

Abimelech's Treachery

Judges 9:26-57

Judges 9:26-57 - "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. 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? 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.

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.

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. 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."

Background Notes

"Nature abhors a vacuum." You've heard that saying before, right? Well, the same is true in the spiritual realm. After the death of Gideon, there was a spiritual vacuum in Israel, and sure enough, Abimelech rushed in to fill the spiritual void. The people were all too willing to make this unproven son of Gideon their ruler and king, but Abimelech turned out to be a terrible and treacherous ruler. This is why many Bible commentators don't consider him to be a Judge, even though He did rule over Israel (or at least part of Israel) for three years.

After the falling-out between Abimelech and the inhabitants of Shechem, the fickle people of Shechem turned for leadership to a man named Gaal. Gaal challenged Abimelech, and Zebul, one of Abimelech's men in the government of Shechem, informed Abimelech of this challenge. So Abimelech got his small army together and attacked Gaal and defeated him, and then he attacked Shechem and defeated the city. "*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.*"

"Sowing a city with salt" would make the ground barren, sterile, and unproductive for anyone who wanted to rebuild the city. Not only did Abimelech destroy the city of Shechem, he burned down the tower of Shechem where 1000 men and women had run for safety. I wonder if Jotham's parable about the trees and the fire came to their minds as the people of Shechem in the tower saw Abimelech and his army bringing branches and trees and setting their tower on fire.

The foundation of that tower of Shechem, by the way, can still be seen today, and the ruins of ancient Shechem are still visible beside the modern-day city of Nablus. Jacob's well is still there, and so is the foundation of the fortress temple. The town of Shechem was never rebuilt after Abimelech destroyed it. Once again, archaeology supports the accuracy of Scripture!

Doctrinal Points

1. God repays the wickedness of men.

“But a certain woman dropped an upper millstone on Abimelech’s head and crushed his skull” (v53).

It is possible that Abimelech killed his brothers on a large millstone, and in turn, Abimelech was killed when a small, upper millstone was dropped on his head. *“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” (v56-57).*

Scripture teaches us that God does repay the wickedness of men. It may appear that evil is going unchecked and people are getting away with evil, but the story is not over yet. In Romans 12:19 we read *“Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.”* When does God repay the wickedness of men? Sometimes it’s in this lifetime, as in the case of Abimelech and the evil men of Shechem. And look at how Hitler met his end!

But the wickedness of men will surely be repaid fully at the final judgment. Look at the words of Revelation 20:11-13 about the final judgment: *“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.”* I trust you are a believer and will not have to face this coming final judgment. Trusting in Christ as your personal Savior is your only escape from that judgment.

The prophet Habakkuk had the same problem that we have. He looked around and saw the people getting away with evil. He asked the Lord, “Why do the wicked prosper?” Well, here is God’s answer in Habakkuk 2:3 - *“For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it, because it will surely come. It will not tarry.”*

The “it” in those verses is the ultimate punishment of evil. In the final analysis, it will “all come out in the wash.” When history has run its course, **no one** will be able to say that he or she got away with evil. God repays the wickedness of men!

2. God allows evil to repay evil.

God used the wickedness of Abimelech to repay the wickedness of the people of Shechem, and God used the wickedness of the people of Shechem to repay the wickedness of Abimelech. God allows evil to repay evil.

In biblical history, and in secular history as well, many times evil kings were defeated and brought down by other evil kings. Evil administrations have a tendency to self-destruct, as they get worse. God has designed this moral universe so that evil eventually backfires. It's just a matter of time. Psalm 76:10 says that God makes the wrath of man to praise Him. A built-in principle is at work in the home, in the state, or in the church: God allows evil to repay evil.

Practical Application

Remember, your spirituality is not inherited by your children!

Gideon had been a good judge in Israel. The last verse of Judges 8 refers to all the good that Gideon had done for Israel. In fact, Gideon was a spiritual man! It's true that he departed from the word of the Lord in his later years, but during his prime, Gideon was definitely a spiritual man.

What a contrast we see in Gideon's son, Abimelech. Why? Because spirituality is not inherited! There's nothing in the DNA code that guarantees salvation or spirituality. There are no "spiritual genes." We all know this, but sometimes we tend to forget. I have seen children of spiritual parents appointed to church leadership positions, Christian camp positions, or other Christian ministry positions because the parents were spiritual, and it was assumed that the children would be spiritual as well. But it doesn't work that way! Children may inherit certain talents and abilities from their parents, but they can't inherit spiritual gifts or spirituality.

Spiritual gifts are given to individual believers as God sovereignly determines, and spirituality comes about by walking with the Lord. Not by genetics! Parents, we're responsible to train up our children in the instruction of the Lord, but the children are responsible to listen and follow that instruction.

Remember, parents - your children can't inherit your spirituality!