

Judges 9:1 ¶ And Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem unto his mother's brethren, and communed with them, and with all the family of the house of his mother's father, saying,

Judges 9:2 Speak, I pray you, in the ears of all the men of Shechem, Whether is better for you, either that all the sons of Jerubbaal, *which are* threescore and ten persons, reign over you, or that one reign over you? remember also that I *am* your bone and your flesh.

Reminder: Jerubbaal = Gideon

We learned in the previous chapter that Abimelech was the son of Gideon's concubine who lived in Shechem. He called a meeting with those of his mother's family and basically challenged them to accept him as their king rather than the "legitimate" sons of his father—70 all told.

The interesting thing to remember is that Gideon rejected being named king, so I don't know how he justified his argument.

Judges 9:3 And his mother's brethren spake of him in the ears of all the men of Shechem all these words: and their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech; for they said, He *is* our brother.

Judges 9:4 And they gave him threescore and ten *pieces* of silver out of the house of Baalberith, wherewith Abimelech hired vain and light persons, which followed him.

His kinsman decided to acknowledge Abimelech as their leader and gave him 70 pieces of silver from the house of Baal, the place dedicated to their false god. The NIV Commentary explains, "Temple treasures were often used for military and political ends."

With that money Abimelech hired some worthless and unimportant (from the Hebrew) men to form his entourage. I think that is the attraction of many wicked groups and gangs; guys look at it as an opportunity to gain power and influence that they could never achieve on their own.

Judges 9:5 And he went unto his father's house at Ophrah, and slew his brethren the sons of Jerubbaal, *being* threescore and ten persons, upon one stone: notwithstanding yet Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left; for he hid himself.

We aren't told what the odds were or how he went about it, but Abimelech headed to Ophrah and killed the 70 sons of Gideon. Or so he thought; one managed to hide and escape—Jotham, the youngest.

Judges 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.

After this, all the men of Shechem got together at the house of Millo and made Abimelech king “by the plain of the pillar.” JFB defines this as “by the oak near a raised mound,” a place easily seen.

The NIV Commentary notes: “His coronation ironically took place near the tree in Shechem where Joshua had solemnly placed the “Book of the Law.”

Joshua 24:25–26 “So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem. And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak, that was by the sanctuary of the LORD.”

Judges 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, Harken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you.

Judges 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.

Judges 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?

Judges 9:10 And the trees said to the fig tree, Come thou, *and* reign over us.

Judges 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?

Judges 9:12 Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou, *and* reign over us.

Judges 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?

Judges 9:14 Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou, *and* reign over us.

Judges 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.

When Jotham heard that Abimelech had been crowned king in Shechem, he went to the top of mount Gerizim to speak to the men of Shechem. His position provided a safe distance between him and his audience and natural amplification so that he could be easily heard. He urged them to heed his message because God would certainly hear their response; then he told the following parable (story with a moral teaching).

The trees decided they wanted a king and asked the olive tree to serve as such. The olive tree declared that he would rather honor God by providing the oil that was used to worship Him. So the trees next asked the fig tree to be their king. The fig tree declared that he would much rather continue to provide sweetness through the good fruit he produced rather than serve as king. The trees next went to the vine—not even a real tree—and asked it to be their king. The vine declared that he was much happier producing the wine that cheered both God and man and did not want to be king. Finally the trees asked the bramble, or thornbush, if he would be their king. He agreed to be king if they would take shelter in his shadow (which was very little) and trust him; if not, he pronounced

a curse calling for fire to issue forth from him to destroy the cedars of Lebanon.

I liked the insights from Adam Clarke on the trees in the parable:

- The olive; the most profitable tree to its owner, having few equals either for food or medicine.
- The fig tree; one of the most fruitful of trees, and yielding one of the most delicious fruits, and superior to all others for sweetness.
- The vine, which alone yields a liquor that, when properly prepared, and taken in strict moderation, is friendly both to the body and mind of man, having a most direct tendency to invigorate both.
- The bramble or thorn, which, however useful as a hedge, is dangerous to come near; and is here the emblem of an impious, cruel, and oppressive king.

Judges 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 and his house, and have done unto him according to the deserving of his hands;

Judges 9:17 (For my father fought for you, and adventured his life far, and delivered you out of the hand of Midian:

Judges 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;)

Judges 9:19 If ye then have dealt truly and sincerely with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, *then* rejoice ye in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you:

Judges 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.

Judges 9:21 And Jotham ran away, and fled, and went to Beer, and dwelt there, for fear of Abimelech his brother.

Jotham went on to declare that if they truly felt they had done right in anointing Abimelech as their king and had dealt justly with the house of Gideon in the process, he wished them well. However, the writer reminds us of what Jotham must have been thinking as he said this: My father fought for you and risked his life to deliver you out of the hand of Midian. Now you have supported the man who killed his sons, my brothers, and made the son of his concubine your king because he is your kinsman.

Jotham concluded by pronouncing a curse: If ye have not dealt justly with my father and his house, may the actions of Abimelech destroy you men of Shechem and eventually bring about his own destruction.

Jotham then ran away and went to Beer to live, a place safely out of the reach of Abimelech, his half-brother. It is obvious that he knew that they understood his message was an accusation and a curse. He knew that they would realize that the bramble was a reference to Abimelech.

Judges 9:22 ¶ When Abimelech had reigned three years over Israel,
Judges 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 9:24 That the cruelty *done* to the threescore and ten sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood be laid upon Abimelech their brother, which slew them; and upon the men of Shechem, which aided him in the killing of his brethren.

Abimelech was allowed to reign over Israel for three years before God sent an evil spirit to stir up trouble between Abimelech and the men of Shechem.

I can't help but wonder what Jotham thought during this time. I sort of compare it to how Habakkuk felt in his day and what sometimes comes to my mind today. Why, LORD, are you allowing evil to prosper? The truth is that He allows what He does in accordance with His own purposes that we just can't always understand. I am so thankful He gave us these words from Isaiah.

Isaiah 55:8–9 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Finally, God sends an evil spirit to begin the fulfillment of Jotham's curse to avenge the death of Gideon's sons. Yes, God is sovereign over all that is evil in this world.

Judges 9:25 And the men of Shechem set liers in wait for him in the top of the mountains, and they robbed all that came along that way by them: and it was told Abimelech.

Judges 9:26 And Gaal the son of Ebed came with his brethren, and went over to Shechem: and the men of Shechem put their confidence in him.

Judges 9:27 And they went out into the fields, and gathered their vineyards, and trode *the grapes*, and made merry, and went into the house of their god, and did eat and drink, and cursed Abimelech.

Judges 9:28 And Gaal the son of Ebed said, *Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should serve him? is not he* the son of Jerubbaal? and Zebul his officer? serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem: for why should we serve him?

Judges 9:29 And would to God this people were under my hand! then would I remove Abimelech. And he said to Abimelech, Increase thine army, and come out.

The men of Shechem decided to ambush Abimelech, and robbed others as they lay in wait. Somebody ended up warning Abimelech. It seems they had fallen under the spell of another ambitious man—Gaal the son of Ebed. The men of Shechem gathered grapes to make new wine and threw a party in the house of their god. In the midst of their revelry they cursed Abimelech. Gaal spoke out and pointed out that Abimelech wasn't really a son of Shechem, his father was Gideon. He urged them to serve the men of Hamor (a reference to himself) since

he was the true father of Shechem. Then he boldly declared that if they made him king, he would get rid of Abimelech. He then made a challenge to Abimelech to get a bigger army and meet him on the battlefield.

Judges 9:30 And when Zebul the ruler of the city heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was kindled.

Judges 9:31 And he sent messengers unto Abimelech privily, saying, Behold, Gaal the son of Ebed and his brethren be come to Shechem; and, behold, they fortify the city against thee.

Judges 9:32 Now therefore up by night, thou and the people that *is* with thee, and lie in wait in the field:

Judges 9:33 And it shall be, *that* in the morning, as soon as the sun is up, thou shalt rise early, and set upon the city: and, behold, *when* he and the people that *is* with him come out against thee, then mayest thou do to them as thou shalt find occasion.

Zebul was evidently Abimelech's appointed ruler of the city, and he got very angry when he heard the words of Gaal. He sent secret messengers to Abimelech to warn him that they were preparing to fortify the city against him. He urged Abimelech to bring his army during the night to wait in the fields outside the city because he knew that time was of the essence. They could then attack the city at dawn and do their best to destroy them.

Judges 9:34 And Abimelech rose up, and all the people that *were* with him, by night, and they laid wait against Shechem in four companies.

Judges 9:35 And Gaal the son of Ebed went out, and stood in the entering of the gate of the city: and Abimelech rose up, and the people that *were* with him, from lying in wait.

Judges 9:36 And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, Behold, there come people down from the top of the mountains. And Zebul said unto him, Thou seest the shadow of the mountains as *if they were* men.

Judges 9:37 And Gaal spake again and said, See there come people down by the middle of the land, and another company come along by the plain of Meonenim.

So Abimelech heeded the advice of Zebul. He divided his people into four companies. When Gaal came out to the gate of the city the next morning, they began their approach. Gaal saw the people and noted to Zebul that it looked like a lot of people were coming down from the top of the mountains. Zebul told him that it was only shadows he saw. Then Gaal spotted another group coming from another direction.

Judges 9:38 Then said Zebul unto him, Where *is* now thy mouth, wherewith thou saidst, Who *is* Abimelech, that we should serve him? *is* not this the people that thou hast despised? go out, I pray now, and fight with them.

Judges 9:39 And Gaal went out before the men of Shechem, and fought with Abimelech.

Judges 9:40 And Abimelech chased him, and he fled before him, and many were overthrown *and* wounded, *even* unto the entering of the gate.

Knowing that attack was imminent, Zebul began to taunt Gaal. He admitted that it was Abimelech and his troops attacking and told him that it was now time for him to back up what he had said. Gaal (implied: and his forces) went out to meet Abimelech in battle. Abimelech chased him and he fled; many men were killed and wounded.

Judges 9:41 And Abimelech dwelt at Arumah: and Zebul thrust out Gaal and his brethren, that they should not dwell in Shechem.

Judges 9:42 And it came to pass on the morrow, that the people went out into the field; and they told Abimelech.

Judges 9:43 And he took the people, and divided them into three companies, and laid wait in the field, and looked, and, behold, the people *were* come forth out of the city; and he rose up against them, and smote them.

Judges 9:44 And Abimelech, and the company that *was* with him, rushed forward, and stood in the entering of the gate of the city: and the two *other* companies ran upon all *the people* that *were* in the fields, and slew them.

Judges 9:45 And Abimelech fought against the city all that day; and he took the city, and slew the people that *was* therein, and beat down the city, and sowed it with salt.

Abimelech lived at Arumah, and Zebul threw Gaal and his kin out of Shechem. The next morning, however, the men of Shechem planned to go into the fields (apparently to look for Abimelech). When Abimelech was told of their plan, he divided his men into three companies; and they once again lay in wait. When the people began to come out of the city, they rose up and attacked and killed them. It is noted that they fought against the city all day. He eventually overtook the city and killed its people; then he sowed it with salt.

Adam Clarke offers this insight: "This sowing a place with salt was a custom in different nations to express permanent desolation and abhorrence."

Judges 9:46 And when all the men of the tower of Shechem heard *that*, they entered into an hold of the house of the god Berith.

Judges 9:47 And it was told Abimelech, that all the men of the tower of Shechem were gathered together.

Judges 9:48 And Abimelech gat him up to mount Zalmon, he and all the people that *were* with him; and Abimelech took an axe in his hand, and cut down a bough from the trees, and took it, and laid *it* on his shoulder, and said unto the people that *were* with him, What ye have seen me do, make haste, *and* do as I *have done*.

Judges 9:49 And all the people likewise cut down every man his bough, and followed Abimelech, and put *them* to the hold, and set the hold on fire upon them; so that all the men of the tower of Shechem died also, about a thousand men and women.

It seems that a group of men that had gathered at the tower of Shechem still survived by taking refuge in the house of the god Berith within the tower. When Abimelech was informed of this, he headed out to mount Zalmon. He took an ax

and cut down a branch from one of the trees and told his men to quickly do the same. They took all the tree branches and put them around the tower and set it on fire. All the people that had hidden in the tower of Shechem died—about 1,000.

The first part of Jotham's curse was fulfilled.

Judges 9:50 ¶ Then went Abimelech to Thebez, and encamped against Thebez, and took it.

Judges 9:51 But there was a strong tower within the city, and thither fled all the men and women, and all they of the city, and shut *it* to them, and gat them up to the top of the tower.

Judges 9:52 And Abimelech came unto the tower, and fought against it, and went hard unto the door of the tower to burn it with fire.

Judges 9:53 And a certain woman cast a piece of a millstone upon Abimelech's head, and all to brake his skull.

Judges 9:54 Then he called hastily unto the young man his armourbearer, and said unto him, Draw thy sword, and slay me, that men say not of me, A woman slew him. And his young man thrust him through, and he died.

Why, we aren't told; but Abimelech and his forces headed to attack Thebez. He conquered the city, but it too had a strong tower where many men and women of the city had fled to escape. They shut themselves in and went to the top. Abimelech came to the tower and intended to burn it down as well. One of the women in the tower, however, dropped a millstone on Abimelech's head and fractured his skull. It didn't kill him instantly, so he called his armor bearer and told him to kill him with his sword so that it couldn't be said that a woman killed him. The man did so, and Abimelech died.

The rest of Jotham's curse was fulfilled.

JFB offered an interesting bit of info: "The Assyrian bas-reliefs afford counterparts of the scene here described so vivid and exact, that we might almost suppose them to be representations of the same historic events. The besieged city — the strong tower within — the men and *women* crowding its battlements — the fire applied to the doors, and even the huge fragments of stone dropping from the hands of one of the garrison on the heads of the assailants, are all well represented to the life — just as they are here described in the narrative of inspired truth [GOSS]."

Judges 9:55 And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they departed every man unto his place.

Judges 9:56 Thus God rendered the wickedness of Abimelech, which he did unto his father, in slaying his seventy brethren:

Judges 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.

Once the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they went back home.

So God avenged the death of Gideon's sons through the deaths of Abimelech and the men of Shechem that put him in power and helped him kill Gideon's sons. He affirmed Jotham by allowing his curse to be fulfilled.