

Judges Chapter 9

Verses 1-6: Gideon eventually succumbed to all the sins he had fought against, and these sins multiplied, with devastating consequences. As a result of Gideon's affair with a Canaanite woman in Shechem, a child was born. This child, "Abimelech", eventually killed all but one of Gideon's 70 other children and caused Israel many years of degradation and sorrow.

Judges 9:1 "And Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem unto his mother's brethren, and communed with them, and with all the family of the house of his mother's father, saying,"

Abimelech's ambition to be a king in Israel, an honor Gideon had refused (compare 8:22-23), was first put to the test in "Shechem", because his mother, a concubine of Gideon, came from there. Accordingly, the citizens of Shechem were invited to make one of their own, and a son of Gideon at that, to be their king. His murder of all but one of his brothers enabled him to assume the throne in Shechem where he ruled for three troublesome years.

"Shechem" was strategically located between the coastal plain and the Jordan Valley and was a crossroads of several trade routes. Whoever ruled Shechem controlled the countryside. Abimelech hatched his plot there, entering into negotiations with some of the city's "worthless and reckless men" (9:4).

Abimelech was Gideon's son by a concubine from Shechem. Gideon was of the tribe of Manasseh. There had been bad blood between the descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh. Abimelech's mother was from the tribe of Ephraim. This meeting with his mother's brethren was to put Abimelech in as king.

Judges 9:2 "Speak, I pray you, in the ears of all the men of Shechem, Whether [is] better for you, either that all the sons of Jerubbaal, [which are] threescore and ten persons, reign over you, or that one reign over you? remember also that I [am] your bone and your flesh."

The men of Shechem chose Abimelech king. God was not consulted whether they should have any king, much less who it should be. If parents could see what their children would do, and what they are to suffer, their joy in them often would be turned into sorrow. We may be thankful that we cannot know what shall happen. Above all, we should fear and watch against sin. For our evil conduct may produce fatal effects upon our families, after we are in our graves.

It seems the 70 sons of Jerubbaal were ruling over Shechem at this time. Abimelech was their half-brother. He was jealous of them. He plants the idea in the ears of the men of Shechem that he should be king, instead of his brothers. He is related to these people.

Judges 9:3 "And his mother's brethren spake of him in the ears of all the men of Shechem all these words: and their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech; for they said, He [is] our brother."

Got them together in some certain place, and laid before them all that Abimelech had suggested to them, and spake in his favor to them.

"And their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, he is our brother": Being fond of kingly government, as the Israelites generally were, it seemed most agreeable to them to have one king over them. And none more acceptable than one so nearly related to them. Who they doubted not, from his alliance to them, would be ready to oblige them on all occasions.

All the men of Shechem decided they wanted Abimelech for their king. His close relatives convinced all of the other men that Abimelech should be their leader.

Judges 9:4 "And they gave him threescore and ten [pieces] of silver out of the house of Baal-berith, wherewith Abimelech hired vain and light persons, which followed him."

"Threescore and ten": Agreeably to the number of his enemies, Gideon's seventy sons.

"Pieces of silver": Not shekels, as some fancy, which were too small a sum for this purpose. But far larger pieces, the exact worth whereof it is neither possible nor needful for us now to know.

"Out of the house of Baal-berith": Out of his sacred treasury. For even they; who were very stingy in their expenses about God's service, were liberal in their contributions to idols. Having since Gideon's death built this temple, (which he would never have suffered them to do while he lived), and endowed it with considerable revenues.

"Vain and light persons": Unsettled, idle, and necessitous persons. The most proper instruments for tyranny and cruelty.

Baal-berith was a version of Baal worship. The collections of silver had come from the worshippers of Baal. These 70 pieces of silver would be enough to hire these evil men to help him kill his brothers.

Judges 9:5 "And he went unto his father's house at Ophrah, and slew his brethren the sons of Jerubbaal, [being] threescore and ten persons, upon one stone: notwithstanding yet Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left; for he hid himself."

"Slew ... brethren": This atrocity, common in ancient times, eliminated the greatest threat in the revolution, all the legitimate competitors.

They actually killed 69 of his half-brothers, so he could take over as king. Jotham, the youngest of the brothers, hid himself and was not found. This stone was like a place of execution where he killed them one after another. To get the control of the people, he has wiped out the great portion of his family.

Judges 9:6 "And all the men of Shechem gathered together, and all the house of Millo, and went, and made Abimelech king, by the plain of the pillar that [was] in Shechem."

“House of Millo”: Literally “house of the fortress”. This was a section of Shechem, probably involving the tower stronghold (of verse 46).

“Pillar” may be a sacred symbol, perhaps even an Asherah pole (an idol, see 6:25). Abimelech’s coronation took place at the very site at Shechem where Joshua had placed the Book of the Law (Joshua 24:1, 26).

Millo was a strong fortification near Shechem. It seems that it was here they made Abimelech king.

Verses 7-15: This following fable was designed to teach the Israelites that they would pay for crowning a worthless man like “Abimelech” (the bramble), who did not have their best interests in mind. The other three trees (“olive, fig, and vine”), represent the king of laudable people who are so committed to serving that they refuse to abandon their work for a position of honor. Jotham’s warnings came true when Abimelech destroyed Shechem and burned Beth-Millo (9:45-49).

Judges 9:7 "And when they told [it] to Jotham, he went and stood in the top of mount Gerizim, and lifted up his voice, and cried, and said unto them, Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you."

Or when it was told him that Abimelech was made king in Shechem by some of his friends.

"He went and stood in the top of Mount Gerizim": A mount near Shechem. It hung over the city, as Josephus says. And so a very proper place to stand on and deliver a speech from it to the inhabitants of it. Who, as the same writer says, were now keeping a festival, on what account he says not, perhaps to Baal-berith their idol. Over against this mountain was another, called Ebal, and between them a valley. And very likely they were assembled in this valley, where the children of Israel stood when the blessings were delivered from Gerizim, and the curses from Ebal. And if so, Jotham might be heard very well by the Shechemites.

"And he lifted up his voice, and cried": That he might be heard by them.

"And said unto them, hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you": Which was a very solemn manner of address to them. Tending to excite attention, as having somewhat of importance to say to them, and suggesting, that if they did not hearken to him, God would not hearken to them when they cried to him. And therefore it behooved them to attend. It is a solemn oath of them to hearken to him, or a wish that God would not hearken to them if they were inattentive to him.

Jotham, who is the youngest of the 70 brothers, hid and lived when Abimelech killed the others. When Jotham heard that his brothers were dead and that Abimelech was made king, he went to the mountain top of Gerizim and cried out to these evil men of Shechem. He calls God's attention to their evil act.

Verses 8-15: Jotham's address begins with a fable (a fictitious tale designed around a central moral). Suggesting that the choice of Abimelech as king is a poor one, since not God's man, but a worthless scoundrel, has been selected as a ruler. Accordingly, they have brought on their own destruction. The conclusion of the fable also becomes the point for Jotham's curse (verse 20), which truly comes to pass (verses 56-57). For other parabolic fables in the Old Testament (see 2 Sam. 12:1-4 and 2 Kings 14:9-10).

Judges 9:8 "The trees went forth [on a time] to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us."

This is an allegorical story or fable with a moral, and a very fine and beautiful one. It is fitly expressed to answer the design, and the most ancient of the kind, being made seven hundred years before the times of Aesop. So famous for his fables, and exceeds anything written by him. By the trees are meant the people of Israel in general, and the Shechemites in particular. Who had been for some time very desirous of a king. But could not persuade any of their great and good men to accept of that office.

"And they said unto the olive tree, reign thou over us": A fit emblem of a good man, endowed with excellent virtues and qualifications for good, as David king of Israel, who is compared to such a tree (Psalm 52:8). Jarchi applies this to Othniel the first judge; but it may be better applied to Gideon, an excellent good man. Full of fruits of righteousness, and eminently useful, and to whom kingly government was offered, and was refused by him. And the men of Shechem could scarcely fail of thinking of him, and applying it to him, as Jotham was delivering his fable.

Judges 9:9 "But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honor God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?"

In reply to the request of the trees.

"Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honor God and man": By "fatness" oil is meant. Pressed out of the fruit of the olive tree, and which was much made use of both in the burning of the lamps in the tabernacle. And in many sacrifices, as the meat offerings and others, whereby God was honored. And it was also made use of in the installation of the greatest personages with the highest offices among men. As kings, priests, and prophets, as well as eaten with pleasure and delight by all sorts of men, and even by the greatest. And so men are honored by it.

"And go to be promoted over the trees": Desert so useful a station, in which it was planted and fixed, to move to and fro, as the word signifies. And reign over trees. Suggesting that it was unreasonable, at least not eligible to a good man to desert a private station in life. To which he was called of God, and in which he acted with honor and usefulness to others. And take upon him a public office, attended with much care and trouble. And with neglect of private affairs, and with the loss of much personal peace and comfort.

The trees in this, are speaking of the men who had tried to get Jerubbaal [olive tree) to reign over them at the end of the battle. Jerubbaal refused. The olive trees make the oil for the offerings to God, and for the anointing of men.

Judges 9:10 "And the trees said to the fig tree, Come thou, [and] reign over us."

Another useful and fruit bearing tree, and to which also good men are sometimes compared (see SOS 2:13).

"Come thou, and reign over us": Which Jarchi applies to Deborah. But may be better applied to one of Gideon's sons, who, though they had not a personal offer of kingly government themselves, yet it was made to them through their father, and refused. As for himself, so for them; and had it been offered to them, they would have rejected it. As Jotham seems to intimate by this parable.

Judges 9:11 "But the fig tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees?"

Rejecting the offer made.

"Should I forsake my sweetness and my good fruit": For such the fruit of the fig tree is, sweet and good: so Julian the emperor shows from various authors, Aristophanes, Herodotus, and Homer. That nothing is sweeter than figs, excepting honey. And that no kind of fruit is better, and, where they are, no good is wanting.

"And go to be promoted over the trees?" The same is designed by this as the former.

This is the very same thing. The people wanted to be ruled by Gideon, but he told them their only king was God. He did not want to rule, nor his sons.

Judges 9:12 "Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou, [and] reign over us."

Another emblem of good and useful men. And it may be observed, that Jotham takes no notice of any trees but fruitful ones till he comes to the bramble. And they only such as were well known, and of the greatest use, in the land of Judea, as olives, figs, and vines (see Deut. 8:8).

"Come thou, and reign over us": This Jarchi applies to Gideon. But since there are three sorts of trees brought into the fable, and when the kingdom was offered to Gideon. It was proposed to him, and to his son, and his son's son, and they refused. Some reference may be had unto it in this apologue. Abarbinel thinks three sorts of men are intended as proper persons for rule and government. As honorable ones, or such as are wealthy and rich. Or those of good behavior to God and man, as Gideon's sons were. But Abimelech was none of these.

Judges 9:13 "And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?"

By way of denial and refusal, as the other two.

"Shall I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man": Which being used in the drink offerings was acceptable to God, and of a sweet savor to him (Num. 15:7). And being drank, revives, refreshes, and makes glad, when before sorrowful, drooping, faint, and weary (Psalm 104:15).

"And go to be promoted over the trees?" All speak the same language, being of the same sentiment.

Again this is the same. All three of the trees above, were good for God and man. The vine is the same as the olive and the fig tree.

Judges 9:14 "Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou, [and] reign over us."

Come thou, and reign over us": In Jotham's parable of trees asking for a king (verses 7-15), the olive, fig and vine decline. They do not represent specific men who declined, rather they build the suspense and heighten the idea that the bramble (thornbush), is inferior and unsuitable. The bush represents Abimelech (verses 6:16).

The son of Gideon by the concubine (Abimelech), is the bramble. He had no right to rule, but he would take it.

Judges 9:15 "And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, [then] come [and] put your trust in my shadow: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon."

Accepting of their offer at once.

"If ye in trust anoint me king over you": Suspecting they were not hearty and cordial in their choice and call to the kingly authority over them.

"Then come and put your trust in my shadow": Promising protection to them as his subjects. Requiring their confidence in him, and boasting of the good they should receive from him. As is common with wicked princes at their first entering on their office. But, alas! What shadow or protection can there be in a bramble? If a man attempts to put himself under it for shelter, he will find it will be of no use to him, but harmful. Since the nearer and closer he comes to it, the more he will be scratched and torn by it.

"And if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon": Signifying, that if they did not heartily submit to his government, and put confidence in him, and prove faithful to him, they should smart for it. And feel his wrath and vengeance. Even the greatest men among them, comparable to the cedars of Lebanon. For thorns and brambles catching fire, as they easily do. Or fire being put to them, as weak as they are, and placed under the tallest and strongest cedars, will soon fetch them down to the ground. And the words of the bramble, or Abimelech, proved true to the Shechemites. He is made to speak in this parable.

This is showing again, that the bramble is of no use but to burn. If Abimelech could not lead the men of Shechem, he would destroy them.

Judges 9:16 "Now therefore, if ye have done truly and sincerely, in that ye have made Abimelech king, and if ye have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have done unto him according to the deserving of his hands;"

If they had done this conscientiously, and in the uprightness of their hearts. To take such a base man, and a murderer, and make him their king. Which Jotham doubted, and put it in this manner to them, that they might consider of it themselves.

"If ye have dealt well with Jerubbaal, and his house": If they could think so, which surely they could not, when they reflected upon the murder of his family they had consented to.

"And have done unto him according to the deserving of his hands": To his memory, and to his family, according to the merit of his works which he had performed on their account, next mentioned.

Abimelech wanted the benefits of being Jerubbaal's son. He did not however, recognize his 70 true sons. Jotham is telling them here, if they have done the correct thing with Jerubbaal's family and have truly chosen Abimelech as king, it is alright.

Judges 9:17 "(For my father fought for you, and adventured his life far, and delivered you out of the hand of Midian:"

In the valley of Jezreel, and at Karkor, where with three hundred men he routed and destroyed an army of 135,000.

"And adventured his life far": Which, according to our version, may seem to have respect to his going over Jordan, and following the Midianites. Fleeing into their country, and fighting them at Karkor, at a great distance from his native place. But the phrase in the original text is, "he cast away his life afar", made no account of it, exposed it to the greatest danger. Or, as the Targum, "he delivered his life as it were to destruction".

"And delivered you out of the hand of Midian": From the oppression and bondage of the Midianites, under which they had labored seven years.

Jerubbaal (Gideon), had won the war with the Midianites for them, as well as for his own people. The tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh were benefited by Gideon's victories.

Judges 9:18 "And ye are risen up against my father's house this day, and have slain his sons, threescore and ten persons, upon one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his maidservant, king over the men of Shechem, because he [is] your brother;"

Which was an instance of great ingratitude in them, after such services done for them, and favors received by them.

"And have slain his sons, seventy persons on one stone": Excepting one, himself, and he was intentionally slain. Their design was to cut off everyone. And all being slain but one, the round number is given. And though Abimelech committed the fact, the men of Shechem were accessory to it as they gave him money with which he hired men to assist him in it (see Judges 9:20). And it is very probable they were privy to his intention, and encouraged him to it. And certain it is they showed their approbation of it, by making Abimelech king after it and therefore they are justly charged with it.

"And have made Abimelech, the son of his handmaid, king over the men of Shechem": Which was both to the disgrace of Gideon and his family. And of themselves too, that an illegitimate son of his should be made their king. When it would have been more to the credit of Gideon, and his family, that he had lived in obscurity, and had not been known as a son of his. And this was to the reproach of the men of Shechem, and especially to the princes thereof. For, by the men of Shechem are meant the lords, and great men thereof, as Kimchi observes. And great contempt is cast on Abimelech himself, who is here represented as making a very poor figure, being by extraction the son of a handmaid, and king only over the men of Shechem. And who made him so for no other reason but this.

"Because he is your brother": Not because he had any right to the kingdom, or had any qualification for it, but because his mother lived among them, and her family belonged to them, and so he was related to many of them. And they hoped on that account to have preferment and favors from him.

In this act, they had shown great disrespect for Gideon and his family. The son of the maidservant had no rights above the 70 sons of Gideon by his wives.

Judges 9:19 "If ye then have dealt truly and sincerely with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, [then] rejoice ye in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you:"

If they could in their consciences think and believe they had done well, and acted the faithful and upright part by him and his family, which he left with them to consider of.

"Then rejoice ye in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you": May you be happy in him as a king. And he be happy in you as his subjects, and live peaceably and comfortably together. And this he suggests as a test of their former conduct that should this alliance between Abimelech and them be attended with happiness. Which he could not believe would be the case, then it would seem that they had done a right part by Gideon and his family. But if they should be unhappy together, as he supposed they would, then it would be clear that they had acted a base and disingenuous part by his father's family.

He is willing to accept their decision, if they have dealt truly and sincerely with the house of Gideon.

Judges 9:20 "But if not, 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, and devour Abimelech."

If it appeared that they had not acted uprightly and sincerely in this matter.

"Let fire come out of Abimelech, and devour the men of Shechem, and the house of Millo": Let wrath, rage, and fury, break out from Abimelech like fire. And issue in the destruction of those that made him king, both those of Shechem and of Millo.

"And let fire come out from the men of Shechem, and from the house of Millo, and devour Abimelech": Let them be incensed against Abimelech, and seek his ruin, and procure it. The sense is, that he wishes that strife, contention, and quarrels, might arise among them, and they mutually destroy each other. The words are a wish or a hope of evil upon them both, and which had its exact fulfilment.

Jotham speaks a curse on Abimelech, Shechem, and Millo, if they are dealing treacherously. He wants them to turn on each other and destroy each other. This is usually what happens among treacherous people.

Judges 9:21 "And Jotham ran away, and fled, and went to Beer, and dwelt there, for fear of Abimelech his brother."

Having delivered his fable, and the application of it, he made his escape, having the advantage of being on the top of a mountain. At some distance from the people, and perhaps they might not be inclined to do him any harm.

"And went to Beer; which some take to be the same with Baalath-beer in the tribe of Simeon (Joshua 19:8). According to Mr. Maundrell, who was in those parts in 1697, it is about two and a half's hours travel from Beth-el to it, and three and a third hours from it to Jerusalem. Beer, he says, enjoys a very pleasant situation, on an easy downward slope, facing southward. At the bottom of the hill it has a plentiful fountain of excellent water, from which it had its name.

"And dwelt there for fear of Abimelech his brother": How long Jotham dwelt there is not certain, and we hear no more of him after this. Josephus says he lay hid in the mountains three years for fear of Abimelech. Which perhaps he concluded from Abimelech's reigning three years, as follows.

After he had stood on the ledge above the city and shouted all of this to Abimelech and to all of Shechem, he ran and hid to keep Abimelech from killing him.

Chapter 9 Questions

1. Who is Abimelech's father?
2. Who was his mother?
3. Gideon was of the tribe of _____.

4. Abimelech's mother was of the tribe of _____.
5. What was the meeting with his mother's brethren for?
6. What does he whisper in their ears?
7. The men of Shechem were inclined to follow _____.
8. How many pieces of silver was given to Abimelech to hire men to help him?
9. Where did the money come from?
10. What kind of people did he hire?
11. He went into his father's house, and _____ his brothers.
12. How many brothers did he have?
13. Which brother hid and saved his life?
14. Where did the men of Shechem gather, and make Abimelech king?
15. What did Jotham do, when he heard this?
16. Who are the trees in verse 8?
17. Who does the olive tree symbolize?
18. What did the fig tree say to the trees?
19. The vine is the same as what?
20. Who was the bramble?
21. What is the only thing the bramble is good for?
22. What does Jotham remind these men of in verse 17?
23. In verse 20, Jotham speaks a _____ on Abimelech.
24. After he finished speaking, Jotham did what?
25. Why did he do this?