

## Judges 8:33 – 9:57

**Introduction** – The consequences of sin and compromise weaves a web of great judgment upon the generation following Gideon's days of peace. We should receive fair warning from the story of Abimelech.

**The Fall and Faithlessness of Israel, Again** (8:33-35) – Gideon truly was a mixed judge, faithfully fighting Baal while acting like he wanted the pleasures of a pagan dynasty. Nevertheless, Gideon must have restrained Baalism effectively. It isn't until after his death that the sons of Israel go a-whoring after Baal again. And again, one can see that their idolatry is tied to forgetting God and the works of God, and failing to walk in gratitude for all His grace.

**Syncretism** – Baal-Berith is literally “lord of the covenant.” Kind of like “God bless America,” this title could appeal to church-going Israelites and Baal-worshipping Canaanites alike. But this mushy theology leads to a terrible curse and judgment from the true Lord of the Covenant.

**The Conspiracy of Abimelech and Shechem** (9:1-6) – Gideon's ephod became a snare to himself and to his household (8:27). Gideon, in essence, turned from his loyalty to Jehovah, and in turn, God now turns from His loyalty to Gideon, using the very instrument of Gideon's compromise, his son, the half-Canaanite, Abimelech (my father is king).

**Serve Baal or God?** – Abimelech calls for loyalty to Baal-Berith and not to the ‘Baal-fighter’ and his God; the one who refused to embrace the god of pluralism, a religion Shechem loves so dearly. He convinces them that in order to make a clean break, all of Jerubbaal's sons must be killed, for surely their intent is to rule over them.

**A Sacrifice to Baal** – Out of the treasury of the house of Baal, money is used to buy thugs who capture all seventy sons (one escapes). One by one, these men are executed upon a stone. Abimelech is then crowned king at the very place Joshua had set up a memorial stone for the people of Israel (Josh 24:1, 24, 26), most likely employing a bit of historical revisionism to a people who had forgotten God.

**The Curse Upon Abimelech and Shechem** (9:7-21) – Jotham proclaims a parable from the mount of blessing, Gerizim. Because of Shechem's decision, the opportunity for blessing will become a curse instead. Mt. Ebal will have the final say.

**The Parable of the Trees and the Bramble** – The trees represent Israel, who are seeking for a king to rule over them. The three fruitful trees (olive, fruit, and grapevine) are associated with Israel throughout Scripture. There is a strong contrast made between the fruitfulness and blessing of these trees working according to their calling and the bramble's worthlessness; he is a fire hazard. The bramble is an emblem of the curse (Gen 3:18), and the curse brings tyrannical reigns of evil men over others. Of course, this is God's description of Abimelech.

**Jotham's Call to Repentance** (vv16-21) – He began in verse 7, “*Listen to me so that God may listen to you.*” The people have obviously been seduced to believe that what they have done is right and just, and that they have acted in truth and sincerity. Jotham warns them that if they do not turn from their loyalty to Abimelech, they will be burned by this same tyrant. Once again, rebellious sin becomes the very instrument of judgment upon a people.

**The Judgment Upon Abimelech and Shechem** (9:22-55) – Evil is self-destructive and evil men will be at one another's throats soon enough. But in His graciousness to His own people, God sends an evil spirit to speed things along. This is a good reminder to us that all angels, including fallen ones, are at God's command and bidding. Satan only has his way when it suits God's purposes. Satan has no realm of independence from God.

**Challenging the Syncretism** (vv26-29) – If the faithful will not challenge the compromise of syncretism, it is only a matter of time until the pagans do. Abimelech was a half-breed and brought the God of Gideon into this Baal-Berith worship. Gaal, in the midst of a great harvest (remember why they have a harvest – remember whom they worship for a successful harvest) calls for pure devotion to the god and people of Shechem. In the drunkenness of the feast, he calls on Abimelech to come out and fight.

**Fire of the Bramble Upon Gaal** (vv30-41) – Zebul hears about Gaal and warns Abimelech who then plans a pre-emptive strike. Zebul gets the last laugh before the battle (v38) and the ‘pure-Canaanites’ are put down. But like a brush fire, Abimelech's wrath has just begun.

**Fire of the Bramble Upon Shechem** (vv42-45) – The people of Shechem figure that the crisis is over and head back out to the harvest. But Abimelech, fresh from one victory, comes down upon the field and the city, destroys, kills, and curses the land with the salt of barrenness (Deut 29:23). We begin to see the hand of the Lord bringing His judgment upon the land using the instrument of Abimelech, who is himself an enemy of Jehovah.

**Fire of the Bramble Upon Baal** (vv46-49) – The leaders of the tower flee to the inner chamber of the House of El-Berith (God of the covenant). As Gideon had burned the altar of Baal, so Abimelech now brings fiery, bramble-fire judgment upon Baal's house.

**Fire of the Bramble Upon Abimelech** (vv50-55) - His lust for power presses him further, to what appears to be an easier target - Thebez. God's irony is everywhere - another tower, another woman, another stone, and once again the head of the serpent is crushed.

**Conclusion** (vv56-57) - Although we clearly see the chastisement of God upon Gideon's family, still these verses declare that God was at work avenging the family of Gideon, the Baal-fighter. Let us remember to trust in His mighty vengeance and holy jealousy.

**Self-Destructive Evil** - Evil men and evil religions are self-destructive. When two evil forces collide, we should give thanks, for God is at work judging their wickedness.

**The Flow of Sin** - One commentator wrote, "*All this, however, blossomed from the seemingly minor compromises made by Gideon, the faithful warrior of God. Let each of us pray that we do not make similar compromises, for it is our children who will pay if we do.*" Amen.

**Jotham, a Faithful Woman, and Hope** - But in this story we see God's mercy as well. A man stands apart from the curse. An unnamed, "unimportant" woman delivers her people through simple faithfulness. God is at work in the weak. God is at work in the meek. They shall inherit the earth.

Dave Hatcher - February 2, 2003