelech

Chapter 9

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I do not believe in karma. According to Hinduism, a person's present state of existence is determined by their performance in previous lives. The word *karma* literally means *action*. If a person's actions were good, then, in their beliefs, when reincarnated, they move towards liberation. However, if in a past life they did evil, then in this life they experience the bad karma of having to suffer for their evil actions. The Hindu's goal is to achieve enough good karma to remove themselves from the cycle of rebirths and achieve eternal bliss.

I do not believe in karma. I do not believe in reincarnation.

I believe, as the Bible teaches, such as in Hebrews 9:27, *it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a 2nd time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.*

When we die we face God and are held accountable for how we have lived. In this life our actions have consequences, but even if justice should seem to be flaunted, God is just and will not let the guilty go unpunished. And the Bible also says He is merciful, and has given us the only way to being saved from condemnation for our own sins. There is no other name given under heaven by which we are saved except Christ Jesus.

Yet even in this life, the Bible shows us that God may give a very appropriate response to evil. The events in Judges 9 bear witness to that. By the end of chapter 8 Gideon's life is reviewed with mixed feelings, for he was a judge, and was used by God to rescue his people from Midian. Yet he abused his power.

He had a concubine from Shechem, which at that time was a Canaanite town. Chapter 9 sets out the awful mess of what happened when their son, Abimelech, rose to prominence.

Abimelech began by appealing to the Shechem locals. He went to them and made a political speech requesting that they endorse him as the candidate to be their king, so that his 70 half brothers wouldn't become the new kings. This was in spite of Gideon refusing to be crowned king. However the name Abimelech in English means something like "my father is king."

Using a fear of race, Abimelech swung the men of Shechem to call on him to be their king. So they gave him 70 gold coins from the local Baal shrine's coffers, for his campaign. Abimelech used that money to hire a gang of ruffians, who helped him kill 69 of his half brothers on 1 large stone, which was probably a stone used in collecting blood during animal sacrifices. However, they could not find the youngest son, Jotham, who was hiding.

Having wiped out possible opposition, the men of Shechem crowned him their king at the very spot where, years earlier, the people had sworn obedience to the Lord and Joshua had caused a copy of the Law to be kept at the oak tree pillar in Shechem.

When told of his half-brother's crowning, Jotham then addressed the people from a safe distance, telling them an applied parable of the trees, and then he escaped to a much safer place to live.

The parable begins *The trees once went out to anoint a king over themselves.*

They asked an olive tree, a fig tree and a vine, each refusing, declaring that they wouldn't stop producing their crops just to sway over trees. Finally they approach an unproductive bramble who is honoured to accept, with a small proviso... the trees would have to come under its shade, but if they refused, he would burn the cedars of Lebanon.

Jotham explained that the bramble was worthless, unproductive Abimelech. By making him king, then he would destroy them like a bushfire.

The honeymoon lasted 3 years. We are told that God instigated the unrest of the lords of Shechem. They set up groups like Robin Hood's men, plundering the traders going near Shechem, undermining the protection (or shade) that Abimelech guaranteed. Then a pretender to the throne started boasting and calling for a showdown.

Like his father, Abimelech moved his troops in at night, and the town of Shechem was destroyed in 3 campaigns. One was in the city, one in the paddocks around it, and then the final slaughter came when 1000 men and women had assembled in a stronghold of a tower for protection. Abimelech burnt it and killed them all.

He then turned to another rebellious town, the town of Thebez. They too resorted to a strong tower, and

as it was being attacked, a woman picked up a millstone and threw it off the tower. It hit Abimelech's head. As he lay wounded, he pleaded with a servant to kill him, so that he too would not die at the hands of a woman. As he killed his brothers at the one stone, so a stone led to his death.

The summary verses are in verses 56-57 *Thus God repaid Abimelech for the crime he committed against his father in killing his 70 brothers; and God also made all the wickedness of the people of Shechem fall back on their heads, and on them came the curse of Jotham son of Gideon.*

So God gave Abimelech and the people of Shechem a very appropriate response to their evil.

Does that mean that it will happen every time, and that a fitting punishment will be given to someone? No. As Habakkuk would say in Habakkuk 1:2-5 *O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save? Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous— therefore judgment is perverted.*

And when the people got excited in Luke 13 because they heard of deaths, it says *At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. Jesus asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those 18 who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."*

We may not see true justice and good judgements in our lifetime. Evil may flourish. Destruction may not be direct punishments. But Jesus does promise a Judgement Day with true justice. We must be ready. John 3.16 *For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him will not perish, but will have eternal life.*