

Significant Lessons From The Seemingly Insignificant

#40 Nov. 7, 2018: Abimelech's Demise At Shechem

Jotham Continues Telling His Parable To The Men Of Shechem

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.

- Imagine a bramble king! A worthless tree with delusions of grandeur.
- What shade can a bramble bush offer a cedar of Lebanon?
- The bramble boasts what it cannot offer. It has no fruit to contribute to life.
- Getting in its shade will not be pleasant. You must prostrate yourself on the ground and shade comes at the price of getting scratched.
- If you do not come under the protection of my shadow, fire will come out of the thorn and burn the cedars of Lebanon.
- If you truly want me as your king, gather in my shade. But if you're found to be a liar, then all of us will burn with fire.

William L. Shirer, author of *Rise & Fall Of 3rd Reich*, saw this bramble-like tendency in an evil man named Hitler in September 1934, at the Nazi Party celebration in Nuremberg.

- The words he uttered, the thoughts he expressed, often seemed to me ridiculous, but that week in Nuremberg I began to comprehend that it did not matter so much what he said but how he said it. Hitler's communication with his audiences was uncanny. He established a rapport almost immediately and deepened and intensified it as he went on speaking, holding them completely in his spell. In such a state, it seemed to me, they easily believed anything he said, even the most foolish nonsense. Over the years as I listened to scores of Hitler's major speeches I would pause in my own mind to exclaim: "What utter rubbish! What brazen lies!" Then I would look around at the audience. His German listeners were lapping up every word as the utter truth.

Judges 9:19-20 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: 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.

Jotham's 2- Fold Curse: Let this "marriage" of the leaders and Abimelech become a disaster. Each will bring about the destruction of the other.

- Total ruin of 2 enemies, as if both fired their atomic arsenal at the opposite party in the same instant and both were right on target.

Jotham's Message To People of Shechem: God would bring His judgment upon them and upon Abimelech for the evil they had committed in killing the sons of Gideon and then assuming the role of king over Shechem and a few surrounding cities.

- ❖ Legacy of Abimelech's reign: It will culminate in judgment by fire upon both ruler and the ruled.

Note: Prophecy of Jotham is not fulfilled immediately.

God allows Abimelech to have a measure of success. The fire smoldered for three years.

- ❖ God will see to it that man's selfish purposes would be frustrated.
- ❖ God providentially worked through wicked men to bring about judgment on the guilty while protecting those who were culpable for this terrible injustice.

Consider: THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD INCLUDES THE FULFILLMENT OF HIS CURSES

Tozer: "God is faithful to condemn!" Don't be fooled by God's timetable where it might seem like there is no accountability. If you forsake truth and integrity, your treachery will be rewarded with the curse of God."

For 3 years it seemed as though evil had triumphed, but God's justice would soon be invoked upon this wicked usurper.

Longfellow once described the justice of God writing that...

"Though the mills of God grind slowly, Yet they grind exceeding small"

Abimelech's Demise Begins: The Beginning of the End: Judges 9:22-29

Three years passed. Trouble is looming.

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: [treachery = act of deliberate betrayal] God takes a hand. His omniscient eye was still upon the bloodstained stone in Ophrah; such cruelty could not go unpunished. Judgment will come quickly.

"When God sends evil it is always an intervening force of moral and righteous judgment, corresponding to the wickedness of the situation."

Key: Divinely orchestrated events follow to punish Abimelech and the men of Shechem for the slaughter of Gideon's sons.

1. Those who 3 years earlier helped conspire to exterminate his brothers and orchestrate his rise to power, are now seeking to undermine his authority and be rid of him.
2. The downfall and destruction of Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem is GOD'S DOING! Divine retribution imposed for their treachery. [9:24, 56-57] ALL COMPLICIT PARTIES ARE HELD ACCOUNTABLE!
3. God caused the words of Jotham to be fulfilled by the events described which He providentially brought to pass.

Throughout the remainder of chapter 9 it is as though we stand where Jotham stood on Mount Gerizim and view the whole panorama of events.

Scene 1: Men Of Shechem Conspire To Betray Abimelech.

"God is often pleased to punish bad men by the very persons who have contributed to their elevation, thus chastising them with the rods which they themselves have gathered."

Judges 9:25 And the men of Shechem set liers [ambush] 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.

- ❖ Ambushes were set up in the hills to rob those who passed by on the nearby trade routes.
- ❖ Kings of this era forced taxes and tolls from traders and merchants who traveled the trade routes than ran through their territories.
- ❖ They agreed to pay the money to receive the king's protection from thieves and nomads.
- ❖ If the local king failed in providing security, traders would avoid the area.
- ❖ Abimelech would lose a major source of funds for his treasury.
- ❖ This would bring discredit to Abimelech who could no longer guarantee safety for travelers in his territory.
- ❖ Merchants would learn of the danger, take a different trade route and not have to pay Abimelech any tariffs that were due. Word would spread that the "king" could not control his people or protect the area business. Prepares the way for open rebellion
- ❖ Ah...If Abimelech were to pass by, these "bandits" could kill him and Shechem would be rid of him.
- ❖ However, this would not fulfill Jotham's curse.
- ❖ Not only must Abimelech die, but Shechem's leaders must die as well.

Scene 2: Who Has The Gall [Gaal] to Oppose Abimelech? Judges 9:26-29

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

1. Gaal, a newcomer, arrives in Shechem with his relatives.
2. Did Gaal just come out of nowhere? Why now and not 3 years earlier?
3. Is this the providence of God? Is this possibly the workings of the evil spirit?
4. Shechem's leaders put their trust in Gaal, son of a slave.

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

1. Grapes were harvested and trodden into juice which turned into wine. It was now "Miller Time" for the people of Shechem. The "bar" was open in the temple of Baal-Berith.

Note: Once again we see the consequences of "not driving out the enemy."

- When Gaal was well "under the influence," he gained great courage.
- He cursed Abimelech, boasting that if he were in charge he would quickly get rid of him.
- He would challenge Abimelech to come with his entire army and everyone would see who was worthy to be their king.

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?

Don't forget: Abimelech had reasoned he was the best candidate for king because he had "roots" in Shechem. His relatives would receive preferential treatment.

1. Gaal uses this argument, but he reminds the people of Shechem their "roots" go way back to Hamor the Hivite, Shechem's founding father.

FYI: The Shechemites are descended from Hamor who was a Hivite in the land.

- The Hivites descended from Canaan, the 4th son of Ham. Canaan was cursed by Noah and this curse passed onto his sons.
- Moses gave the command that the Hivites were to be utterly destroyed.

Deut. 7:1-2, 11 When the Lord thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the HIVITES, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou;

And when the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them:

Thou shalt therefore keep the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments, which I command thee this day, to do them.

- The Hivites were one of the Canaanite enemies who were to be driven totally out of the land under Joshua. [Joshua 3:10]
- The Shechemites were descended from the cursed line of Canaan.

2. Gaal challenged the people to remember the parentage of Abimelech through his father Jerubbaal [Gideon], rather than referring to his mother, the Shechemite.
3. Jerubbaal = overthrewer of the altar of Baal their god, for which act the Shechemites themselves had tried to slay him [Judges 6:30, 31]
4. If ye will be in subjection, call someone to authority who is descended from the ancient and legitimate stock of Shechem, instead of this ignoble alien despot. [Gen. 12:6]
Why should they submit to a relative newcomer, when the "old guard" is here?
5. Gaal has the most compelling proof that he has claim to the throne.

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.

Scene 3: Zebul's Report & Recommendation: Judges 9:30-33

Judges 9:30-31 And when Zebul the ruler of the city heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was kindled. And he sent messengers to Abimelech privily, saying, "Behold, Gaal the son of Ebed and his relatives have come to Shechem; and behold, they are stirring up the city against you.

1. Zebul sent a report to Abimelech detailing Gaal's claims and his popularity.
2. His recommendation: Abimelech should approach Shechem with his army in the darkness of night and lie in wait in the fields and attack at morning light.

Phase #1: The Defeat Of Gaal: Judges 9:34-41

1. Divides his men into 4 companies.

At dawn, he descends the mountains toward Shechem in the valley.

2. Gaal has risen early and joined Zebul at the gate of the city. At this early hour, many would have passed through the gates on their way to work in the fields.
3. Gaal seemed to note movement in the hills. He then observed movement from another part of the hills above. He was certain many men were advancing on the city.

Judges 9:38 Then said Zebul unto him [Gaal], 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.

4. Gaal had to confront Abimelech outside the city gates. He led the city leaders out of the city. Abimelech gained the upper hand and inflicted many casualties on Gaal's forces.
5. Gaal's courage vaporized and he fled to safety inside the city gates with Abimelech in hot pursuit.

Judges 9:41 Then Abimelech remained at Arumah, but Zebul drove out Gaal and his relatives so that they could not remain in Shechem.

Note: The expulsion of Gaal from Shechem by Zebul: Not only does this account of the battle between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem describe the fulfillment of the curse of Jotham, pronounced from Mount Gerizim, it also informs us that God providentially spared Gaal and his relatives from the judgment that was soon to come upon those who took part in the slaughter of Jerub-Baal's sons. Gaal's departure from Shechem also spared him from the judgment which was to fall upon that city (and Abimelech) the next day.

Phase #2: Judges 9:42-45

1. Next morning: Looked like "business as usual." Abimelech was nowhere in sight. Gaal & his relatives were gone: evicted by Zebul.
2. They didn't think Abimelech would hold them accountable for aligning themselves with Gaal.
3. Abimelech returned to Shechem because his wrath was not yet satisfied. This ruthless, godless tyrant would stop at nothing to achieve his selfish ends
4. Divided his men into 3 companies. One group: seize the city gate to gain entrance and prevent the citizens from returning to the city for protection.
 - One company began slaughtering the residents who were outside the city gates.
 - Abimelech focused on the defeat and destruction of the city.
 - He captured the city, killed all the inhabitants and completely destroyed the city.
 - Sowing with salt is the ritual of spreading salt on conquered cities to symbolize a curse: Turn Shechem into a barren, uninhabitable desert
 - It appeared it would never be restored. Shechem was rebuilt about 200 years later by Jeroboam [I Kings 12:25].

Phase 3: The Attack On 2 Towers: Judges 9:46-55

Consider: He had completely destroyed Shechem, so he should get back to his normal routine.

Judges 9:46 When all the leaders of the tower of Shechem heard of it, they entered the inner chamber of the temple of El-berith.

1. The city leaders, those who were destined to be "burned with fire from Abimelech," according to the curse of Jotham, had received word that Abimelech was waging war against the city of Shechem. They fled to the temple of El-Berith.
2. The city leaders are huddled in the inner room of the temple of their god. seek "safety" at the sanctuary of their god from the vengeance of Abimelech.

NET Bible Notes: Inner chamber (stronghold) - Apparently this rare word refers here to the most inaccessible area of the temple, perhaps the inner sanctuary or an underground chamber. It appears only here and in 1 Sam 13:6, where it is paired with "cisterns" and refers to subterranean or cave-like hiding places.

Note: The archaeologists also discovered that the 3 buildings mentioned in the Bible [the "House of Baal-Berith," the "House of Millo," and the "Tower of Shechem"] were one and the same and that Shechem's great temple-fortress was the largest in the land."

3. Abimelech made his way up Mt. Zalmon [Ebal] with his men. They cut down branches from the trees and carried them back to the temple of El-Baal. He set fire to all the branches, placed them beside or on top of the structure in which they were hiding.

"The attempted coup by Gaal; the secret envoy sent by Zebul, Abimelech's accomplice, to warn him of the mounting opposition. We watch the maneuvering of troops, the execution of military plans and counter-plans, until at last smoke arises from the tower of the idol temple in Shechem where a thousand men and women had taken futile refuge as 'fire came out from Abimelech and devoured the men of Shechem', exactly as Jotham had foretold."

4. All the leaders, under the curse of Jotham, died.

The Bramble bush was blazing! Result = 1000 people roasted alive in the pagan temple.

The Power of Revenge Continues: Judges 9:50-55

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

- The citizens crowded into the fortified tower for refuge.
- They went to the tower's roof where they could look down and watch Abimelech unsuccessfully attempting to break through the locked doors or gates.
- He decided to set fire to the tower. It had worked before. But in his arrogance and overconfidence, he drew a little too close to the walls of the tower.

Judges 9:53 But a certain woman threw an upper millstone on Abimelech's head, crushing his skull.

1. In his last moments of life, he ordered his armor-bearer to draw his sword and run him through so that his death would be the result of a "more manly" blow.
2. When the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, each departed to his home.
3. The people in tower of Thebez remained unharmed.

To God Be The Glory: Judges 9:56-57

1. These events are the fulfillment of God's word through Jotham, providentially orchestrated by God.
2. He brought judgment upon the guilty while delivering the innocent [regarding the injustice done to Gideon's sons] from His wrath.

Abimelech is much like Satan. He promises to provide protection and blessings for those who submit to him. Once men are under his power, he becomes an oppressive tyrant. He does not protect life; he is a destroyer. Many fall prey to him and believe his seductive lies.

If God is not King, a usurper will arise in His place.

When there is a spiritual vacuum, Satan will rush to fill it.

Consider: If God had been the King of the Israelites, Abimelech could have never been king.

The Christian life is not lived by beating down the flesh and trying as hard as I can to keep my old nature in its place.

Truth: The flesh cannot rule where the Spirit is King.

Trusting The Sovereign God: God's Promised Punishment Of His Enemies

Ps. 37:1-2 Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. ² For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.

- They are cursed by God Ps. 37:22
- They shall be cut off Ps. 37:9, 22, 28, 34, 38
- They shall be no more Ps. 37:10, 36
- God laughs at them Ps. 37:13
- God sees their day coming Ps. 37:13
- They shall destroy themselves Ps. 37:15
- They shall be broken, & their weapons Ps. 37:15, 17
- They shall perish Ps. 37:20
- They shall vanish and pass away Ps. 37:20, 36
- They will not be found Ps. 37:36

Safety and salvation come only from the God who has delivered His people throughout the centuries. There is a "tower" to which we can flee for salvation and safety.

Prov. 18:10 The name of the LORD is a strong tower; The righteous runs into it and is safe.

Ps. 61:3 For You have been a shelter and a refuge for me, A strong tower against the adversary.

Ps. 46:1 God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble.

Ps. 18:2 The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.

Ps. 27:1 The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

Prov. 30:5 Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.

Judges gives us the assurance that in spite of man's unfaithfulness, God will remain true to His covenant promises. He will preserve His people and establish the Kingdom He promised.

The Promised One:

Isa. 9:6-7 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

⁷ Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

The King Of Glory

Ps. 24:7-10 Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. ⁸ Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle.

⁹ Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.

¹⁰ Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory. Selah.

The crucial issue: Is the King Of Glory sitting on the throne of my heart?