

## **Judges 9:21-28 + 56-57**

The main character in this story is named “Abimelech,” so that’s why it is linked to the Genesis 20 story of Abraham, Sarah and Abimelech.

This is a strange tale that has left scholars confused. A good discussion of the differing viewpoints on it can be found here:

<http://booksnthoughts.com/judges-9-the-tale-of-abimelech-part-1/>

Israel had apparently lapsed back into idolatry after Gideon died. Like last week’s story of violence and brutality concerning the Levite and his concubine, the story is meant to emphasize the danger of a time when “every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” (**Judges 21:25**)

Why did Abimelech kill his 70 half brothers on a rock? The ancients believed the blood of a murdered person cries to heaven for revenge (See Cain, **Genesis 4:10**). Divine punishment might be avoided by covering the blood with earth. But by shedding his brothers’ blood on a stone, where the earth would not absorb it, Abimelech showed his arrogant disregard of God who avenges crimes.

The story of killing seventy sons parallels somewhat the tale of the killing of the seventy sons of the evil king Ahab in **II Kings 10:1-11**. Each event depicts the end of an era.

A cross between Game of Thrones and the Sopranos, this story of vendetta and brutal gang warfare among the relatives of Gideon has one moral - explained in the last two verses:

**Judges 9:56-57** - “God repaid Abimelech for the evil he did to his father by murdering his seventy half-brothers. God also repaid the men of Shechem for their evil deeds. The curse spoken by Jotham son of Jerub-Baal fell on them.”

Jotham’s fable about the trees is an allegory that suggests Israelite history, contains moral and political chastisement, and teaches about how a proper leader should look (i.e. not like Abimelech). Rashi says the olive tree represents the judge Othniel, the figs Deborah, and the vine Gideon.

Abimelech’s fear of being mocked for being killed by the hand of a woman is similar to King Saul in **I Samuel 31:4**, where he is dying of a wound inflicted during his final battle; he tells his armor-bearer to kill him so that people would not say that non-Israelites did him in.

Another similarity between the two: God sent them both an “evil spirit.”

**Judges 9:23** - “Then God sent an evil spirit (ra` ruwach) between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech.”

**1 Samuel 16:14-16** - “But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit

(ra` ruwach) from the LORD troubled him. And Saul's servants said unto him, Behold now, an evil spirit (ra` ruwach) from God troubleth thee. Let our lord now command thy servants, which are before thee, to seek out a man, who is a cunning player on an harp: and it shall come to pass, when the evil spirit (ra` ruwach) from God is upon thee, that he shall play with his hand, and thou shalt be well.