

THE BOOK OF JUDGES

"Atrocity at Ophrah"

Judges 9:1-21

Introduction

1. Here is the aftermath of the death of Gideon (8:32). It supplements the immediate items listed in the previous chapter (8:33-35), namely: 1) Baal worship, 2) Apostasy from the Lord, 3) Opposition to the family of Gideon.

2. There had evidently been attempts at changing from the theocratic rule to a monarchy (8:22). This had failed in a formal way, but it appealed to the people. Gideon himself had gotten involved in an unworthy attempt to do priestly work (8:27). This ended in disaster. Things were not going well in Israel.

3. Now comes a spillover. The progeny of Gideon caused problems. Chief among them is Abimelech, son of a concubine from Shechem (cf. 8:30, 31). More internal problems for the nation. Study about them. Here are some details:

1. A CONSPIRACY by Abimelech vv. 1-6.

a. His concern vv. 1, 2.

The import of these verses is that Abimelech, probably on the basis of parental example, desired to be the "king" over Israel. He initiated this with his own kin at Shechem. Out of the 70 sons of Gideon, he felt he should have the privilege. His claim was this: "I am your bone and your flesh."

b. His concord vv. 3, 4, 6.

The word "men" (v. 3) is really "lords" and suggests that the leaders of Shechem supported Abimelech's position. Their contention was: "he is our brother" (v. 3). Money was taken out of the treasury of the temple dedicated to Baal so that Abimelech would have campaign funds. This same temple is assigned to "El-berith" (v. 46). It shows how syncretism had invaded Israel. Sad to see this today where people "share" quarters with false religions! Abimelech's coronation was at the tower (or Millo) which is mentioned in connection with the city of Shechem (vv. 6, 20, 47, 49). One was excavated which had walls measuring 80 x 65 feet and flanked by towers. It was probably used as a temple and a fortress.

c. His conduct v. 5.

Abimelech committed a terrible atrocity against his family. He killed the 70 sons of Gideon, save one, Jotham, who was the youngest and was able to escape. What a butchery!

2. AN OPPOSITION by Jotham vv. 7-21.

a. His boldness v. 7.

Gerizim and Ebal are familiar mountains (Deut. 27; John 4). Jotham stood by these mountains and cried to Israel. Although Abimelech had the apparent thrust of the nation on his side, Jotham acted alone in view of the situation. We need such prophetic voices today!

b. His cleverness vv. 8-15.

With the skillful use of the first parable in the Bible, Jotham demonstrated the stupidity of the decision to have Abimelech as king. He employed the sources of food--olive and fig trees and grape vines--as opposed to the bramble which was worthless, to show that Shechem had made a poor choice. The parable was particularly appropriate. How strange that Israel should choose something worthless over that which produced fruit! Jotham's message could not be lost.

c. His frankness vv. 16-18.

The application of the parable was made by Jotham. He did not leave this to chance understanding. It was simply this: in doing what they did, Shechem had entirely set aside all that Gideon had done for them. He had laid his life out for them (v. 17), but they were entirely without gratitude. He placed it as a moral issue, for he challenged their "truth and sincerity." These two Hebrew words imply lack of perfection for the city of Shechem.

d. His firmness vv. 19-21.

There is no compromise with Jotham. He lays it on the line. If the choice of Shechem is morally right, then let them rejoice together. If not, then fire will come out of the concord between Shechem and Abimelech. With this firm announcement, Jotham ran for his life.

Conclusion It is difficult to believe that a nation upon whom God had displayed such mercy could experience this sort of thing. But the reason is simple: spiritual declension was rife among them. Spirituality determines everything!