

Judges 09 - Abimelech's Political Career: Seizing the Kingdom, Defending the Kingdom, Losing the Kingdom

II. Failure in rescue of Israel through the seven cycles (Judges 3:7—16:31)

(6) Abimelech (Judges 8:29—9:54)

(A) Abimelech seizes power by force in Shechem (8:29—9:6)

(B) Jotham's fable to the Shechemites regarding Abimelech's evil character (9:7-21)

(C) Abimelech becomes estranged from the Shechemites and Gaal becomes king (9:22-29)

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(G) Abimelech seeks to take Thebez because of the rebels living there and is fatally wounded by a woman dropping a millstone on him necessitating Abimelech's suicide (9:50-54)

Judges 9

(6) Abimelech (Judges 8:29—9:54)

(A) Abimelech seizes power by force in Shechem (8:29—9:6)

1 Now Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem, to his mother's relatives, and spoke to them and to the entire family of the household of his mother's father, saying,

1 And Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem to his mother's relatives, and spoke to them and to the whole clan of the household of his mother's father, saying,

1 Then Jerubbaal's son Abimelech went to his mother's relatives in Shechem. He spoke to the entire family of his mother's father, telling them,

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,

- It is interesting that in Judges 9, Gideon is always called JerubBaal ("Baal Fighter"), never Gideon (Cf. 6:32)

- Abimelech was the son of Gideon by a concubine: a slave woman who lived with her father's family in Shechem (8:30-31; 9:18). Undoubtedly, he would have been shunned by his half-brothers (Cf. v5).

- Abimelech means "my father is king." Gideon certainly lived like a king, but he refused to establish a dynasty in Israel.

— Gideon has made it clear that neither Abimelech nor any of his sons were to rule the people (8:23). Israel will not have a true king until Saul was anointed in 1 Sam 10.

- Obviously, Abimelech felt Gideon had made a mistake. After his father's death, Abimelech moved from Ophrah to Shechem to start his campaign

— In what he did, Abimelech broke several of God's laws and as a result brought destruction upon himself and trouble to the people

- "Thou shalt not covet" is the last of the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:17), but breaking it is the first step in breaking the other nine!

- Ambition can be a dangerous thing:

— "I will ascend into heaven!" turned an angel into the devil (Is 14:13)

— "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built?" turned a king into an animal (Dan 4:28-37)

— If we exalt ourselves, God has many ways of bringing us down (Matt 23:12)

- The Shechemites may have been primarily Canaanite, as the Book of Joshua does not mention a national conquest of Shechem, only that there is no opposition to his arrival there

— The Israelites had been acquainted with the people of Shechem since the day of the Patriarchs (Gen 12:6; 33:18-20; 34:1ff)

- Shechem had been a significant religious center since the time of Abraham (Gen 12:6-7). It was located in the narrow valley between the hills of Gerizim and Ebal, site of the recitation of the blessings and cursings of the Law under Joshua (Joshua 8:30-35), as well as the further covenant renewal ceremony before Joshua's death (Joshua 24:1-28).

— It was situated on a strategic crossroads of the latitudinal route ascending from the coastal highway in the west and descending to Adam, on the Jordan River, and the longitudinal route along the central ridge from Jerusalem in the south to the northern accesses to the Jezreel Valley.

2 "Speak, now, in the hearing of all the leaders of Shechem, 'Which is better for you: for seventy men, all the sons of Jerubbaal, to rule over you, or for one man to rule over you?' Also, remember that I am your bone and your flesh."

2 "Speak, now, in the hearing of all the leaders of Shechem, 'Which is better for you, that seventy men, all the sons of Jerubbaal, rule over you, or that one man rule over you?' Also, remember that I am your bone and your flesh."

2 "Ask all the "lords" of Shechem, 'What's better for you? That 70 men, each of them Jerubbaal's sons, rule over you? Or that one man rule over you?' Keep in mind that I'm like your own close relative."

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.

- Abimelech's question hinted toward the latter: however, there was no indication that any of the other sons had ambition to be king

— He added that it was better to be ruled by an insider versus an outsider; he was one of them. This was not true of any of the other 70 sons of Gideon.

3 So his mother's relatives spoke all these words on his behalf in the hearing of all the leaders of Shechem; and they were inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, "He is our relative."

3 And his mother's relatives spoke all these words on his behalf in the hearing of all the leaders of Shechem; and they were inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, "He is our relative."

3 So his mother's relatives spoke all of this on his behalf in the presence of all the "lords" of Shechem. Since they were inclined to follow Abimelech, they said, "He's our relative!"

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.

- The Canaanite blood tie was his most convincing argument, and it worked

— His mother was a Shechemite and his father was an Israelite; Abimelech could represent both constituencies

— The Canaanites in Shechem had no indebtedness to Gideon's sons, while Abimelech was one of their own

4 And they gave him seventy *pieces* of silver from the house of **Baal-berith**, with which Abimelech hired **worthless** and **reckless** men, and they followed him.

4 They gave him seventy *pieces* of silver from the house of Baal-berith with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless fellows, and they followed him.

4 and they gave him 70 silver coins from the temple that they had built to Baal-berith. Abimelech hired some worthless and useless men, who followed him

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.

- "...Baal-berith" - "lord of the covenant"; a god of the Philistines (Cf. 8:33)

— "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," and "Thou shalt not make for yourself any graven image" are the first two commandments (Ex 20:3-4)

- Abimelech broke both: his acceptance of public money from the Baal worshipers to finance his crusade was a public announcement that he had renounced the God of Israel and was on the side of Baal
- Ambition is a terrible master. With the tainted money from the heathen temple, he hired a group of mercenaries to gain control over the people, and remove every rival to the throne
- "...worthless" - denotes men with idle hands and empty stomachs, but with no desire to work or earn an honest living
- These men were without possessions, willing to sell themselves for any task
- The same word will be used of the men that Jephthah will gather around him later (11:3)
- "...reckless" - means "to boil up" or "to be violent"; implies these were licentious men
- The type of men who followed him were idle and worthless and were devoid of wisdom and moral understanding

Power tends to corrupt. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. — Lord Acton [Letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton, 1887]

5 Then he went to his father's house in Ophrah and killed his brothers the sons of Jerubbaal, seventy men, **on one stone**. But Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, because he hid himself.

5 Then he went to his father's house at Ophrah and killed his brothers the sons of Jerubbaal, seventy men, on one stone. But Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, for he hid himself.

5 to his father's house in Ophrah. There he murdered his own brothers, Jerubbaal's sons—all 70 of them—in one place. But Jerubbaal's youngest son Jotham survived by hiding himself.

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.

- "...on one stone" - the fact that all 69 brothers were killed on one stone required the killing to take place one by one

— This was not a quick slaughter of unsuspecting victims, but a calculated, brutal act of murder while trying to foster terror

- "Thou shalt not murder" is the 6th Commandment (Ex 20:13)

— This was violated numerous times by Abimelech and his mercenaries. Murderers go to hell (Rev 21:8; 22:15).

— There's no evidence that Abimelech and his gang ever repented of their sins. Their feet were "swift to shed blood" (Rom 3:15; Is 59:7), and that blood would come back on their

heads.

- Murder is bad enough, but when brother kills brother, that is even more heinous. 69 brothers killed (only Jotham escaped). This was probably vengeance for their previous abuses.

- Abimelech joined the ranks of other men who committed fratricide:

- Cain → Abel (Gen 4)
- Absalom → Amnon (2 Sam 13:23ff)
- Jehoram → 6! (2 Chr 21:4)

- It is a cynical comment on the men of the area: how soon they forgot the exploits and indebtedness to Gideon! No one interfered...

6 All the leaders of Shechem and all **Beth-millo** assembled together, and they went and made Abimelech king, by the **oak** of the memorial stone which was in Shechem.

6 All the men of Shechem and all Beth-millo assembled together, and they went and made Abimelech king, by the oak of the pillar which was in Shechem.

6 All the men from Shechem and Beth-millo gathered together and set up Abimelech as king near the pillar erected in Shechem.

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.

- The aristocracy of Shechem proclaimed Abimelech as king

— His kingdom, however, would be limited to four basic cities: Shechem, Beth-Millo, Arumah, and Thebez

— His three-year rule was secured by gall, maintained by force, and did not survive his death

— Abimelech was never a judge, and never much of a king

- "...Beth-millo" - "house of the fortress"; the section of the upper classes

- "...oak" - *'elown*, a tree, great tree, terebinth; probably the well-known sacred tree of Moreh (Cf. Gen 12:6; 35:4)

- He also defiled a place sacred in Jewish history:

— This took place at the "oak of Moreh" where the Lord had appeared to Abraham and promised to give him and his descendants the land (Gen 12:6)

— It was near this site that Israel heard the blessings and the curses read from Torah and promised to obey the Lord (Deut 11:26-32; Joshua 8:30-35)

— Jacob buried the idols here as he called his family back to God (Gen 24:1-5)

— Here Joshua gave his last speech and led the people in the renewal of the covenant ceremony (Joshua 24:25-26)

— How ironic that this sacred history was degraded and dishonored by the selfish acts of one godless man

- The 3rd Commandment says, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain" (Ex 20:7). The 9th Commandment forbids us bearing false witness (Ex 20:16).
- Abimelech broke both when he was crowned king. If he took an oath of office in the name of the Lord, it was blasphemy. If he promised to protect the people and obey the law, it was deception (Deut 17:14-20). No matter what he promised, he had his own agenda and intended to carry it out.

Politics is a strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principles; the conduct of public affairs for private advantage. [Ambrose Bierce]

(B) Jotham's fable to the Shechemites regarding Abimelech's evil character (9:7-21)

7 Now when they told Jotham, he went and stood on the top of Mount Gerizim, and raised his voice and called out. And he said to them, "Listen to me, you leaders of Shechem, that God may listen to you.

7 Now when they told Jotham, he went and stood on the top of Mount Gerizim, and lifted his voice and called out. Thus he said to them, "Listen to me, O men of Shechem, that God may listen to you.

7 When Jotham was informed about this, he went out, took his stand on top of Mount Gerizim, and cried out loudly, "Listen to me, you "lords" of Shechem, and God will listen to you.

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

- Jotham's pronouncement concerning Abimelech's self-appointed kingship...his speech (a short story told in poetic form) covers v8-15

- Only Jotham had escaped. Jotham probably spoke from a triangular rock ledge on the side of Gerizim which forms a natural pulpit from which one can be heard as far away as Mount Ebal across the valley.

- Mt. Gerizim was the place that the blessings were to be read (Deut 27:12,28); but Jotham's speech was anything but a blessing

- Other parables in the OT:

- Nathan's "Parable of the Ewe Lamb" (2 Sam 12:1-4)
- The parable by the woman of Tekoa (2 Sam 14:5-20)
- The Parable of the Thistle (2 Kings 14:8-14)
- The Parable of the Vineyard (Is 5:1-7)

- Also, the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel contain both standard parables as well as "action" parables (Jer 13; 18-19; 27-28; Ezek 4-5; 16; 31, et al.)

8 Once the trees went to anoint a king over them, and they said to the olive tree, 'Reign over us!'

8 Once the trees went forth to anoint a king over them, and they said to the olive tree, 'Reign over us!'

8 "Once upon a time the trees went out to consecrate a king for themselves. "So they told the olive tree, 'Reign over us!'

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.

9 But the olive tree said to them, 'Shall I give up my fatness with which God and mankind are honored, and go to wave over the trees?'

9 But the olive tree said to them, 'Shall I leave my fatness with which God and men are honored, and go to wave over the trees?'

9 But the olive tree asked them, 'Should I stop producing my rich oils by which both God and men are honored and go take dominion over trees?'

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?

- The olive tree honors God and man. It honors God because olive oil was used for anointing the priesthood and used for the lampstand. It honors man since its oil was used for anointing as a refreshment of the skin and for food.

— In other words, why should the olive tree become king, reigning over the trees, and abandon the more useful purpose it already had?

10 Then the trees said to the fig tree, 'You, come, reign over us!'

10 Then the trees said to the fig tree, 'You come, reign over us!'

10 "So the trees told the fig tree, 'Hey you! Come and reign over us!'

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

- The same offer is made to the fig tree...

11 But the fig tree said to them, 'Shall I give up my sweetness and my good fruit, and go to wave over the trees?'

11 But the fig tree said to them, 'Shall I leave my sweetness and my good fruit, and go to wave over the trees?'

11 But the fig tree asked them, 'Should I leave my sweet, good fruit and go take dominion over trees?'

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?

- The fig tree also rejected the offer
- The fig maintains its sweetness either when fresh or dried. The yield of a fig tree is two or three crops a year, not just one as with most other trees.
- Ezek 31 and Daniel 4 both use trees to represent leaders or nations

12 Then the trees said to the vine, 'You, come, reign over us!'

12 Then the trees said to the vine, 'You come, reign over us!'

12 "So the trees told the grape vine, 'Hey you! Come and reign over us!'

12 Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou, and reign over us.

- The same offer of kingship is made to the grape vine...

13 But the vine said to them, 'Shall I give up my new wine, which cheers God and mankind, and go to wave over the trees?'

13 But the vine said to them, 'Shall I leave my new wine, which cheers God and men, and go to wave over the trees?'

13 But the grape vine asked them, 'Should I leave my new wine, which cheers God and man, and go take dominion over trees?'

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?

- Each offer was refused; each would have to sacrifice something in order to reign, and weren't prepared to make that sacrifice. Each felt they had a more useful purpose.

14 Then all the trees said to the bramble, 'You, come, reign over us!'

14 Finally all the trees said to the bramble, 'You come, reign over us!'

14 "So all the trees told the bramble bush, 'Hey you! Come and reign over us!'

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

- The trees, having failed to tempt the useful trees to leave their usefulness for the sake of status, as a last resort, offered the kingship to the lowest grade of plant life, and therefore to any other position would be an elevation

- A bramble, or thornbush, was a useless nuisance, the most worthless plant in the Middle East

- It produces no fruit, and is too low to the ground to produce any shade. Its wood cannot be used for any kind of construction because it splits too easily. It is good only as fuel for the fire.

- This was, of course, a symbol of Abimelech

15 And the bramble said to the trees, 'If you really are anointing me as king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, may fire come out of the bramble and consume the

cedars of Lebanon.'

15 The bramble said to the trees, 'If in truth you are anointing me as king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, may fire come out from the bramble and consume the cedars of Lebanon.'

15 Then the bramble bush replied to the trees, 'If you really are consecrating me to rule you, come and put your confidence in my shade; but if not, may fire spring out from the bramble bush and burn up the cedars of Lebanon...'

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.

- This was an absurd proposition: it was too low to cast a significant shadow

— Often in the summer, fires would breakout in bramble bushes, and threaten the safety of the trees

— Although the bramble is so lowly, it can destroy the most noble tree of all, the cedar of Lebanon

The point of this parable is that Abimelech can offer no security or comfort to Shechem, and in fact, will be the source and cause of its destruction.

16 "Now then, if you have acted with honesty and integrity in making Abimelech king, and if you have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have dealt with him as he deserved

—

16 "Now therefore, if you have dealt in truth and integrity in making Abimelech king, and if you have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have dealt with him as he deserved

—

16 "Now then, if you have been acting in good faith and integrity by making a king out of Abimelech, if you have treated Jerubbaal and his household appropriately by acting toward him as he deserved—

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;

17 for my father fought for you, and risked his life and saved you from the hand of Midian;

17 for my father fought for you and risked his life and delivered you from the hand of Midian;

17 because my father fought on your behalf, throwing away all concern for his own life, and delivered you from Midian's domination.

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

- Jotham makes his case based on righteousness: if Shechem had done righteously in all that they did to Gideon, who risked his life for them, then all is well and good

— Even the Canaanites still in the land, who also suffered from the Midianite raids, benefited from Gideon's campaign

18 but *in fact* you have risen against my father's house today and have killed his sons, seventy men, on one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his female slave, king over the leaders of Shechem, because he is your relative—

18 but you have risen against my father's house today and have killed his sons, seventy men, on one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his maidservant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your relative—

18 "But now as for you, you've rebelled against my father's house today. You've murdered his sons—70 men—in one place, and you've installed Abimelech, the son of his mistress, as king to rule over the "lords" of Shechem, since he's related to you.

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;)

- Twice we are told of "the seventy men" (v18,56), but since Jotham escaped, there were only 69

— This is no more an "error" than "the twelve" (John 20:24; 1 Cor 15:5), which were actually only eleven with Judas excepted

19 so if you have acted with honesty and integrity toward Jerubbaal and his house this day, be joyful about Abimelech, and may he also be joyful about you.

19 if then you have dealt in truth and integrity with Jerubbaal and his house this day, rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you.

19 So if you've acted in good faith and integrity toward Jerubbaal and his household today, then you're welcome to Abimelech, and he's welcome to you...

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:

- They should have been ashamed of the way they rejected the house of Gideon and honored a worthless opportunist

20 But if not, may fire come out of Abimelech and consume the leaders of Shechem and Beth-millo; and may fire come out of the leaders of Shechem and from Beth-millo, and consume Abimelech."

20 But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech and consume the men of Shechem and Beth-millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem and from Beth-millo, and consume Abimelech."

20 But if not, may fire spring out from Abimelech and consume the "lords" of Shechem and Beth-millo, and may fire spring out from the "lords" of Shechem and Beth-millo to consume Abimelech."

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.

- Jotham made his point: Abimelech, the "bramble king" would be unable to protect the people and he would cause judgment to come that would destroy those who trusted in him
— After three conditional clauses, this was a prophecy and a curse: Both Abimelech and his followers would destroy one another (notice how literally this was fulfilled: v57)

- Abimelech was actually trying to wrest the kingdom away from God:

— Judges 8:23: And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you.

21 Then Jotham escaped and fled, and went to Beer; and he stayed there because of his brother Abimelech.

21 Then Jotham escaped and fled, and went to Beer and remained there because of Abimelech his brother.

21 Then Jotham escaped by running away. He went to Beer and remained there because of his brother Abimelech.

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

- They obviously didn't receive his rebuke favorably, so Jotham went into hiding (probably for the entire three years of Abimelech's reign)

- God is still on the throne, and He will see to it that man's selfish purposes will be frustrated

— There's no competition in the work of the Lord (John 4:34-38; 1 Cor 3:5-9), and there's no need for us to promote ourselves

(C) Abimelech becomes estranged from the Shechemites and Gaal becomes king (9:22-29)

22 Now Abimelech **ruled** over **Israel** for three years.

22 Now Abimelech ruled over Israel three years.

22 Abimelech dominated Israel for three years.

22 When Abimelech had reigned three years over Israel,

- "...ruled" - *sar*, "prince," "captain," or "official"; not *melech*, "king"
- "ruled" is too strong a word; "governed" would be better
- Abimelech's attempt to be king would not last as long as any of the oppressions or any of the periods chronicled in the rest of Judges
- "...Israel" - not always used of the whole nation, but sometimes used more locally, as here
- In this instance, "Israel" refers to the Greater Shechem area, including the four titles mentioned below
- Abimelech didn't reign supremely over the entire nation; there wasn't that kind of solidarity during the days of the Judges. He was in control of Shechem and Beth-Millo (v6), Arumah (v41), and Thebez (v50), all in the western part of Manasseh
- It's doubtful that his influence reached all of the tribes. Three years under his leadership set the stage for the Shechem revolt...

23 Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem; and **the leaders of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech,**

23 Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech,

23 Then God sent an evil spirit to divide Abimelech and the "lords" of Shechem

23 Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech:

- Notice, it was God who sent an evil spirit of ill will (Cf. 1 Kings 12:15; Is 19:14)

— This shows God is able to use even demons to carry out His own purposes

— He, indeed, rules the entire universe. Even Satan couldn't touch Job without His permission (Job 1:12; 2:6).

- "...the leaders of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech" - predicted by Jotham three years earlier

Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceedingly small. — Longfellow, *Retribution*

24 so that the violence done to the **seventy** sons of Jerubbaal would come, and *the responsibility* for their blood would be placed on their brother Abimelech, who killed them, and on the leaders of Shechem, who encouraged him to kill his brothers.

24 so that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood might be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers.

24 so that the violence committed against the 70 sons of Jerubbaal might come back on their brother Abimelech, who murdered them, and so it might come back on the "lords" of

Shechem, who provoked him to murder his brothers.

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.

- "...seventy" - is a collective noun for the sons of Gideon; there were actually 69, excepting Jotham

25 The leaders of Shechem set up men in ambush against him on the tops of the mountains, and they robbed everyone who would pass by them on the road; and it was reported to Abimelech.

25 The men of Shechem set men in ambush against him on the tops of the mountains, and they robbed all who might pass by them along the road; and it was told to Abimelech.

25 The "lords" of Shechem sent out men to ambush him on the mountain tops, and they robbed everyone who came by them along the roads, and this was reported to Abimelech.

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.

- Abimelech was living at Arunah (v41) and these bandits were robbing him of both his tribute money and his reputation

— The merchants would divert to a different trade route, and thus avoid whatever tariffs were levied upon them

— Furthermore, word was getting out that the new king couldn't control his people and protect area business—a fundamental requirement of the crown

26 Now **Gaal** the son of **Ebed** came with his relatives, and crossed over into Shechem; and the leaders of Shechem trusted him.

26 Now Gaal the son of Ebed came with his relatives, and crossed over into Shechem; and the men of Shechem put their trust in him.

26 Meanwhile, Ebed's son Gaal arrived with his relatives and crossed over into Shechem. The "lords" of Shechem put their faith in him.

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.

- "...Gaal" - "to loathe" or "to abhor"

- "...Ebed" - "slave"

— So Gaal was "the abhorred one, son of a slave"

- Gaal went to Shechem, which resulted in a change of allegiance of the men of Shechem; he would help them in their revolt against Abimelech

27 So they went out to the field and gathered the grapes of their vineyards and trampled *them*, and held a festival; and they went into the house of their god, and ate and drank and

cursed Abimelech.

27 They went out into the field and gathered *the grapes of* their vineyards and trod *them*, and held a festival; and they went into the house of their god, and ate and drank and cursed Abimelech.

27 They went out into the fields, harvested their vineyards, made some wine, and threw a party. Then they went into the temple of their god, ate, drank, and cursed Abimelech.

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.

- At the time of the grape harvest (June-July), the Shechemites held a pagan religious festival, perhaps comparable to the Feast of Ingathering (Lev 23:15-22)

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* Zebul *not* his governor? Serve the men of **Hamor** the father of Shechem; but why should we serve him?"

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* Zebul *not* his lieutenant? Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem; but why should we serve him?"

28 Then Ebed's son Gaal remarked, "Who is this Abimelech? And who is Shechem? Should we serve him? Isn't he Jerubbaal's son? Isn't Zebul his lieutenant? Serve the men of Hamor, Shechem's ancestor—but why are we serving him?"

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?"

- They cursed Abimelech and put their confidence in Gaal, who ridiculed both Abimelech and his deputy Zebul who was the governor of Shechem (v30)

— Whereas Abimelech connected himself with his Canaanite mother, Gaal connected Abimelech with his Jewish father. Gaal thus reminds the people that Abimelech was the son of the Baal Fighter, and therefore would have been opposed to the sanctuary of Baal-Berith in Shechem.

— Gaal set himself up as the defender of Baal, and of Shechem, against the son of the Baal Fighter

— Why did Gaal curse and challenge Abimelech? Because he had been drinking! (v27)

— He reminded the people that their king had a Jewish father, while they were the sons of Hamor, not sons of Jacob (Gen 34:26)

— The key plank in Abimelech's platform (v9) turned out to be his "thorn in the flesh"

- "...Hamor" - the Hivite prince who founded Shechem (Gen 33:19; 34:2; Joshua 24:32)

29 If only this people were under my authority! Then I would do away with Abimelech." And he said to Abimelech, "Enlarge your army and come out!"

29 Would, therefore, that this people were under my authority! Then I would remove Abimelech." And he said to Abimelech, "Increase your army and come out."

29 If only authority over this people were given to me. Then I would remove Abimelech!" Then he challenged Abimelech: "Build up your army and then come out and fight!"

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.

- Abimelech was living in Arumah (perhaps Kirbet el-Urma between Shechem and Shiloh); Gaal was living in Shechem

— Gaal was more accessible to the people and their problems (this was the same approach that Absalom, years later, would use to steal the hearts of Israel, 2 Sam 15:1-6)

— Gaal concluded with his call to reject Israelite rule and reinstate Canaanite rule, dared the king to accept his challenge...

(D) Abimelech loyalist Zebul becomes aware of Gaal's quest for power in Shechem (9:30-33)

30 When Zebul the leader of the city heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger burned.

30 When Zebul the ruler of the city heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger burned.

30 When Zebul, the ruler of the city, heard what Ebed's son Gaal had said, he flew into a rage.

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

- Zebul was Abimelech's local representative in Shechem

31 So using deception, he *successfully* sent messengers to Abimelech, saying, "Behold, Gaal the son of Ebed and his relatives have come to Shechem; and behold, they are stirring up the city against you.

31 He sent messengers to Abimelech deceitfully, saying, "Behold, Gaal the son of Ebed and his relatives have come to Shechem; and behold, they are stirring up the city against you.

31 He sent messengers to Abimelech in secret and told him, "Look out! Ebed's son Gaal and his family have arrived here in Shechem. Watch out! They're stirring up the city against you.

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.

- Zebul sent a secret message to Abimelech, so that Gaal was unaware

32 So now, arise by night, you and the people who are with you, and lie in wait in the field.

32 Now therefore, arise by night, you and the people who are with you, and lie in wait in the field.

32 So get up at night, take your soldiers with you, and wait in ambush out in the field.

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

- Zebul recommends a surprise attack on Gaal and his men

33 Then in the morning, as soon as the sun is up, you shall rise early and attack the city; and behold, when he and the people who are with him come out against you, you shall do to them whatever you can."

33 In the morning, as soon as the sun is up, you shall rise early and rush upon the city; and behold, when he and the people who are with him come out against you, you shall do to them whatever you can."

33 Tomorrow morning when the sun is up, get up early and attack the city. When Gaal and his army come out to fight you, do whatever you can to them."

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.

(E) Amalek returns to Shechem and puts Gaal to flight (9:34-40)

34 So Abimelech and all the people who *were* with him got up at night, and lay in wait against Shechem, in four units.

34 So Abimelech and all the people who *were* with him arose by night and lay in wait against Shechem in four companies.

34 So Abimelech and his entire army got up that night and waited in ambush against Shechem in four separate companies.

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

35 Now Gaal the son of Ebed went out and stood at the entrance of the city gate; and Abimelech and the people who *were* with him arose from the ambush.

35 Now Gaal the son of Ebed went out and stood in the entrance of the city gate; and Abimelech and the people who *were* with him arose from the ambush.

35 Ebed's son Gaal went out and stood in the entrance to the city gate while Abimelech and his army were creeping out of their ambush.

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.

36 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 are seeing the shadow of the mountains as *if they were* people."

36 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 are seeing the shadow of the mountains as *if they were* men."

36 When Gaal saw the army, he observed to Zebul, "Look there! People are coming down from the top of the mountains."

But Zebul replied to him, "You're looking at morning shadows cast by the mountains. They just look like men to you."

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.

- Gaal trusted Zebul as a friend, but he was a double agent: Zebul was placing the bait in Abimelech's trap

37 And Gaal spoke yet again and said, "Look, people are coming down from the **highest part of the land**, and one unit is coming by way of **the diviners' oak**."

37 Gaal spoke again and said, "Behold, people are coming down from the highest part of the land, and one company comes by the way of the diviners' oak."

37 Gaal spoke up again to say, "Look! People are coming down from the highest part of the land, and there's a company approaching from the diviner's oak tree."

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.

- "...highest part of the land" - "navel of the land"; apparently a reference to Gerizim located centrally in the central highlands

- "...the diviners' oak" - perhaps the oak of Moreh (Gen 12:6); it was located in a sacred place where the Canaanites turned for a decision from the gods

38 Then Zebul said to him, "Where then is your boasting with which you said, 'Who is Abimelech that we should serve him?' Is this not the people whom you rejected? Go out now and fight them!"

38 Then Zebul said to him, "Where is your boasting now with which you said, 'Who is Abimelech that we should serve him?' Is this not the people whom you despised? Go out now and fight with them!"

38 So Zebul replied, "Right... So where's your boasting now? You said, 'Who is Abimelech? Should we serve him?' Isn't this the army that you insulted? So go out right now and fight them!"

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.

- When it was obvious that an army was attacking Shechem, Gaal had to "put up or shut up"

— If he hid in the city, he would have been disgraced and lost his following, and eventually be caught and killed

— If he tried to flee, Abimelech's men would have chased him and killed him

39 So Gaal went out in the sight of the leaders of Shechem and fought Abimelech.

39 So Gaal went out before the leaders of Shechem and fought with Abimelech.

39 So Gaal went out in full view of the "lords" of Shechem and fought Abimelech.

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

40 But Abimelech chased him, and he fled from him; and many fell wounded up to the entrance of the gate.

40 Abimelech chased him, and he fled before him; and many fell wounded up to the entrance of the gate.

40 Abimelech chased him, and Gaal ran away from him. Many fell wounded right up to the entrance to the city gate.

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

- Abimelech was unable to penetrate into the city of Shechem, so he could not capture the city at this stage; he will seek another opportunity to do so later.

(F) Zebul prevents Gaal and his followers from returning to Shechem giving Abimelech the opportunity of killing them and besieging Shechem (9:41-49)

41 Then Abimelech stayed in Arumah, but Zebul drove out Gaal and his relatives so that they could not stay in Shechem.

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

41 Afterwards, Abimelech remained at Arumah, but Zebul expelled Gaal and his family so they couldn't remain in Shechem.

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

- The result was that Abimelech remained in Arumah. This may have upset the Shechemites since it was they who made him king, not Arumah

- Gaal is kicked out of Shechem and never heard from again...

42 Now it came about the next day, that the people went out to the field, and it was reported to Abimelech.

42 Now it came about the next day, that the people went out to the field, and it was told to Abimelech.

42 The next day, the people went out to the field, and Abimelech learned about it.

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

- Another problem remained for Abimelech: the citizens of Shechem had cursed him (v27) and were attacking caravans and robbing him of both money and reputation

43 So he took his people and divided them into three units, and lay in wait in the field; when he looked and saw the people coming out from the city, he attacked them and killed them.

43 So he took his people and divided them into three companies, and lay in wait in the field; when he looked and saw the people coming out from the city, he arose against them and slew them.

43 So he took his army, divided it into three separate companies, and laid in ambush out in the field. When Abimelech noticed the people coming out from the city, his army attacked them and killed them.

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.

- The next morning, when the people of Shechem went out of the city to work in the fields, Abimelech set an ambush, blocked the city gate, and slaughtered the trapped citizens

44 Then Abimelech and the company who was with him rushed forward and stood at the entrance of the city gate; the *other* two companies then attacked all who *were* in the field and killed them.

44 Then Abimelech and the company who was with him dashed forward and stood in the entrance of the city gate; the other two companies then dashed against all who *were* in the field and slew them.

44 Then Abimelech and the soldiers who were with him rushed forward and commandeered the entrance to the city gate while the other two companies ran out to kill everyone who was in the field.

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.

- One of the three companies ran to the gates and stood in the entrance of the gate of the city in order to keep the people from escaping back into the city

— The other two companies attacked all who were in the field and killed them

45 Abimelech fought against the city that whole day, and he captured the city and killed the people who *were* in it; then he tore down the city and sowed it with salt.

45 Abimelech fought against the city all that day, and he captured the city and killed the people who *were* in it; then he razed the city and sowed it with salt.

45 Abimelech fought against the city all that day, captured the city, killed the people in it, then tore the city to the ground and sowed it with salt.

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.

- He put salt in the land so that nothing could grow there. This was also a symbolic action that condemned a conquered city so that nobody would want to live there.

— Salty ground was a symbol of barren desert (Deut 29:23; Job 39:6; Ps 107:34; Jer 17:6)

- Archaeology has confirmed this 12th century destruction of Shechem, which remained a ruin till rebuilt by Jeroboam I as his capital (1 Kings 12:25)

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

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

46 When all the "lords" at the tower of Shechem heard what had happened, they retreated into the inner chamber of the temple of El-berith.

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.

- The remaining people in the city, upon hearing of the slaughter of Shechemites inside and outside the city, fled to safety

- The "tower of Shechem" may have been the same as "the house of Millo" (v6), where the aristocracy of Shechem lived

— The people fled from Beth-Millo to the Temple of Baal-Berith (v4; Cf. 8:33). Apparently the people felt safer in a building devoted to their god, hoping that Abimelech would respect it and leave them alone.

47 And it was reported to Abimelech that all the leaders of the tower of Shechem were gathered together.

47 It was told Abimelech that all the leaders of the tower of Shechem were gathered together.

47 Abimelech was told that all of the "lords" of the Shechem Tower had assembled there.

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

48 So Abimelech went up to Mount Zalmon, he and all the people who *were* with him; and Abimelech took an axe in his hand and cut down a branch *from the* trees, and lifted it and put *it* on his shoulder. Then he said to the people who *were* with him, "What you saw me do, hurry *and* do likewise."

48 So Abimelech went up to Mount Zalmon, he and all the people who *were* with him; and Abimelech took an axe in his hand and cut down a branch from the trees, and lifted it and laid *it* on his shoulder. Then he said to the people who *were* with him, "What you have seen me do, hurry *and* do likewise."

48 So he went up to Mount Zalmon, accompanied by his entire army. Abimelech had an axe in his hand, so he cut down a branch from a tree, lifted it up, and laid it on his shoulder. Then he told the army that had accompanied him, "You've seen what I just did. Hurry up! Do the same thing!"

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.

49 So all the people also cut down, each one, his branch and followed Abimelech, and put *them* on top of the inner chamber and set the inner chamber on fire over those *inside*, so that all the people of the tower of Shechem also died, about a thousand men and women.

49 All the people also cut down each one his branch and followed Abimelech, and put *them* on the inner chamber and set the inner chamber on fire over those *inside*, so that all the men of the tower of Shechem also died, about a thousand men and women.

49 Then his entire army also cut down a branch for each soldier, followed Abimelech to the inner chamber, and set fire to it while they were inside. As a result, all the men of the tower of Shechem died, including about a thousand men and women.

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.

- Abimelech turned the temple into a convenient furnace and killed all the people in it

— Thus the Lord avenged the blood of Gideon's sons. The fire did "come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon" (v15)

— The "cedars of Lebanon" represents the leading citizens of the city who had supported Abimelech's rule (v20)

- This is how another Canaanite enclave had been eradicated from the Land

(G) Abimelech seeks to take Thebez because of the rebels living there and is fatally wounded by a woman dropping a millstone on him necessitating Abimelech's suicide (9:50-54)

50 Then Abimelech went to Thebez, and he camped against Thebez and captured it.

50 Then Abimelech went to Thebez, and he camped against Thebez and captured it.

50 Later on, Abimelech went to Thebez, set up a siege encampment there, and captured it.

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

- Since the people of Thebez (about 10 miles NE from Shechem on the road to Beth Shean) had joined in the general rebellion against Abimelech, he went there to punish them as well

51 But there was a strong tower in the center of the city, and all the men and women with all the leaders of the city fled there and shut themselves in; and they went up on the roof of the tower.

51 But there was a strong tower in the center of the city, and all the men and women with all the leaders of the city fled there and shut themselves in; and they went up on the roof of the tower.

51 But there was a fortified tower in the center of the city, and all the men, women, and leaders of the city escaped to it, shut themselves in, and went up to the roof of the tower.

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.

- Here, too, the citizens sought the protection of their tower; and Abimelech tried to use the same method of attack that had proven successful at Shechem

52 So Abimelech came to the tower and fought against it, and approached the entrance of the tower to burn it down with fire.

52 So Abimelech came to the tower and fought against it, and approached the entrance of the tower to burn it with fire.

52 So Abimelech approached the tower, attacked it, and approached the tower's gate, intending to burn it down.

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.

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

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

53 But a certain woman threw an upper millstone down on Abimelech's head, fracturing his skull.

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

- He made the mistake of getting too close to the tower, and a woman dropped an upper millstone (12-18 inches in diameter, and several inches thick) on his head and gave him a splitting headache (reminiscent of Jael in Judges 4)

— This incident will be remembered many years later by King David (2 Sam 11:21)

- This was a triple disgrace:

(1) He was killed, but not in battle

(2) He was killed by a woman, a disgrace to a soldier

(3) He was killed with a millstone, not a sword

54 Then he called quickly to the young man, his armor bearer, and said to him, "Draw your sword and kill me, so that it will not be said of me, 'A woman killed him.'" So the young man pierced him through, and he died.

54 Then he called quickly to the young man, his armor bearer, and said to him, "Draw your sword and kill me, so that it will not be said of me, 'A woman slew him.'" So the young man pierced him through, and he died.

54 So he cried out to his young armor bearer and ordered him, "Draw your sword and kill me, so no one will say about me that 'A woman killed him.'" So the young man pierced him through, and he died.

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.

- Similar to Saul (1 Sam 31:4)

- This didn't really change anything: centuries later, Abimelech's shameful death was remembered as being accomplished by a woman (2 Sam 11:21)

- He had used a woman, his mother, to claim kingship, but now a woman would take it away from him; a woman gave him life, now a woman would take it away

55 Now when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, **each left for his home.**

55 When the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, each departed to his home.

55 When the men of Israel noticed that Abimelech was dead, they each left for home.

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

- Abimelech lost his life and his kingdom. The curse pronounced by his half-brother Jotham was fulfilled on both Abimelech and the people of Shechem (v20).

- "...each left for his home" - Israel's experiment in Canaanite-type city-state kingship ended in failure and was aborted, awaiting a future time of national kingship

56 So God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father in killing his seventy brothers.

56 Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father in killing his seventy brothers.

56 That's how God repaid Abimelech for the evil thing he did to his father by killing his 70 brothers.

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

- What happened to Abimelech was divine retribution, both for the murder of his 69 brothers, but God also paid back Shechem for their wickedness (v57)

57 God also returned all the wickedness of the men of Shechem on their heads, and the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal came upon them.

57 Also God returned all the wickedness of the men of Shechem on their heads, and the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal came upon them.

57 God also repaid the men of Shechem for their wickedness, and the curse of Jerubbaal's son Jotham came true for them.

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.

- Literally fulfilling curse of Jotham, Gideon's son:

- Judges 9:20: ... 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.

— Beth Millo = "house of fortress"

- Ps 34:21: Evil shall slay the wicked: and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate.

- Prov 21:12: The righteous man wisely considereth the house of the wicked: but God overthroweth the wicked for their wickedness.

- The shedding of innocent blood is something that God takes very seriously and eventually avenges (Deut 19:10,13; 21:9; 1 Kings 2:31; Prov 6:17; Is 59:7; Jer 7:6; 22:3,17; Joel 3:19)