



## A Study of the Book of Judges

### Lesson 9: Abimelech...The Bramble King Judges 9:1-9:57

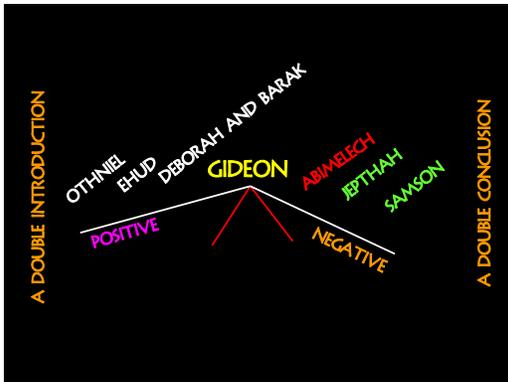
Now the last time we met, we discussed Gideon's fall or rather his decline from greatness. That is, we discussed how Gideon finished his career by committing two great sins.

First, he turned from being gracious and conciliatory to violently punishing the men of Succoth and Peniel for refusing to give his men bread while he was pursuing the kings of Midian. You will remember that he punished the men of Succoth by means of desert thorns and briars and that he went even further with the elders of the town of Peniel...he killed them.

Secondly, after Gideon had thoroughly routed the Midianites and punished the towns of Succoth and Peniel, he created a snare for the nation by making a golden ephod from the plunder of the Midianites. The text is not particularly clear about what Gideon's underlying intention was in making the ephod but it is very clear about the result. The text says...

<sup>NIV</sup> **Judges 8:27**...All Israel prostituted themselves by worshiping it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and his family.

Now I have been making the point right along from the beginning of our study that Gideon is the transitional figure in the Book of Judges. Up until Gideon, all of the judges are portrayed in a positive light and that includes Gideon, at least for the first half of his story. That is why you have heard me repeat so often this little refrain.



Two beginnings and two endings with seven judges on a seesaw in between and Gideon in the middle.

TWO BEGINNINGS...  
AND TWO ENDINGS...  
WITH SEVEN JUDGES ON A SEESAW  
IN BETWEEN...  
AND GIDEON IN THE MIDDLE.

Now the reason I have repeated that so often is because Gideon is the transitional figure in the book and everything begins to go south near the end of Gideon's story.<sup>1</sup> Darkness creeps in and all that is positive suddenly turns bitter and gloomy.

Oh, Gideon still achieved deliverance from the Midianites but as soon as Gideon died the nation turned again to do wickedness and to follow after Baal and that led, of course, to judgment from God. Only this time judgment was different. When it came, it came not by foreign oppression but from internal intrigue and fratricide.

And to make things even worse, it comes by the hand of one of Gideon's sons.

Now with that as a backdrop, turn with me to Judges Chapter 9, verse 1.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Judges 9:1**...Abimelech son of Jerub-Baal went to his mother's brothers in Shechem and said to them and to all his mother's clan, <sup>2</sup> **"Ask all the citizens of Shechem, 'Which is better for you: to have all seventy of Jerub-Baal's sons rule over you, or just one man?' Remember, I am your flesh and blood."**

Now for those of you, who might have missed last time, allow me to briefly introduce you to this character Abimelech.

Abimelech was one of Gideon's sons. As far as we know from the text, he is the only son of Gideon born to a concubine. The rest of Gideon's sons were born to married wives...for Gideon had many wives (8:30).

Now in our last lesson we also saw that Abimelech's name was significant.<sup>2</sup> His name means **"My Father is King."** We don't know whether Gideon meant the name to imply that Abimelech's God was king or whether Gideon thought of himself as king...which, of course, he was not but the name in itself quite significant.

It seems to me that the author leaves Gideon's intention in naming Abimelech purposely ambiguous. What does seem clear is that Abimelech thought himself fully capable of ruling as a king. In fact, we will see that he not only thought himself capable of being king but that he was willing to commit murder to be king. But it is always that way with the blindly ambitious. They are not willing to work or serve to earn the right to lead. Instead, they want to usurp and to supplant. That is way of all those that follow after Abimelech.

Now it is hard to know from the text whether Abimelech's mother was an Israelite or a Canaanite. I take it that she was an Israelite but in Shechem the interrelation of the two groups seems to have been such that it was really hard to tell who an Israelite and was who was a Canaanite. Anyway, Abimelech had apparently been staying with his brothers in Ophrah and at some point left his home there to go to Shechem, his mother's hometown. Now he went there with a purpose and that purpose was to woo the men of Shechem to support him in his quest for the throne.

He was willing to do the unspeakable to promote his own cause.

Now the way Abimelech advanced his cause was with a question and the question he asked of the men of Shechem was this, **"Which is better to have 70**

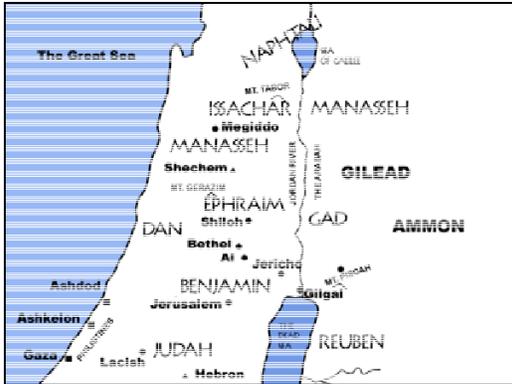
**kings or just one?"** To which he added, **"Remember, I am your flesh and blood."**

What he was arguing was that he thought they ought to prefer his rule over the rule of Gideon's sons on the basis that he was related to them whereas Gideon's sons were not. Now there is no indication in the text that Gideon's sons were in fact trying to rule over Shechem. But that didn't matter it seems to Abimelech. He was presenting himself as a king to his family and to the people of Shechem and it appears from the text that his argument struck a chord with the men of Shechem. Look at their response in verse 3.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Judges 9:3**...When the brothers repeated all this to the citizens of Shechem, they were inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, **"He is our brother."**

Now I ought to say a bit about Shechem. It is an important site in biblical history and that was especially true in relationship to the lives of the patriarchs.

Shechem was Abraham's first stop in the land of Canaan. What I mean by that is that Shechem is the first place Abraham stopped and built an altar in the land that had been promised to him by YHWH. The story of Abram's stop there is recorded in Genesis 12:6.



**NIV Genesis 12:6...**Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. <sup>7</sup> The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "**To your offspring I will give this land.**" So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

The first offering of the people of Israel in the land of Canaan was at Shechem. Now think about that historically. That made Shechem the "**Plymouth Rock**" of the nation.

But Shechem was also an important place in the life the patriarchs that followed Abraham. Genesis 35 tells us that Jacob consecrated his family their and put away the foreign gods in his possession by burying them under an oak at Shechem.

**NIV Genesis 35:1...**Then God said to Jacob, "**Go up to Bethel and settle there, and build an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau.**" <sup>2</sup> So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "**Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes.**" <sup>3</sup> **Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God...** <sup>4</sup> So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had and the rings in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the oak at Shechem.

Abraham had been the first to sacrifice at Shechem and here is Genesis 35, Abraham's grandson returns to the place and renews his covenant relationship with YHWH and puts aside his foreign gods. Shechem was an important place.

But the most important thing, or at least the most dramatic thing, that ever occurred at Shechem occurred when the nation of Israel met God there and publicly swore allegiance to Him before Joshua and the Ark of the Covenant.

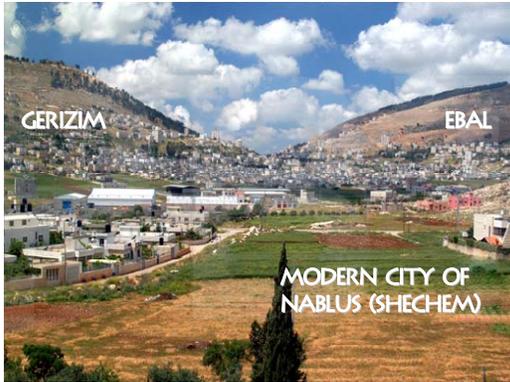
That great event occurred at Shechem when Joshua and the Israelites first entered the land.

You remember that Moses was not allowed to enter the land. It was Joshua who led the Israelites into the land and they went straightway to Shechem. Now let me ask you...why would they do that?

They went here because that is where Abraham went. They did it to renew the covenant.

There they reaffirmed their oath of fidelity to YHWH and that oath that reaffirmation included listening to the public reading of the blessings and curses associated with the covenant and then swearing together before Him that they would indeed be loyal to the covenant they had made with Him.

You can see the command to do that in chapter 27 of the Book of Deuteronomy. There Moses commanded the people once when they entered the land to go to Shechem to the two mountains there, Gerizim and Ebal, and enact a great visual, national consecration of covenant fidelity to God.



Here's what they were to do. They were to divide the nation into two groups of six tribes each. Six of the tribes were to stand on the slopes of Gerizim and six were to stand on the on the slopes of Ebal. Then the priests were to read the law and whenever they read about blessings that were connected with obedience the tribes on Gerizim were to shout with one voice, "**Amen!**"

But whenever the priests read about curses attached to breaking God's law the tribes on Ebal were to shout out with one voice, "**Amen!**"

They were to do that facing the Ark of the Covenant in the valley between them and they were to do that until all of the blessings and curses were read. They were doing that as a public expression that they understood the vows they were making and they did that at the very same spot Abraham had first sacrificed when he entered the land.

Joshua 8 tells us that is what happened. Look at it with me starting in verse 30.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Joshua 8:33**...All Israel, aliens and citizens alike, with their elders, officials and judges, were standing on both sides of the ark of the covenant of the LORD, facing those who carried it-- the priests, who were Levites. Half of the people

stood in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD had formerly commanded when he gave instructions to bless the people of Israel. <sup>34</sup> Afterward, Joshua read all the words of the law-- the blessings and the curses-- just as it is written in the Book of the Law. <sup>35</sup> There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly of Israel, including the women and children, and the aliens who lived among them.

Now I think that must have been an extraordinary moment in the life of the nation but even that was not the end of Shechem. Later in the Book of Joshua, it comes up again. It comes up when Joshua tells the people that he does not think they are able to keep God's law. The people answered back, "Oh, yes we will" and Joshua commemorates their vow of obedience by setting a monument under one of the oaks at Shechem. Let's look at that for a moment in Joshua 24.<sup>3</sup>

**<sup>NIV</sup> Joshua 24:19...Joshua said to the people, "You are not able to serve the LORD. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. <sup>20</sup> If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you." <sup>21</sup> But the people said to Joshua, "No! We will serve the LORD." <sup>22</sup> Then Joshua said, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the LORD." "Yes, we are witnesses," they replied...<sup>25</sup> On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem. he drew up for them decrees and laws. <sup>26</sup> And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the LORD. <sup>27</sup> "See!" he said to all the people. "This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the LORD has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God."**

Now, I bring up the two mountains and the monument because they come up in the story this morning and the reference to them is fairly subtle. Still, the reference to Gerizim and to the monument at Shechem would have been very

clear to the Israelites first reading the Book of Judges. But because we are not very good Bible students we sometimes miss such allusions.

Before we press on let me just illustrate what I mean. Now not all of you are Texans. I know you all want to be Texans and you're working hard to become Texans but alas some of you have a ways to go. But if you were a true Texan and you were to ask me how I was doing and I were to say, **"I feel like it's day twelve in a little mission church in San Antonio."** You would intuitively understand that I was talking about the Alamo and the fact that the great heroes there were all killed by the end of a thirteen day siege and that since I felt like it was day twelve...that I did feel like I had very much longer to go.

Do you see what I mean? You would just know because you know Texas and you know Texas history and it is so precious to you that you can even catch veiled allusions or references her ancient historical events.

Now I bring that up because it is very important to the story. Any true Israelite hearing about someone shouting from Mt. Gerizim would have immediately thought back to the nation standing on Gerizim and shouting amens to the reading of the blessings and curses. And anyone hearing about a pillar or monument under and oak tree at Shechem would have immediately thought back to Joshua and the monument that commemorated Israel's promise to covenant obedience. But we often do not and the reason is because we are not very careful Bible readers. We want to be and we are trying to be but it just takes time.



Now, I hope you'll forgive me for that little rabbit trail but I think it will make things clearer in a moment or two.

Now let's look back at Judges 9:4.

**NIV Judges 9:4**...They gave him (that is, the citizens of Shechem gave him) seventy shekels of silver from the temple of Baal-Berith<sup>4</sup>, and Abimelech used it to hire reckless adventurers, who became his followers. <sup>5</sup> He went to his father's home in Ophrah and on one stone murdered his seventy brothers, the sons of Jerub-Baal. But Jotham, the youngest son of Jerub-Baal, escaped by hiding.

Now there are two or three things worth noticing here. First, the money used to finance Abimelech's quest for the throne came from the temple of Baal-Berith. I hope you remember that "**berith**" is the Hebrew word for "**covenant**". Now this temple for Baal of the Covenant was located in the heart of Shechem between the two mountains Gerizim and Ebal. It would have been a sacrilege in and of itself. That means that an Israelite reading this story would have remembered that at one time the Ark of the Covenant had stood exactly where the temple to Baal of the Covenant now stood and I think there is something to the fact that Baal goes after the sons of Jerub-Baal...the one who contends with Baal...that is, Gideon.

Secondly, you ought to be able to put two and two together to see that the seventy shekels were used to hire assassins to accompany Abimelech to Ophrah to murder his brothers.

Thirdly, you ought to note how strange it is that Abimelech killed his brothers on one stone...almost as if on an altar.<sup>5</sup> Now scholars are divided about why he killed his brothers upon one stone. Some think he was trying to limit the spread of additional violence...which I very much doubt. It does not seem to me that Abimelech was ever very much concerned about limiting violence.

Some think it was...in some fashion or another...a sacrifice...which I am much more willing to accept.

Some think that it is mentioned simply as a sort of foreshadowing to prepare the reader for the **“one stone”** that will do Abimelech in at the end of the chapter...which I think is almost certainly the real reason it is mentioned at all.

Anyway, Abimelech went back to Shechem very proud of himself and feeling very secure in all his regal ambition and splendor.

Look at verse 6.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Judges 9:6**...Then all the citizens of Shechem and Beth Millo gathered beside the great tree at the pillar in Shechem to crown Abimelech king.

Now let me ask you a question. How does verse 6 make you feel?

Now I am not asking you to wax eloquent with any of this modern **“This is what it means to me”** nonsense. You all know me well enough to know that I think that sort of stuff is absolutely useless. No, what I am asking you to do is to think biblically based upon what you know about why that pillar was put there first place. How does it make you feel to see Abimelech the murderer, Abimelech the Usurper crowned King of Shechem at the very spot and next to the very monument that Joshua erected when he and the people of Israel swore on their lives covenant fidelity to their great God and King?

Well, of course, it is intended to make you indignant.

It is intended to make you ask yourself, **“Is there no end to this man’s vileness?”**

**Has God utterly abandoned His people to mayhem and to violence?”**

It is intended to make you ask, **“Where is God?”**

I would answer that the same way R.G. Lee does in his famous sermon *Payday Someday*, **“Hold on a minute...He’s coming.”**

Now look at verse 7.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Judges 9:7**...When Jotham (that is, Gideon’s one surviving son) was told about this, he climbed up on the top of Mount Gerizim and shouted to them, **“Listen to me, citizens of Shechem, so that God may listen to you.**

What image is that supposed to put into your mind? It is obvious isn’t it? Listen to what he says.

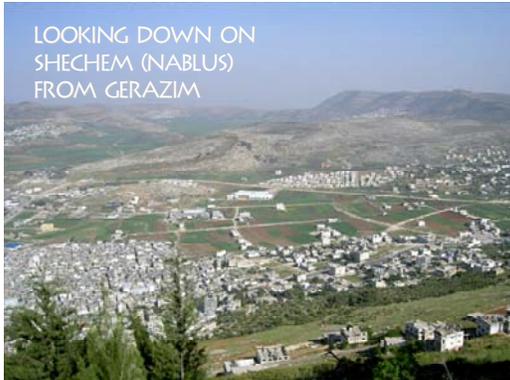
**NIV Judges 9:8...One day the trees went out to anoint a king for themselves. They said to the olive tree, 'Be our king.' <sup>9</sup> "But the olive tree answered, 'Should I give up my oil, by which both gods and men are honored, to hold sway over the trees?' <sup>10</sup> "Next, the trees said to the fig tree, 'Come and be our king.' <sup>11</sup> "But the fig tree replied, 'Should I give up my fruit, so good and sweet, to hold sway over the trees?' <sup>12</sup> "Then the trees said to the vine, 'Come and be our king.' <sup>13</sup> "But the vine answered, 'Should I give up my wine, which cheers both gods and men, to hold sway over the trees?' <sup>14</sup> "Finally all the trees said to the thornbush, 'Come and be our king.' <sup>15</sup> "The thornbush said to the trees, 'If you really want to anoint me king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, then let fire come out of the thornbush and consume the cedars of Lebanon!' <sup>16</sup> "Now if you have acted honorably and in good faith when you made Abimelech king, and if you have been fair to Jerub-Baal and his family, and if you have treated him as he deserves-- <sup>17</sup> and to think that my father fought for you, risked his life to rescue you from the hand of Midian <sup>18</sup> (but today you have revolted against my father's family, murdered his seventy sons on a single stone, and made Abimelech, the son of his slave girl, king over the citizens of Shechem because he is your brother)-- <sup>19</sup> if then you have acted honorably and in good faith toward Jerub-Baal and his family today, may Abimelech be your joy, and may you be his, too!**

Do you see what he is doing here? He is comparing his half-brother Abimelech to an ambitious thornbush and he is pronouncing a blessing on the men of Shechem if they do right by Gideon's slain sons. But he does not stop there; next he will pronounce a curse if they fail to do what is right. Look at verse 20.

**NIV Judges 9:20...But if you have not, let fire come out from Abimelech and consume you, citizens of Shechem and Beth Millo, and let fire come out from you, citizens of Shechem and Beth Millo, and consume Abimelech!"**

Now let me ask you, "What do think is going to happen?"

You can feel it coming can't you. Don't let that bother you...you are supposed to feel it coming...



Now this would have been Jotham's view from atop Mt. Gerazim looking down on the city of Shechem. He would have been shouting down to them at the exact moment they were gathered around that pillar while they were making Abimelech king.

Now Jotham's shouting to the men of Shechem is intended to bring to mind that great scene where the people of Israel camped between the two mountains. Even his story, which is by the way the first parable ever used in the Bible, is intended to recall to the mind of the reader the great pronouncement of blessings and curses from the days of Joshua.

Do you see that? If not look with me again for a moment at verse 19...it sort of sums up Jotham's point.

**<sup>NIV</sup> Judges 9:19...if then you have acted honorably and in good faith toward Jerub-Baal and his family today, may Abimelech be your joy, and may you be his, too! <sup>20</sup> But if you have not, let fire come out from Abimelech and consume you, citizens of Shechem and Beth Millo, and let fire come out from you, citizens of Shechem and Beth Millo, and consume Abimelech!"**

Do you see what I mean? Essentially, what Jotham does is to remind the Shechemites of the blessings and curses that Israel had originally repeated before Joshua and in doing that he reminds them that if they have done honorably they will be blessed but if they have done wickedly they will be cursed.

You don't have to be a Hebrew scholar or a psychic to see what he expects to happen. Still, after givingt he men of Shechem his parable he disappears from the scene and the reason he does that is because now God Himself will take up the cause and bring judgment both upon Shechem and upon Abimelech.<sup>6</sup> Now I want you to remember two of the ideas we have read about as we press on...namely, I want you to remember the idea of one stone and the idea of fire coming out from the thornbush. Let's put in at verse 21.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Judges 9:21**...Then Jotham fled, escaping to Beer,<sup>7</sup> and he lived there because he was afraid of his brother Abimelech. <sup>22</sup> After Abimelech had governed Israel three years, <sup>23</sup> God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the citizens of Shechem, who acted treacherously against Abimelech. <sup>24</sup> God did this in order that the crime against Jerub-Baal's seventy sons, the shedding of their blood, might be avenged on their brother Abimelech and on the citizens of Shechem, who had helped him murder his brothers.

Now in verse 25 we are going to see how the evil spirit between Shechem and Abimelech will blossom into full blown war.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Judges 9:25**...In opposition to him these citizens of Shechem set men on the hilltops (Gerazin and Ebal) to ambush and rob everyone who passed by, and this was reported to Abimelech.

Now, it is remarkable I think how God uses ambitious usurpers to bring about the judgment of an ambitious usurper. The men of Shechem actually sent out

men to the hilltops of Gerizim and Ebal to watch for travelers coming through their valley and when travelers did come through they would swoop down and rob them and oppress them<sup>8</sup>. Now I want you to think about that. They were using the same two mountaintops from which the nation had pronounced blessings and curses to watch and rob everyone that passed through.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Judges 9:26**...Now Gaal son of Ebed moved with his brothers into Shechem, and its citizens put their confidence in him. <sup>27</sup> After they had gone out into the fields and gathered the grapes and trodden them, they held a festival in the temple of their god. While they were eating and drinking, they cursed Abimelech. <sup>28</sup> Then Gaal son of Ebed said, **"Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should be subject to him? Isn't he Jerub-Baal's son, and isn't Zebul his deputy? Serve the men of Hamor, Shechem's father! Why should we serve Abimelech? <sup>29</sup> If only this people were under my command! Then I would get rid of him. I would say to Abimelech, 'Call out your whole army!'"**

It is remarkable I think to see how God uses ambitious usurpers to bring about the judgment of ambitious usurpers. That is what Gaal is.

The text says that a man named Gaal and his brothers moved into the town and encouraged the men of the town to insurrection against Abimelech. After the grape harvest, the city held a festival and Gaal attempted to woo the city over to his rule. Verse 30 tells us what happened next.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Judges 9:30**...When Zebul the governor of the city heard what Gaal son of Ebed said, he was very angry. <sup>31</sup> Under cover he sent messengers to Abimelech, saying, **"Gaal son of Ebed and his brothers have come to Shechem and are stirring up the city against you. <sup>32</sup> Now then, during the night you and your men should come and lie in wait in the fields. <sup>33</sup> In the morning at sunrise, advance against the city. When Gaal and his men come out against you, do whatever your hand finds to do."** <sup>34</sup> So Abimelech and all his troops set out by night and took up concealed positions near Shechem in four companies.

What all that means is that Zebal, the governor or mayor of the city...Abimelech's appointed man...sends a secret word to Abimelech that there was a mutiny brewing and that he needed to come a deal with Gaal and the other mutinous men of the city. Now the intrigue is extraordinary. Abimelech usurped the kingship. The men of Shechem on Zebul are robbing and pillaging passers-by from their vantage posts on Gerazim and Ebal and now Gaal is plotting to overthrow Abimelech and all of that is happening in the place where Abraham first pledged covenant loyalty to YHWH.

Look at verse 35.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Judges 9:35**...Now Gaal son of Ebed had gone out and was standing at the entrance to the city gate just as Abimelech and his soldiers came out from their hiding place. <sup>36</sup> When Gaal saw them, he said to Zebul, "**Look, people are coming down from the tops of the mountains!**" Zebul replied, "**You mistake the shadows of the mountains for men.**" <sup>37</sup> But Gaal spoke up again: "**Look, people are coming down from the center of the land, and a company is coming from the direction of the soothsayers' tree.**" <sup>38</sup> Then Zebul said to him, "**Where is your big talk now, you who said, 'Who is Abimelech that we should be subject to him?' Aren't these the men you ridiculed? Go out and fight them!**" <sup>39</sup> So Gaal led out the citizens of Shechem and fought Abimelech. <sup>40</sup> Abimelech chased him, and many fell wounded in the flight-- all the way to the entrance to the gate. <sup>41</sup> Abimelech stayed in Arumah, and Zebul drove Gaal and his brothers out of Shechem.

Now, Gaal and his men were driven from the city but that did not satisfy Abimelech. Verse 42 tells us that he intended to destroy all the people of Shechem. Perhaps, he also learned in the battle that the men of Shechem were robbing passers by and that he was no longer gaining all of the tribute from Shechem that he deserved. Perhaps he feared another usurper coming along. His reasons are not altogether clear...but his actions certainly are.

Look at verse 42. It tells us what happened next.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Judges 9:42...**The next day the people of Shechem went out to the fields, and this was reported to Abimelech. <sup>43</sup> So he took his men, divided them into three companies and set an ambush in the fields. When he saw the people coming out of the city, he rose to attack them. <sup>44</sup> Abimelech and the companies with him rushed forward to a position at the entrance to the city gate. Then two companies rushed upon those in the fields and struck them down. <sup>45</sup> All that day Abimelech pressed his attack against the city until he had captured it and killed its people. Then he destroyed the city and scattered salt over it.<sup>9</sup> <sup>46</sup> On hearing this, the citizens in the tower of Shechem went into the stronghold of the temple of El-Berith. <sup>47</sup> When Abimelech heard that they had assembled there, <sup>48</sup> he and all his men went up Mount Zalmon. He took an ax and cut off some branches, which he lifted to his shoulders. He ordered the men with him, "**Quick! Do what you have seen me do!**" <sup>49</sup> So all the men cut branches and followed Abimelech. They piled them against the stronghold and set it on fire over the people inside. So all the people in the tower of Shechem, about a thousand men and women, also died.

Now the point of what we just read is that fire came out of the bramble king and destroyed the city of Shechem. The curse that Jotham had spoken against the men of Shechem came true.

What is remarkable is that Mount Zalmon, almost a certain reference to Mount Ebal...was the place where Abimelech gathered his wood to burn the men and women who hid in the tower. That is, the mountain that once had been the mountain from which Israel had pronounced curses upon itself if it broke covenant with YHWH became the mountain from which those curses...in the form of fire...were administered.

When Abimelech spread salt on the city he did so almost certainly in an effort to symbolically try to utterly destroy the city and every memory of the city.<sup>10</sup> He intended for the city to become permanently desolate.

The other thing is that the tower of Shechem, the stronghold...the religious center of the town...the temple of Baal Berith...was not able to protect its citizens against the judgment of YHWH. The people took refuge there but their taking refuge there led to their destruction.

But what about the destruction of Abimelech? Is there no justice for him? Hold on...its coming in verse 50.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Judges 9:50**...Next Abimelech went to Thebez and besieged it and captured it. <sup>51</sup> Inside the city, however, was a strong tower, to which all the men and women-- all the people of the city-- fled. They locked themselves in and climbed up on the tower roof. <sup>52</sup> Abimelech went to the tower and stormed it. But as he approached the entrance to the tower to set it on fire, <sup>53</sup> a woman dropped an upper millstone on his head and cracked his skull. <sup>54</sup> Hurriedly he called to his armor-bearer, "**Draw your sword and kill me, so that they can't say, 'A woman killed him.'**" So his servant ran him through, and he died. <sup>55</sup> When the Israelites saw that Abimelech was dead, they went home.

Now the point of these few verses is to show that whereas Abimelech killed his brothers on a single stone so God recompensed his sin with a single stone...a single stone dropped by a woman. Abimelech, tried to avoid the stigma and embarrassment of being killed by a woman, and plead with his servant to run him through so that no one can say he was killed by a woman.<sup>11</sup> But the truth of the matter is that no one was going to say that anyway. Rather they were going to say he was killed by God and the author of the story frames the story so that the reader will understand that Abimelech's death came not from a woman but from the hand of almighty God.<sup>12</sup>

It is a lesson, I think, for all those who are bent on destroying others to advance themselves and their agendas.

Fire came out from God, through this woman of Thebez, crashing down in judgment on the head of Abimelech. Verse 56 sums it all up.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Judges 9:56**...Thus God repaid the wickedness that Abimelech had done to his father by murdering his seventy brothers. <sup>57</sup> God also made the men of Shechem pay for all their wickedness. The curse of Jotham son of Jerub-Baal came on them.

Are there any questions? Let's pray.

---

<sup>1</sup> J. Paul Tanner, "The Gideon Narrative as the Focal Point of Judges" in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 Ap-Je 1992, p 152-3.

<sup>2</sup> George F. Moore, *Judges* in the ICC Series (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1895...reprinted in 1976), 235. Moore disagrees with the interpretation of Abimelech's name. However see, Alberto J. Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 167.

<sup>3</sup> *Expositor's Bible Commentary*. V.3..."Joshua 8:30-35 records the covenant renewal ceremony held at Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim after the defeat of Ai, and Joshua's final words of challenge were delivered at Shechem ([Josh 24:1-27](#)).

<sup>NIV</sup> **Joshua 8:30**...Then Joshua built on Mount Ebal an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, <sup>31</sup> as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the Israelites. He built it according to what is written in the Book of the Law of Moses-- an altar of uncut stones, on which no iron tool had been used. On it they offered to the LORD burnt offerings and sacrificed fellowship offerings. <sup>32</sup> There, in the presence of the Israelites, Joshua copied on stones the law of Moses, which he had written. <sup>33</sup> All Israel, aliens and citizens alike, with their elders, officials and judges, were standing on both sides of the ark of the covenant of the LORD, facing those who carried it-- the priests, who were Levites. Half of the people stood in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD had formerly commanded when he gave instructions to bless the people of Israel.

<sup>4</sup> J. Clinton McCann, *Judges* in the Interpretation Commentary Series (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2002), 73. **"The money received from the temple treasury of Baal-berith is used by Abimelech to pay the thugs who help him kill the seventy sons of Gideon (9:4-5)."**

<sup>5</sup> T.A. Boogaart, "Stone for Stone: Retribution in the Story of Abimelech and Shechem" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 32.01 (1985): 45-56. See also...Arthur E. Cundall, *Judges & Ruth* in the Tyndale Old Testament Commentary Series, (Downer's Grover, Illinois: Varsity Press, 1968), 127.

See also... Robert Boling, *Judges* in the Anchor Bible Commentary Series, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1975), 162-3. Boling connects the following verse to Judges...<sup>NIV</sup> **1 Samuel 14:33**...Then someone said to Saul, "Look, the men are sinning against the LORD by eating meat that has blood in it." "You have broken faith," he said. "Roll a large stone (a single stone) over here at once." <sup>34</sup> Then he said, "Go out among the men and tell them, 'Each of you bring me your cattle and sheep, and slaughter them here and eat them. Do not sin against the LORD by eating meat with blood still in it.'" So everyone brought his ox that night and slaughtered it there.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew R. Fausset, *Judges* in the Geneva Series of Commentaries, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 199), 173. Fausset is particularly eloquent here. He writes: So those worthiest to rule are those men who yield the most fruit for the public good. But these are just the persons, who like Gideon, are least disposed to obtrude themselves, or even accept the office when thrust upon them, for they know that he who would rightly govern, must go "up and down" as a drudge to state cares." Still such men must be prevailed upon because as my brother Larry Danner often says, "If we do not put good men in places of leadership we will wind up with bad men in places of authority."

<sup>7</sup> See Dr. Constable's notes on 9:21 at <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/judges.pdf>. "Having finished his message Jotham fled to Beer (lit. Well, site uncertain) where he hid from his brother's wrath. However this may not have been the name of a town. Jotham may have hidden in some empty well for a long time (cf. 2 Sam. 17:18-21)."

<sup>8</sup> Leon Wood, *The Distressing Days of the Judges*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1975), 243.

<sup>9</sup> A.M. Honeyman, "The Salting of Shechem" *Vetus Testamentum* 3.01 (1953): 192-5.

<sup>10</sup> Arthur E. Cundall, *Judges & Ruth* in the Tyndale Old Testament Commentary Series, (Downer's Grover, Illinois: Varsity Press, 1968), 134. The sowing of salt did not necessarily make the land uninhabitable. It is possible that salt can do that but it would require an enormous amount of salt...an amount requiring earthmovers and modern technology. The action is principally symbolic...calling down a curse that the city not be rebuilt.

<sup>11</sup> Cundall, 136. Cundall notes that within a 100 years or so, Israel's first king would make a very similar request...perhaps this is an allusion to the superiority of the David kingship over the House of Saul...in this case Saul appearing literarily similar to Abimelech.

<sup>12</sup> Wood, 250. He writes: "But he did not reckon with God and with God's inexorable law of retribution. He came to reap what he had sowed. He died as tragically as he had made others die."