LEADER GUIDE

# BIBLE STORIES AFTER DARK

*From faith to failure: when religion and reality collide*

WEEK ONE

## Dying to Be Somebody

*Judges 9 · 75-minute session*

RICK MELICK

LEADER GUIDE · WEEK 1

# Before You Lead

You don't have to be a Bible scholar. Read Judges 8:22–9:57 twice this week, do the Pride Audit yourself, and come ready to go first with an honest answer. Men open up when the leader does.

THE GOAL

**Every man leaves knowing how Judges 9 unfolds, who helped Abimelek rise, and one specific way he'll fight pride this week.**

## THE 75 MINUTES

| TIME | SEGMENT | WHAT TO DO |
|---|---|---|
| **0:00** | After Dark · 10 min | Tell (or read) the spikes story. Ask "Start here" question 1. Laugh. Then get serious. |
| **0:10** | Four Scenes · 25 min | Walk through the four scenes. Have different men read each. Pick one or two questions per scene. Don't try to do them all. |
| **0:35** | Behind the Story · 10 min | Share two "Did you know?" facts. The fortress-temple and the silver math always land. Then the four truths. |
| **0:45** | Man to Man · 20 min | Two cases, then the Pride Audit in silence for two minutes. Don't ask men to share their marks. |
| **1:05** | Challenge & prayer · 10 min | Read the challenge. Each man writes his step. Pair up and pray for each other by name. |

> IF YOU RUN SHORT
> Protect Man to Man. It's where the story turns into life. Cut Scene 3 questions and the third case first.

## DAILY FOLLOW-UP

Most men won't open the book midweek. That's okay. Rick sends a short text each morning with a link to that day on the phone version (see the Daily Texts page). The study lives at capitolcitystore.com/after-dark. Each day builds: **notice → name it → compare → own it → make it right.** Next week, start by asking, "Who lost an argument on purpose?"

# What You Need to Know

**Where this fits.** Judges shows Israel spiraling down, and chapter 9 is the first "king" in the book: a warning about grabbing power. It isn't a rejection of all leadership. Compare Gideon's answer in 8:22–23 with God's design for a king in Deuteronomy 17:14–20.

**Seventy brothers.** 8:30–31 says Gideon had seventy sons, and Abimelek was the son of a concubine from Shechem. 9:5 says he killed the seventy, then immediately notes Jotham escaped. Don't get stuck on the count; the writer is making a point about total ruthlessness.

**Jotham's fable (9:7–21).** The useful trees refuse to rule; the thornbush accepts, promises shade it can't give and threatens fire. The burning of Shechem (9:49) is the payoff. Ask: why did Shechem prefer "one of our own" over justice?

**"God stirred up animosity" (9:23).** Some translations say "an evil spirit." The writer is telling us this was God's judgment. That doesn't mean God approved of anyone's violence, and it doesn't mean we should label every tragedy today as punishment. The writer gives an inspired explanation of *these* events.

**The millstone (9:53).** In that culture, being killed by a woman was humiliating for a warrior, which is why Abimelek wanted his armor-bearer to finish him. The story isn't laughing at the woman. It's exposing him. Israel still remembered it generations later (2 Samuel 11:21).

**The writer's verdict (9:56–57).** This is the anchor. God repaid Abimelek *and* Shechem. Keep the lesson tied here, not to a generic "pride is bad."

## ANSWER HELPS

**Why did Shechem back him?** Family ties and advantage (9:1–3). Once they paid for the killing, they were in it with him (9:4–6).

**What does the thornbush mean?** A ruler with nothing to offer but big promises and threats. The fire warning comes true.

**Was Abimelek successful?** He got the title for three years. The Bible measures his reign by violence, betrayal and judgment, not by the title.

## KEEP THE GROUP SAFE

Don't pressure men to share trauma, abuse or private history. Challenge misuse of authority without treating every disagreement as abuse. If a man describes ongoing harm to himself or someone else, talk with him privately that day and bring in a pastor. Safety comes before discussion.

# Daily Texts

Send one each morning, Monday through Friday. Short on purpose. Swap in the group's name or link.

**Mon:** After Dark, Day 1 🔥 Read Judges 8:22–35. Gideon turned down the crown, then named his son "my father is king." Where do you say one thing and live another? capitolcitystore.com/after-dark/week-1/#day1

**Tue:** Day 2: Read Mark 10:42–45. Greatness = serving. Which Pride Audit answer showed up yesterday? Name it. capitolcitystore.com/after-dark/week-1/#day2

**Wed:** Day 3: Read Philippians 2:3–11. Abimelek grabbed. Jesus let go. Where can you go down instead of up today? capitolcitystore.com/after-dark/week-1/#day3

**Thu:** Day 4: Read James 4:1–10. "God opposes the proud." Tell God plainly where your pride cost someone. capitolcitystore.com/after-dark/week-1/#day4

**Fri:** Day 5: The challenge. Lose one argument on purpose. Have the conversation. Let someone else be right. See you at group. capitolcitystore.com/after-dark/week-1/#day5

## OPTIONAL MONDAY EMAIL

**Subject: Dying to be somebody**

Men,

Great night. Abimelek got the crown, kept it three years, and still died worried about what people would say. Seventy brothers for three bad years.

This week, five minutes a day. I'll text you each morning. Each day builds on the one before, and by Friday you'll be ready for the challenge: lose one argument on purpose.

Pull out your Pride Audit. Which one are you working on? Tell one guy in the group.

Next week: Genesis 38. Read it before you come. You won't believe it's in the Bible.

Rick

## SOURCES FOR THE RESEARCH NOTES

Fortress-temple at Shechem: Lawrence E. Stager, "The Shechem Temple Where Abimelech Massacred a Thousand," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 29:4 (2003); Edward F. Campbell, "Judges 9 and Biblical Archaeology" (1983); G. Ernest Wright, *Shechem: The Biography of a Biblical City* (1965). Commentaries for deeper study: Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth* (NAC); Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges* (NICOT). Scripture quotations from the NIV.

FOR RICK · SERIES PLAN

# Recommended Six-Week Lineup

**Every week has three parts:** a story that shocks, a teaching from Jesus himself, and something a man can do tomorrow.

| WK | THE STORY | WHAT JESUS SAID | DO IT TOMORROW |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | **Dying to Be Somebody**<br>Judges 9: a man kills 70 brothers for a crown | Luke 14:7–11: don't grab the seat of honor. Mark 10:42–45: greatness means serving. | Lose one argument on purpose. |
| 2 | **The Prostitute Was Right**<br>Genesis 38: Judah sleeps with his disguised daughter-in-law, then orders her burned | John 8:1–11: men drag in a woman to be stoned, and the man is missing. Matthew 7:1–5: the plank in your own eye. | Name one double standard you hold, and apologize first. |
| 3 | **The King Who Called a Dead Man**<br>1 Samuel 28: Israel's king visits a medium the night before he dies | Luke 16:27–31: "even if someone rises from the dead," they won't listen. | Name your fear and take it to God before you take a shortcut. |
| 4 | **The Man Who Lost His Strength**<br>Judges 13–16: the strongest man alive, undone by appetite | Matthew 5:27–30: "If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out." Samson lost his eyes (Judges 16:21). | Pick one appetite and set one guardrail this week. |
| 5 | **The Man Who Lied to Look Generous**<br>Acts 5:1–11: a husband and wife drop dead in church over a lie about money | Matthew 6:1–4: give in secret. Luke 12:1–3: "nothing concealed that will not be disclosed." | Tell the truth about one thing you've been managing for appearances. |
| 6 | **The King Who Took Whatever He Wanted**<br>2 Samuel 11–12: adultery, a cover-up, a murder | Luke 18:9–14: "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." | Confess one thing to God and one thing to a brother. |

**Why this order:** it moves from what's inside a man (ego, hypocrisy, fear, appetite, image) to what he does with power, and it ends in confession and grace: "The LORD has taken away your sin" (2 Samuel 12:13).

**Alternates:** Jephthah's vow (Judges 11), The King Who Couldn't Take No (1 Kings 21), The Man Who Built Bigger Barns (Luke 12:13–21).