

THE BOOK OF JUDGES

"Tragic End of Abimelech"

Judges 9:23-57

Introduction

1. By conspiracy, Abimelech became the acknowledged "king" of Israel for this period (vv. 1, 2). Destruction of his brothers was involved (v. 5) and the use of Baal support (v. 4). It was an evil arrangement between the city of Shechem and Abimelech.
2. To counter this conspiracy, Jotham, the only living escapee from Abimelech's brutal atrocities, spoke forcefully to the inhabitants of Shechem. He used a parable (vv. 7-21). He warned of disaster for Shechem because they had done evil in cooperating with Abimelech.
3. Now comes the epilogue for all of this. The results of murder and intrigue led to more of the same. The end is disaster, but also the acclaim of God's justice (vv. 55-57). The events of this episode enforce the issue that whatever a man sows, he shall reap the same (Gal. 6:7).

1. ABIMELECH AND SHECHEM vv. 22-25.

a. His royalty v. 22.

The king relationship between Abimelech and the city of Shechem lasted three years. It was short lived. Wicked things sour quickly.

b. His cruelty vv. 23; 24.

What Abimelech had done to the sons of Gideon was not forgotten by God! The prophetic word of Jotham would come to pass by God's intervention (v. 20). Sin cannot be covered, except by the blood of the Lamb! God will not allow sin to go unpunished.

c. His difficulty v. 25.

Shechemites prodded Abimelech by plundering his revenues. There were incursions into his lifeline of support. Serious differences arose between Abimelech and Shechem!

2. ABIMELECH AND GAEL vv. 26-49.

a. The challenge vv. 26-39.

Gael means "abhorrent one" and his father's name means "slave." Gael was a true foreign upstart. He took advantage of the problems which persisted between Shechem and Abimelech. His intent was to take over the city and rule it himself. Furthermore, this only accentuated the problems which already persisted between the Israelites and the Canaanites within the city. Gael was probably a Canaanite and he sought to get their support (v. 28; cf. Gen. 33:19; 34:2; Josh. 24:32). Zebul, Abimelech's local ruler appointed for Shechem, advised Abimelech of the impending revolt (v. 31). Had Gael taken over immediately, he may have won the day. He hesitated and lost! He was outmaneuvered by Zebul (vv. 36, 37). The stage was set for battle (vv. 38, 39).

b. The revenge vv. 40-49.

This was varied. Gael was defeated in battle (v.40). Abimelech returned to his residence in Arumah, a factor which had probably led to some dissatisfaction in Shechem (v. 41). Zebul threw Gael out of the city and reestablished himself as leader (v. 41). Then the Shechemites were decimated as they worked the fields (v. 42-44). Then Abimelech attacked the city leaders and killed them (vv. 45-49). Apparently many of them belonged to the Baal temple and may have been Canaanites in religion and in fact (cf. v. 55). The cruelty of Abimelech was therefore affirmed and Shechem's bad choice confirmed.

3. ABIMELECH AND THEEBZ vv. 50-54.

a. Abimelech's attack vv. 50-52.

Every effort was advanced by Abimelech to take the city. Apparently this city had joined Shechem in rebellion against Abimelech. It was located about six miles northeast of Shechem. An attempt was made to burn the focal point of the city's resistance.

b. Abimelech's death vv. 53-54.

The millstone used by the woman to throw down on Abimelech probably was a small one, but it did its work! To avoid the shame of being killed by a woman, the final life of Abimelech was taken by his trusted armorbearer.

Conclusion Israelites, the leaders of Shechem, apparently were not the major point of Abimelech's attack. They escaped (v. 55). Jotham's curse had come to fruition upon Abimelech and Shechem (v. 57). Most important of all: God had intervened to show that sin is never unpunished (vv. 23, 56, 57). Oh, that men would serve the Lord!