

## Judges 9 - Thursday, November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012

(1) Then Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem, to his mother's brothers, and spoke with them and with all the family of the house of his mother's father, saying, (2) "Please speak in the hearing of all the men of Shechem: 'Which is better for you, that all seventy of the sons of Jerubbaal reign over you, or that one reign over you?' Remember that I *am* your own flesh and bone." (3) And his mother's brothers spoke all these words concerning him in the hearing of all the men of Shechem; and their heart was inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, "He is our brother."

- We start off chapter nine with the account of this man Abimelech, one of Gideon's seventy sons, who was born to one of his concubines.
- Here, in the first three verses, we're told that he is somehow able to convince his Shechemite brethren to make him his father's successor.
- In other words, he is promoting himself over and above the rest of his brothers, all seventy of them, in order to be made a king and ruler.

**Psalms 75:6-7 KJV** For promotion *cometh* neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. (7) But God *is* the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another.

- Not only is the self-promotion and exaltation, it is absolutely evil, and is about to get really ugly, really fast, as we'll see here in a moment.
- It's as if he's launching a campaign to be elected as the ruler, and the way in which he will go about it, will be to eliminate all his opponents.
- It's important to understand that the Shechemite's are predominately Cannanites, and Abimelech is appealing to them as his political party.

(4) So they gave him seventy *shekels* of silver from the temple of Baal-Berith, with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless men; and they followed him. (5) Then he went to his father's house at Ophrah and killed his brothers, the seventy sons of Jerubbaal, on one stone. But Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, because he hid himself.

- In keeping with our political metaphor, Abimelech is able to raise campaign funds, which he in turn uses to hire thugs to run his campaign.
- The first thing they do is kill all seventy sons of Gideon, and they do it by lining them up and likely, beheading them all on the same stone.
- Save one, the youngest son of Gideon, whom we're told was able to run and hide, thus sparing his life from this unspeakable act of terror.

- Lest you think that this is far removed from the world in which we live today, think again, as this sort of evil actually happens all the time.
- While those seeking self-promotion and exaltation don't literally assassinate those posing a threat, they do assassinate the character.
- Whether it's business or ministry, there are those with selfish, even satanic ambition who will murder others reputation for their exaltation.

**Adam Clarke** - "A work begun under the name and influence of the devil is not likely to end to the glory of God, or to the welfare of man."

(6) And all the men of Shechem gathered together, all of Beth Millo, and they went and made Abimelech king beside the terebinth tree at the pillar that *was* in Shechem.

- I find it interesting that in response to what Abimelech did, the men of Shechem make him their king instead of being repulsed with horror.
- The reason I find this interesting is that the men of Shechem have no idea what kind of man they have actually supported and elected.
- In other words, if this is how he gets into office, what will he do once in the office? In effect, they've just brought a curse upon themselves.

**Habakkuk 2:12 NIV** "Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime!"

(7) Now when they told Jotham, he went and stood on top of Mount Gerizim, and lifted his voice and cried out. And he said to them: "Listen to me, you men of Shechem, That God may listen to you! (8) "The trees once went forth to anoint a king over them. And they said to the olive tree, 'Reign over us!' (9) But the olive tree said to them, 'Should I cease giving my oil, With which they honor God and men, And go to sway over trees?' (10) "Then the trees said to the fig tree, 'You come *and* reign over us!' (11) But the fig tree said to them, 'Should I cease my sweetness and my good fruit, And go to sway over trees?' (12) "Then the trees said to the vine, 'You come *and* reign over us!' (13) But the vine said to them, 'Should I cease my new wine, Which cheers *both* God and men, And go to sway over trees?' (14) "Then all the trees said to the bramble, 'You come *and* reign over us!' (15) And the bramble said to the trees, 'If in truth you anoint me as king over you, *Then* come *and* take shelter in my shade; But if not, let fire come out of the bramble And devour the cedars of Lebanon!"

- It's worthy of noting that what we have here is the first recorded parable in the Bible, and it comes from Abimelech's half brother Jotham.
- Having just escaped Abimelech's massacre of all seventy of his brothers, Jotham preaches from the pulpit standing on top of Mt. Gerizim.
- What's so fascinating about this parable is that it's such a perfect description of what has just happened in their election of Abimelech.

- Notice how that the first three trees are an olive tree, a fig tree, and a grape vine. These trees in the Middle-East are of the utmost value.
- Conversely, the bramble, is of no value because it's only a thorn bush, which is low to the ground, produces no fruit, and has no shade.
- Not only is the thorn bush worthless, you can't even use the wood from it because it splinters. The only thing to do with it is to burn it.

- Couple of thoughts here, the first of which is that the olive tree fig tree and grape vine would have all been able to produce shade and fruit.
- However, the thorn bush produces neither yet it promises that it can. Using the previous metaphor, isn't that just like a politician's promise?
- To me, this speaks to how those who are worthy won't seek to be leaders while those who aren't worthy will seek to positions of leadership.

**James 3:1 NIV** Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

- I want to point out something else here before we move on, and it has to do with how the thorn bush threatens to devour them with fire.
- The reason I wish to point this out is the thorn bush wants to lord it over them, but if they disagree, then it will turn on them and burn them.
- This is true of those wishing to Lord it over others, those who refuse to be lorded over are turned on as opponents and burned, so to speak.

(16) "Now therefore, if you have acted in truth and sincerity in making Abimelech king, and if you have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have done to him as he deserves— (17) for my father fought for you, risked his life, and delivered you out of the hand of Midian; (18) but you have risen up against my father's house this day, and killed his seventy sons on one stone, and made Abimelech, the son of his female servant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your brother— (19) if then you have acted in truth and sincerity with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, *then* rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you. (20) But if not, let fire come from Abimelech and devour the men of Shechem and Beth Millo; and let fire come from the men of Shechem and from Beth Millo and devour Abimelech!" (21) And Jotham ran away and fled; and he went to Beer and dwelt there, for fear of Abimelech his brother.

- After teaching them this powerful parable Jotham in effect, pronounces a curse on them for choosing this evil Abimelech to rule over them.
- In likening Abimelech to the thorn bush, their choice of a leader will come back to haunt them, and even burn them because of their folly.
- I like what Jotham does after teaching this lesson, he runs and hides in fear. This is what I do as a pastor sometimes after a sermon.

(22) After Abimelech had reigned over Israel three years, (23) God sent a spirit of ill will between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech, (24) that the crime *done* to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might be settled and their blood be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who aided him in the killing of his brothers.

- These verses beg the question of why it is that God would allow this evil man Abimelech to rule over Israel for as long as three years.
- One thought is that God is giving them that which they deserve in that this is who they wanted as their leader, so they have to live with it.
- Another thought is that this may be another one of those times where, as one has best said it, "God's delay's are not God's denials."

- After three years of his reign over Israel, God Himself sends a spirit of "ill will" between both Abimelech and these men of Shechem.
- We're told that the Shechemites dealt treacherously with Abimelech, in order for the murder of the seventy sons of Gideon might be settled.
- Clearly, God is now going to bring judgment upon, not only Abimelech but on the men of Shechem who were obviously complicit in all of it.

(25) And the men of Shechem set men in ambush against him on the tops of the mountains, and they robbed all who passed by them along that way; and it was told Abimelech. (26) Now Gaal the son of Ebed came with his brothers and went over to Shechem; and the men of Shechem put their confidence in him. (27) So they went out into the fields, and gathered *grapes* from their vineyards and trod *them*, and made merry. And they went into the house of their god, and ate and drank, and cursed Abimelech.

- Here we're told that the men of Shechem turn against Abimelech and turn to this man named Gaal who apparently wins their allegiance.
- What they do is set up this ambush and rob the passers by along the way, then go out into the fields and gather grapes to make their wine.
- It's interesting to note how that they go into the house of their god and eat and get drunk and when they do they end up cursing Abimelech.

(28) Then Gaal the son of Ebed said, "Who *is* Abimelech, and who *is* Shechem, that we should serve him? *Is he* not the son of Jerubbaal, and *is not* Zebul his officer? Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem; but why should we serve him?"

- This is interesting for a number of reasons not the least of which is that Gaal uses the "race card" against Abimelech who is half Jewish.
- This is why he asks them why they should serve this man who is half Jewish and half Canaanite, suggesting that he be served instead.
- Keep in mind that this guy is really drunk, which is why he is saying the things he's saying, and, as we'll see next making threats as well.

(29) If only this people were under my authority! Then I would remove Abimelech." So he said to Abimelech, "Increase your army and come out!" (30) When Zebul, the ruler of the city, heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was aroused. (31) And he sent messengers to Abimelech secretly, saying, "Take note! Gaal the son of Ebed and his brothers have come to Shechem; and here they are, fortifying the city against you. (32) Now therefore, get up by night, you and the people who *are* with you, and lie in wait in the field. (33) And it shall be, as soon as the sun is up in the morning, *that* you shall rise early and rush upon the city; and *when* he and the people who are with him come out against you, you may then do to them as you find opportunity." (34) So Abimelech and all the people who *were* with him rose by night, and lay in wait against Shechem in four companies. (35) When Gaal the son of Ebed went out and stood in the entrance to the city gate, Abimelech and the people who *were* with him rose from lying in wait. (36) And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, "Look, people are coming down from the tops of the mountains!" But Zebul said to him, "You see the shadows of the mountains as *if they were* men." (37) So Gaal spoke again and said, "See, people are coming down from the center of the land, and another company is coming from the Diviners' Terebinth Tree." (38) Then Zebul said to him, "Where indeed *is* your mouth now, with which you said, 'Who is Abimelech, that we should serve him?' *Are* not these the people whom you despised? Go out, if you will, and fight with them now." (39) So Gaal went out, leading the men of Shechem, and fought with Abimelech. (40) And Abimelech chased him, and he fled from him; and many fell wounded, to the *very* entrance of the gate. (41) Then Abimelech dwelt at Arumah, and Zebul drove out Gaal and his brothers, so that they would not dwell in Shechem. (42) And it came about on the next day that the people went out into the field, and they told Abimelech. (43) So he took his people, divided them into three companies, and lay in wait in the field. And he looked, and there were the people, coming out of the city; and he rose against them and attacked them. (44) Then Abimelech and the company that *was* with him rushed forward and stood at the entrance of the gate of the city; and the *other* two companies rushed upon all who *were* in the fields and killed them. (45) So Abimelech fought against the city all that day; he took the city and killed the people who *were* in it; and he demolished the city and sowed it with salt.

- So, after Gaal threatens to kill Abimelech, word gets out to Zebul, who sets Gaal up by deceiving him, in order that Abimelech can kill him.
- After this bloody battle, Abimelech in killing the people who had turned their allegiance over to Gaal, he demolishes the city sowing salt.
- It would seem that Jotham's parable has turned into a prophecy that's being fulfilled concerning Abimelech turning on them as the thorn bush.

(46) Now when all the men of the tower of Shechem had heard *that*, they entered the stronghold of the temple of the god Berith. (47) And it was told Abimelech that all the men of the tower of Shechem were gathered together. (48) Then Abimelech went up to Mount Zalmon, he and all the people who *were* with him. And Abimelech took an ax in his hand and cut down a bough from the trees, and took it and laid *it* on his shoulder; then he said to the people who were with him, "What you have seen me do, make haste *and* do as I *have done*." (49) So each of the people likewise cut down his own bough and followed Abimelech, put *them* against the stronghold, and set the stronghold on fire above them, so that all the people of the tower of Shechem died, about a thousand men and women.

- It seems the men of Shechem who had survived thought that they'd be safe from Abimelech if they were in the temple of the god Berith.  
- Sadly, about a thousand men and women meet their death at the hands of Abimelech, and as we'll see next, he's just getting started.

(50) Then Abimelech went to Thebez, and he encamped against Thebez and took it. (51) But there was a strong tower in the city, and all the men and women—all the people of the city—fled there and shut themselves in; then they went up to the top of the tower. (52) So Abimelech came as far as the tower and fought against it; and he drew near the door of the tower to burn it with fire.

- This is the thorn bush doing that which only a thorn bush can do and burn. In this case, the thorn bush of Abimelech burns them alive.

(53) But a certain woman dropped an upper millstone on Abimelech's head and crushed his skull. (54) Then he called quickly to the young man, his armorbearer, and said to him, "Draw your sword and kill me, lest men say of me, 'A woman killed him.' " So his young man thrust him through, and he died. (55) And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they departed, every man to his place. (56) Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father by killing his seventy brothers. (57) And all the evil of the men of Shechem God returned on their own heads, and on them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal.

- And so it ends with this evil man meeting his death, by way of God's judgment, thus the lesson that can be learned from Abimelech's life.  
- Abimelech teaches us that evil men, though it may seem as if they get away with wickedness for years, in the end, God will cut them down.

**Psalms 37:1-20 NKJV A Psalm of David.** Do not fret because of evildoers, Nor be envious of the workers of iniquity. (2) For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, And wither as the green herb. (3) Trust in the LORD, and do good; Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. (4) Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart. (5) Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring *it* to pass. (6) He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, And your justice as the noonday. (7) Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. (8) Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret—*it* only *causes* harm. (9) For evildoers shall be cut off; But those who wait on the LORD, They shall inherit the earth. (10) For yet a little while and the wicked *shall be no more*; Indeed, you will look carefully for his place, But it *shall be no more*. (11) But the meek shall inherit the earth, And shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. (12) The wicked plots against the just, And gnashes at him with his teeth. (13) The Lord laughs at him, For He sees that his day is coming. (14) The wicked have drawn the sword And have bent their bow, To cast down the poor and needy, To slay those who are of upright conduct. (15) Their sword shall enter their own heart, And their bows shall be broken. (16) A little that a righteous man has *is* better than the riches of many wicked. (17) For the arms of the wicked shall be broken, But the LORD upholds the righteous. (18) The LORD knows the days of the upright, And their inheritance shall be forever. (19) They shall not be ashamed in the evil time, And in the days of famine they shall be satisfied. (20) But the wicked shall perish; And the enemies of the LORD, Like the splendor of the meadows, shall vanish. Into smoke they shall vanish away.