

# CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian  
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

## DHW BIBLE CLASS

### LESSON 8

### JUDGES

### CHAPTER 9

**Judges 9:56-57**, *“Thus God rendered the wickedness of Abimelech, which he did unto his father, in slaying his seventy brethren: 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.”*

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter could be said to give us a picture of Gideon’s legacy. Though Gideon’s judgeship could be considered long since he lived to a good old age before he died, he did not leave behind an impressive and lasting legacy. In the evening years of his life, he backslid in his relations with God. The ephod, which he made, was a grave mistake. It became an object of superstitious worship by the children of Israel. In Shechem, his son Abimelech by his Canaanite concubine began to have great ambitions. He aspired to be king of Israel when his father died, and in his attempt to secure the position, he committed the foulest of atrocities. When the people chose a bad leader, the spiritual and religious life of the nation took a downward slide. It is important that much thought and care should be

exercised in electing a leader of the church.

This chapter also features several people whose characters serve as a warning of behaviour God does not approve. Paul declares in his epistle to the Romans (15:4): “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.” Intertwined with these valuable lessons is the teaching of the truth of divine retribution — of God’s just punishment against the wicked. Israel had been privileged to be God’s chosen people and be given the Word of God so that she could live well on earth and be the instrument to carry out God’s will. But if Israel turned her back on the grace and mercies of God, who is a consuming fire, she could expect to be burned by God’s holiness and righteousness.

## OUTLINE

1. Abimelech makes his move (vv.1-6),
2. Jotham’s parable (vv.7-21),
3. God avenges (vv.22-29).
4. Abimelech defeats Gaal and his mercenaries (30-45),
5. Abimelech meets his death (vv. 46-55),
6. God’s retribution and judgement (vv. 56-57).

## COMMENTARY

### Abimelech Makes His Move – 9:1-6

After the death of Gideon, Abimelech, aspired to succeed his father and rule Israel as king. His father had rejected the people's proposition to rule over them, saying the LORD should rule them and be their king, therefore, Abimelech's desire was not in line with his father's wish. This makes it abundantly clear that Abimelech had an insatiable craving for power. However, he had a problem. He had seventy other Israelite brothers and any one of them could vie for the same position. He needed to act in order to ensure that he would be the sole successor to his father.

Abimelech went to Shechem and spoke to his uncles and to all the members of his mother's family. He told them to consult all the men in Shechem whether it was better for them to be ruled by the 70 sons of Jerubbaal or have one to rule over them, and to subtly imply that it would be better that he should rule over them since he was bone and flesh akin with them. Abimelech was very cunning in using the name of his father "Jerubbaal" instead of the name of "Gideon." The use of "Jerubbaal" would remind the Shechemites of how Gideon destroyed the altar of Baal and desecrated their god (6:28). The seed of revenge was subtly planted in their hearts by Abimelech. The Shechemites worshipped Baal and

they even had a temple in his name, "Baal-berith." As expected, Abimelech won the hearts of the men of Shechem who resolved to support him. Whether he did discuss his evil plan with his uncles or the men of Shechem is not recorded. Anyway, the men of Shechem gave him seventy pieces of silver (quite a sum then), which they drew from the temple of Baal-berith treasury.

The number of silver pieces which were given to Abimelech to fund his bid to be king was not a coincidence—one silver piece for each of the 70 sons of Gideon. He took the money to hire men of questionable character as his mercenaries. His intention was clear. He went to his father Gideon's house in Ophrah where he murdered all 70 of his brothers except one, Jotham, who managed to escape. Having ruthlessly removed any other possible contender for the throne of Israel, all the men of Shechem staged a coronation to make Abimelech king. He was ceremonially installed by the Shechemites.

### Jotham's Parable – 9:7-21

Jotham, whose name means "Jehovah is perfect," was the youngest son of Gideon. When he was informed that the Shechemites had crowned his step-brother Abimelech king, he stood on the slopes of Mount Gerizim and

called on the Shechemites to hear him.<sup>1</sup>

He told them a parable. The trees wanted to anoint a king over them, so they went to the olive tree to reign over them. But the olive tree replied that it should not leave and stop producing the “fatness” of its fruit which honoured both God and man and “go to be promoted over trees” (v.9). The verb, “promoted” literally means “to rattle or sway” over all the other trees. Since the olive tree declined, the trees went to the fig tree. The fig tree also gave the same reply. The trees then went to the vine and made the same offer. The vine also gave them the same reply—“should I leave my wine (grape juice) which cheereth God and man” and to go and “rattle or sway” above the other trees! This does not mean that God drinks wine (grape juice) like man does. But it pleased God to accept His people’s pouring out wine (grape juice) in His honour at sacrifices.<sup>2</sup>

Now the desperate trees went to the bramble, which is a thorny shrub. The bramble was only too pleased to accept the offer. It said to the trees: “If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow (or shade): and if not, let

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<sup>1</sup> Mount Gerizim was the place where Joshua in time past had led the Israelites to renew the covenant which the LORD had made with them through Moses (Joshua 8:30-35).

<sup>2</sup> Leviticus 23:13 And the meat offering thereof *shall be* two tenth deals of fine flour mingled with oil, an offering made by fire unto the LORD *for* a sweet savour: and the drink offering thereof *shall be* of wine, the fourth *part* of an hin.

fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon” (v.15). The bramble is a lowly shrub which does not have any shadow. If one lies under it, it will scratch and not provide any shade. The presumptuous bramble also threatened the trees that if their offer was not truthful, then fire would come out of the bramble (a shrub which could easily catch fire and cause a bush fire) and would destroy even towering cedar trees of Lebanon.<sup>3</sup>

Jotham explained the meaning of his parable. He questioned whether the Shechemites had acted “truly and sincerely” in crowning Abimelech king. Gideon his father had fought and risked his life in saving them from the oppression of the Midianites. But they had unfairly gone against him and his family by slaughtering his seventy sons “upon one stone.”<sup>4</sup> They had made Abimelech, the son of his father’s concubine king just because he was their brother. Had they dealt fairly and rightly with Gideon and his family; then they should rejoice with Abimelech and let Abimelech rejoice with them. Jotham continued that if they had not acted justly, he pronounced a curse upon them: “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,

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<sup>3</sup> This is the first parable ever recorded in the Bible.

<sup>4</sup> This “stone” could be a reference to the altar on which Gideon offered the second bullock to the LORD (Judges 6:26-28)

and devour Abimelech” (v. 20). In short, Jotham charged them for showing ingratitude towards Gideon by crowning Abimelech, the very man who was guilty of the cruel act of ingratitude; and he pronounced a curse on them. After saying that, Jotham fled to Beer in fear of Abimelech.<sup>5</sup>

### **God Avenges – 9:22-29**

The rest of the chapter teaches the doctrine of retribution. God is not to be mocked, for what a man sows that shall he reap.<sup>6</sup> Abimelech reigned over Israel for three years. He did not reside in Shechem but he lived in Arumah making it his official residence. Arumah was only about eight kilometers southeast of Shechem where his uncles and his mother’s family lived. But in Shechem, he appointed a man named Zebul to administer the city and report to him.

In sending “an evil spirit” between Abimelech and the Shechemites, God acted judiciously, and the men of Shechem “dealt treacherously with Abimelech.” (v.23).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Numbers 21:16 And from thence *they went* to Beer: that *is* the well whereof the LORD spake unto Moses, Gather the people together, and I will give them water.

<sup>6</sup> Galatians 6:7 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. 8 For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

<sup>7</sup> Abimelech and the Shechemites had been idolatrous by worshipping Baal and had committed murder by slaughtering Gideon’s sons. God gave them over to their evil thoughts and deeds. This is the judgment of a sovereign and righteous God who will render a man what he

The men of Shechem seemed to have a dislike for Abimelech for he did not show any interest in them. The Shechemites hid men in the mountains to lay wait on and rob travellers coming from Arumah to Shechem. Abimelech was told about these incidents. In this crucial time, Shechem had a gallant visitor by the name of Gaal, the son of Ebed. He came with his brothers or fellow fighters. The men of Shechem had a liking for Gaal and turned to him as a friend and confidante. They hosted a merry-making feast and went into the house of their god, eating and drinking, and cursing Abimelech (v.27). Gaal seized the opportunity to challenge the people to revolt against Abimelech: inciting them to open rebellion and proposing himself as a better ruler. He despised Abimelech and defied him to increase his army and to come out to fight against him.

### **Abimelech Defeats Gaal and His Mercenaries – 9:30-45**

Zebul, administrator of Abimelech in Shechem, was very angry when he heard what Gaal had said to the Shechemites. He secretly sent messengers to Abimelech and reported that Gaal, the son of Ebed and his brothers had fortified the city in rebellion against him. Zebul advised Abimelech to spring a surprise attack

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deserves. Romans 1:24 *Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:*

on Shechem. That very night, he should lead his men to lay wait in the fields near Shechem. At the first light of the next day he should attack the city. When Gaal and his brothers came out to fight, he could ambush and destroy them.

Abimelech took the advice of Zebul and marched on to Shechem without delay. In the morning, Gaal who was at the gate of Shechem noticed that there were people coming down from the mountains. He told Zebul, who was with him, of this observation. But Zebul said to Gaal that what he saw was the shadow of the mountains as if they were men. Zebul lied for he knew that what Gaal saw were actually Abimelech's men. Gaal again said that they were people coming down by the middle of the land and another company of men was coming by the plain. This time Zebul responded by taunting Gaal to fight Abimelech and his men. Gaal went out and fought Abimelech in the sight of the Shechemites. Abimelech defeated Gaal and many of his men were wounded.

Abimelech returned to his residence in Arumah probably to plan for a total destruction of the city of Shechem. Zebul remained and retained his office. He exiled the defeated Gaal and his brothers from Shechem. The next day the men of Shechem went into the field. Abimelech was informed. He quickly marshalled three companies of his men to lie in ambush in the field for the

Shechemites. When the Shechemites came out, Abimelech and his men set upon them. Abimelech led his company of men to block the gate of the city so that no one could return and escape. The two other companies set upon the Shechemites and massacred them. The bramble-king Abimelech then entered the city, massacred the inhabitants, and "sowed it with salt." This last phrase is an expression symbolizing the curse on the city that it would not be inhabited again.

When some of the men of Shechem sought refuge in the temple of Baal-berith — the temple from which the men of Shechem had drawn from its treasury 70 pieces of silver to finance Abimelech's enthronement, the bramble-king determined to kill all of them. He led his men to the forest of Zalmon where each of his men cut branches off the trees. Abimelech carried the branches on his shoulder and told his men to do likewise. They then followed Abimelech to the tower of the temple and set it on fire. The bramble-king Abimelech burned all the men hiding in the tower. There were about 1,000 men and women who were burned to death. Once the tide of evil builds, nothing can contain it in the end.

### **Abimelech Meets His Death – 9:46-55**

Abimelech had greater ambitions. He wanted to expand his domain. With the city of Shechem destroyed, he then moved against a

neighbouring city of Thebez about 10 kilometers northeast of Shechem. There was a strong tower in the city, and the people had fled to it for protection and safety. Abimelech led his men against the tower probably using the same tactic as he did in Shechem. He tried to break the wooden door of the tower with fire. He stood close enough to the wall of the tower that a woman threw a "piece of millstone" onto his head fracturing his skull. He did not die instantly, managing to call on his armour bearer to thrust his sword into him to end his life so that posterity would not say that he was slain by a woman. The young armour bearer did so and fled.

However, Abimelech died a humiliating death. Having seen the death of Abimelech, all his men stopped attacking the city.

### **God's Retribution and Judgement – 9:56-57**

God justly repaid Abimelech's wickedness to his father's family by slaying his 70 sons. For the men of Shechem, justice too was meted out to them for their part in the Abimelech's evil deeds. The life of the bramble-king came to a horrible and humiliating end, but not before Shechem and her inhabitants were burned by him.

Thus Jotham's predictive curse was fulfilled. It is clear that God spoke through Jotham in uttering the curse, and God had now seen to it that it was carried out in accordance with His judgement. The LORD God was still

intimately involved in the national life of His covenant people Israel. The children of Israel might turn their back on Him, but God had not and would not reciprocate in a similar way. He remained faithful to His covenant.

### **PRACTICAL VALUE**

When a person sins, he should confess, repent and ask God for forgiveness. After that if his sin is also against another then he has to apologize and make restitution to the person whom he has wronged. If the believer refuses to do that; God has said that He will not be mocked or be deceived or be misled. God says (6:7-8) "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." This is a universal principle which all people experience daily in their lives. If we think that there are people who seem to get away with it, God will eventually mete out His justice and punishment. Abimelech and the men of Shechem are examples of God's sovereign justice and condemnation. There is no escape. Be sure our sin will find us out (Numbers 32:23).

Many more people are mentioned in this chapter than the others: Abimelech, Jotham, the men of Shechem, Gaal, Zebul, and the men of Thebez. A study of these people

should warn us of the kind of character and conduct which are not approved of God. For example, Gaal was an opportunist. He took advantage of the unhappiness of the Shechemites and the situation in that city, boasted of himself as a better person than Abimelech. He underestimated the power of Abimelech and was soundly defeated and shamefully thrown out of the city. Then there is Jotham. He was the youngest of his 70 brothers. He had the presence of mind to hide and save himself. God helped him but he was also responsible for the part he had to play. He bravely spoke in a parable to indict the men of Shechem. Sometimes there is a need to speak up for what is right and true, and we should do so, and not be inhibited by our own shortcomings.

There is a lesson to be learned about choosing a leader. The Shechemites chose Abimelech on the grounds that he was their blood relation. This blinded them from seeing his character flaws. A leader should be chosen on his godly qualifications and not on the basis of who he is related to. Abimelech was ungrateful to his father Gideon who probably loved him most and gave him the name "Abimelech." His aspiration to be king of Israel was so consuming that he would murder his brothers instead of pursuing legitimate means. He was ambitious and self-seeking. That should not be the quality of a leader, who should be an instrument for God to bless and guide God's people. God

has spelt out the qualities for choosing overseers for His church. Paul listed the qualities in 1Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:7-9. A careful examination of these two passages reveals one very important quality that a leader must have, that is, he must have a strong moral character, one that is faithful to the LORD God. AMEN.

### DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

#### Daily Readings

**MONDAY:** Judges 9:1-6; Proverbs 11:29.

**TUESDAY:** Judges 9:7-21; Titus 1:5-11.

**WEDNESDAY:** Judges 9:22-29; Galatians 5:16-18.

**THURSDAY:** Judges 9:30-45; John 10:10; 1 John 2:15-16.

**FRIDAY:** Judges 9:46-57; Numbers 32:23.

#### Discussion Questions

1. Why was Abimelech desirous to be king? What did he do to become king of Israel? Are there wantabe kings in church's today?

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2. How did the people of Shechem get drawn into supporting Abimelech's proposition to become king? Is this not an Asian culture?

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3. What are the four trees mentioned in the parable, and which of them was Abimelech compared with? (vv.8-14) Which tree describe you?

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4. What valuable lesson do we learn about not choosing a "bramble" leader?

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5. Briefly, what are your assessments on each of the following people?

a. Abimelech

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b. Jotham

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c. The men of Shechem

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d. Gaal

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e. Zebul

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f. The men of Thebez

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6. The chapter ends with the statement: "Thus God rendered the wickedness of ...." What does it teach us about God's character and justice?

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