

## Gideon's son, Jotham

### *Judges 9:5-23*

**9:5** And he [*Abimelech*] went unto his father's house at Ophrah, and slew his brethren the sons of Jerubbaal [*Gideon*], being threescore and ten persons, upon one stone: notwithstanding yet **Jotham** the youngest son of Jerubbaal [*Gideon*] was left; for he hid himself. **9:6** And all the men of Shechem gathered together, and all the house of Millo, and went, and made Abimelech king, by the plain of the pillar that was in Shechem. **9:7** And when they told it to **Jotham**, he went and stood in the top of mount Gerizim, and lifted up his voice, and cried, and said unto them, Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you.

**9:8** The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us. **9:9** But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? **9:10** And the trees said to the fig tree, Come thou, and reign over us. **9:11** But the fig tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees? **9:12** Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou, and reign over us. **9:13** And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? **9:14** Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou, and reign over us. **9:15** And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon.

#### a neglected prophet

Abimelech, a wicked son of Gideon, is notorious for killing 70 of his brothers in order to become king (9:1-5), but the prophetic ministry (9:7-20) of Gideon's youngest son, Jotham, against Abimelech is easily overlooked.

**9:16** Now therefore, if ye have done truly and sincerely, in that ye have made Abimelech king, and if ye have dealt well with Jerubbaal [*Gideon*] and his house, and have done unto him according to the deserving of his hands; **9:17** (For my father fought for you, and adventured his life far, and delivered you out of the hand of Midian: **9:18** And

ye are risen up against my father's house this day, and have slain his sons, threescore and ten persons, upon one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his maidservant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your brother;) **9:19** If ye then have dealt truly and sincerely with Jerubbaal [*Gideon*] and with his house this day, then rejoice ye in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you: **9:20** But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech, and devour the men of Shechem, and the house of Millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem, and from the house of Millo, and devour Abimelech. **9:21** And **Jotham** ran away, and fled, and went to Beer, and dwelt there, for fear of Abimelech his brother. **9:22** When Abimelech had reigned three years over Israel, **9:23** Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech: ...

### *Judges 9:56-57*

**9:56** Thus God rendered the wickedness of Abimelech, which he did unto his father [*Gideon*], in slaying his seventy brethren: **9:57** And all the evil of the men of Shechem did God render upon their heads: and upon them came the curse of **Jotham** the son of Jerubbaal [*Gideon*].

## negatives

Deborah was called a prophetess in Judges 4:4. But nowhere does it say that Jotham was a prophet. Nor was he a judge. Judges regularly led armies, but Jotham fled in fear (9:21). Aside from speaking out against the men of Shechem once, all that it says that he did was hide (9:5) and flee (9:21). Thus, he was not much of a hero.

If God's judgment had come swiftly to the men of Shechem and Abimelech, after Jotham spoke, it would be obvious that God approved all that Jotham said (D-6). But nothing

happened until more than three years later (9:22-23). Was this because God does not hurry to judge the wicked, or was it because there was something wrong with what Jotham said or did? Was he too emotional (B-2)? Did he selfishly call for revenge (B-5, B-6)? Was he needlessly rude and insulting to Abimelech and others (B-4)?

If there was something wrong with Jotham, his speech would probably indicate this by being somewhat disorganized. Is it? (Line B-3 is more important than it may seem.)

*Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).*

<b>A</b>	( ) <b>Jotham's position was weak.</b>
A-1	( ) He was still young.
A-2	( ) He was afraid of Abimelech (9:21).
A-3	( ) After he finished speaking, he fled (9:21).
A-4	( ) He acted alone as far as we know (9:5, 21).
A-5	( ) His speaking did not accomplish much (9:21, 57).
A-6	( ) He probably did not have much military experience.
<b>B</b>	( ) <b>Jotham spoke like an angry man.</b>
B-1	( ) He spoke very loudly (9:7).
B-2	( ) He was too emotional (9:7-20).
B-3	( ) His speech was poorly organized.
B-4	( ) His parable was insulting (9:14-15).
B-5	( ) He wanted Abimelech to be killed (9:20).
B-6	( ) He wanted Shechem to be burned (9:20, 49).

## positives

It is easy, of course, to criticize Jotham's fear and flight, but would it have been better for him to have stood his ground and been killed by Abimelech? No! Even David wisely chose to flee from Absalom in 2 Samuel chapter 15. Unlike David, Jotham was not a military leader. So his safest and wisest option was to flee and hide.

That said, if Jotham was really just a coward, why did he put his life in danger by speaking at all? He could have fled and hid without saying anything. Instead, he spoke.

Moreover, Jotham spoke very well. His parable drew a powerful parallel between the trees selecting the bramble bush as their king and the men of Shechem choosing Abimelech. His three basic points were: 1.) that no noble person would want to become the king of Israel, 2.) that the men of Shechem made a very poor choice, and 3.) that the bramble-like Abimelech would likely cost the men of Shechem dearly.

*Notice that conditional "if" lines begin in 9:15 and continue after the parable in 9:16-20. Thus, Jotham's curse was fair.*

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

<b>C</b>	( ) Jotham's speech was persuasive.
C-1	( ) He used a parable (9:7-15).
C-2	( ) He explained his parable (9:16-20).
C-3	( ) He asked many questions (9:9, 11, 13)?
C-4	( ) His parable was appropriate (9:15, 47-49).
C-5	( ) He used conditional "if" statements (9:19-20).
C-6	( ) He reminded the people of his father's service (9:17).
<b>D</b>	( ) Jotham spoke like a prophet.
D-1	( ) He spoke against the sin of the men of Shechem (9:7, 18).
D-2	( ) His curse (9:57) was really a prayer for justice (9:19-20).
D-3	( ) His curse was quickly fulfilled (9:15, 22, 47-49, 56-57).
D-4	( ) His fleeing was like Elijah's running in 1 Kgs. 19:3.
D-5	( ) He chose a fitting spot (9:7, Deut. 11:29).
D-6	( ) God agreed with what Jotham said.

## conclusions

### worksheet answers

One of the most important worksheet points is that God approved what Jotham said (D-6). If this was not the case, his speech probably would not be in the Bible. In addition, Jotham's use of conditional "if" sentences (C-5) indicates that he was indirectly calling upon God for justice (D-2) rather than selfishly seeking revenge (B-5, B-6).

If Jotham had been overly emotional (B-2) and filled with hate, he may have tried to fight Abimelech despite his lack of experience (A-6) and fear (A-2) rather than going to speak at Mount Gerizim all by himself (A-4). Though he probably could not organize a successful fight, he could count on God to deal with the men of Shechem. So it was probably not his youthfulness (A-1) and lack of military experience (A-6) alone that led Jotham to speak out boldly instead of acting violently.

Finally, on some key negative points, Jotham's speech was not poorly organized (B-3). Likewise, since his speech was approved by God, it was not without effect (A-6), even though it was three years before judgment finally came (D-3).

### So what?

Judges chapter nine shows that Jotham was more like a prophet (D) than a judge, since he was better with words than with weapons. Even so, perhaps Jotham was not really a prophet either. Unlike Deborah, a prophetess, he did not directly predict what God would do. Deborah predicted the certain death of Sisera (4:9-14); Jotham was less dogmatic.

Jotham did not speak selfishly, however, as he delivered a message of (probable) judgment to the men of Shechem. His tone of uncertainty about the future—seen in his use of conditional sentences—was an acknowledgment of God's sovereignty rather than an indication of doubt about a just ending. Jotham was probably sarcastic in his conditional blessing in 9:19, since he did not really believe that there would be lasting joy in Shechem because of Abimelech.

The bottom line is that we should be like Jotham, even though, like him, we are not prophets. We too should speak about and pray for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. We also should pray for sinful people to repent (2 Pet. 3:9).

### applications

*Apply the points which you believe are most important or seem most needful.*
