

Day 247 - MONDAY: September 4th

Judges 9

Judges 9:1-57 NKJV

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, "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." 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." 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. 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. 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. 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! "The trees once went forth to anoint a king over them. And they said to the olive tree, 'Reign over us!' 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?' "Then the trees said to the fig tree, 'You come and reign over us!' But the fig tree said to them, 'Should I cease my sweetness and my good fruit, And go to sway over trees?' "Then the trees said to the vine, 'You come and reign over us!' But the

vine said to them, 'Should I cease my new wine, Which cheers both God and men, And go to sway over trees?' "Then all the trees said to the bramble, 'You come and reign over us!' 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!' "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— for my father fought for you, risked his life, and delivered you out of the hand of Midian; 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— 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. 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!" And Jotham ran away and fled; and he went to Beer and dwelt there, for fear of Abimelech his brother. After Abimelech had reigned over Israel three years, God sent a spirit of ill will between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech, 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. 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. 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. 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. 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? If only this people were under my authority! Then I would remove Abimelech." So he said to Abimelech, "Increase your army and come out!" When Zebul, the ruler of the city, heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was aroused. 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. Now therefore, get up by night, you and the people who are with you, and lie in wait in the field. 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." So Abimelech and all the people who were with him rose by night, and lay in wait against Shechem in four companies. 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. 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." 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." 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." So Gaal went out, leading the men of Shechem, and fought with Abimelech. And Abimelech chased him, and he fled from him; and many fell wounded, to the very entrance of the gate. Then Abimelech dwelt at Arumah, and

Zebul drove out Gaal and his brothers, so that they would not dwell in Shechem. And it came about on the next day that the people went out into the field, and they told Abimelech. 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. 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. 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. Now when all the men of the tower of Shechem had heard that, they entered the stronghold of the temple of the god Berith. And it was told Abimelech that all the men of the tower of Shechem were gathered together. 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." 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. Then Abimelech went to Thebez, and he encamped against Thebez and took it. 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. 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. But a certain woman dropped an upper millstone on Abimelech's head and crushed his skull. 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. And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they departed, every man to his place. Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father by killing his seventy brothers. 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.

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading program states for this chapter: "As stated in yesterday's reading, when Gideon died, the Israelites went right back to their old ways, fornicating with the gods of the Canaanites. How quickly do men turn when the restraining influence of a righteous man is removed!

Although Gideon did not become an actual king, he did have a heavy influence on all aspects of public life. In fact, the large number of sons born to him after his victory—70!—indicates that Gideon amassed a rather large harem (Judges 8:30), something usually reserved for kings. So although he did not become a king de jure, he was apparently the de facto king in Israel. This is also indicated by the name of one of his sons, whom he actually gave the royal title of Abimelech (verse 31), which means "My Father Is King"—and Abimelech's remarks indicate that Gideon's 70 sons were placed in important positions of leadership (compare Judges 9:1-2).

While Gideon earlier realized that he should not be crowned king, it is possible that he later didn't see things so clearly, particularly when we consider what happened with the ephod and his having many wives. (The multiplying of wives to oneself was forbidden to the kings of Israel in Deuteronomy 17:17 because it carried the danger of turning the one doing so away from God—and this principle was certainly applicable to anyone.) Furthermore, Gideon's strong leadership, the deference of the

people of Israel toward him, his personal lifestyle and the role of his sons in governing Israel probably did little to dispel the notion among the people that, even if he was not an actual king, he might as well have been.

Nevertheless, it is nowhere stated that Gideon ever actually assumed the *title* of king—and, with what is made of this issue in chapters 8 and 9, we would certainly expect the account to say so if he had. Thus, it is most likely that he never did. Naming his son Abimelech was perhaps a recognition of what he *effectively* was—not what he *truly* was. And perhaps he was even hopeful of being blessed with some kind of dynastic succession of leadership, as presumptuous as that seems to be. Whatever the case, it is clear that Gideon's son Abimelech *did* want to be acknowledged as king. Upon his father's death, Abimelech realized that if he did not move immediately, he would forever lose his opportunity for that honor. His first action was to gain the support of his mother's influential Shechemite family, who saw that if Abimelech reigned in Israel, they would likely obtain high posts in the new government and all the benefits that went with them. This led the men of Shechem to throw their support, and money from the temple of Baal-Berith there, behind Abimelech. With the new money, Abimelech hired an entourage to accompany him—putting on the airs of a king, a public relations move. With the support of a significant city, and a personal entourage, Abimelech next eliminated any potential competition by murdering all his brothers, Gideon's sons. Immediately, the men of Shechem and Beth Millo crowned Abimelech king. Pathetically, this occurred at the terebinth tree at Shechem, where Jacob, so many years before, had commanded those of his household to put away the foreign gods that were among them (Genesis 35:4).

Jotham, the youngest of Gideon's sons, was the only survivor of the massacre. His long parable of the trees who sought a king charged the

men of Shechem and Beth Millo with the grossest foolishness and the most treacherous dealings against Gideon, and he called forth a destruction upon them in repayment. Being the only blood descendant of Gideon, he knew Abimelech would do all he could to take his life, so he fled and hid.

The pact between Abimelech and his Shechemite supporters lasted for three years. Thereafter, "God sent a spirit of ill will between Abimelech and the men of Shechem" (verse 23). What caused the breach is not stated, but the disaffection caused the men of Shechem to support one Gaal, son of Ebed, in his bid for the throne. The rebellion was brought to a quick end—Abimelech killed Gaal and destroyed the city, including its pagan temple—and thus the treachery of the Shechemites against Gideon was repaid.

On the heels of this victory, Abimelech attacked another city, Thebez. But during the attack, a woman dropped a grinding stone down onto Abimelech's head. Dying, he ordered his armor-bearer to kill him, lest it be said that he was killed by a woman. And so Abimelech's treachery against his father Gideon was repaid.

God watches over His people. When the righteous cry out to him for deliverance from their enemies, God will act, although the unfolding of the events may, to all outward appearances, seem to have little to do with God. In the case of Abimelech, all God had to do was break the league between the Shechemites and Abimelech. The natural wickedness of the players involved would serve to bring things to a conclusion. And, true to His word, those who seek to exalt themselves will be abased.”

[END]

Verse 4 – The JFB commentary states: “idle, worthless vagabonds, the scum of society, who had nothing to lose, but much to gain from the success of a revolutionary movement.”

Verse 45 – Regarding the city being “sown with salt”, John Gill’s commentary states: “not to make it barren, for he would rather then have sowed the field, though this would not have had any effect of that kind, for any time at least; but to show his detestation of it, because of the ill usage he had met with, and as a token of its perpetual destruction, to which he devoted it, determining that if it was in his power it should never be rebuilt; but it was hereafter, and became again a very flourishing city in Jeroboam's time. Thus the Emperor Frederic Barbarossa, in the year 1162, when he took Milan, not only ploughed it up, but sowed it with salt; and in memory of it there is a street in it, now called "la contrada della Sala": besides, Abimelech did this to deter other cities from rebelling against him; for if he so used his own city, more severely, if possible, would he use others.” [END]