

## September 9

**Scriptures:** Read Judges 9

**Key Verse:** “But a certain woman dropped an upper millstone on Abimelech’s head... Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father...” (Judges 9:53, 56)

### Overview

This is a story of a great tragedy in Israel’s history. We see that God judged Israel, not from an enemy without but from strife within. Gideon, the man whom God had so mightily used, had a ruthless and unprincipled son by a concubine from Shechem. The people of Shechem were Canaanites whom Israel had allowed to remain in the land. Such a union was not acceptable in the sight of God and, as we find so often in the Bible, many problems arose from multiple marriages. A concubine was like a secondary ‘wife’ who remained living with her own family and who received occasional visits from her ‘husband’. Because she raised her children as a part of her family, Abimelech likely never knew his father nor his half-brothers very well.

Because of his affinity with the men of Shechem, Abimelech was able to gain their support in his desire to be king. With the money received from them, he hired a band of “worthless and reckless men” (v.4) to help him execute his seventy half-brothers so that he would have no rivals. However, in some unexplained way, yet in the providence of God, the youngest son of Gideon, Jotham, escaped. He was then the only living descendant of Gideon (who had already died, 8:32). Although this may have happened to Gideon and his family as a result of his sin(s) (8:27), God still honored him by not allowing his name to be erased from Israel.

Jotham bravely stood upon Mount Gerizim and, speaking in the manner of a prophet and using a parable, he predicted a terrible outcome for both the Shechemites and Abimelech (they would destroy each other, v.20), all because they did not deal well with the house of Gideon, whom they should have honored and respected for the great service he was to them in driving out the Midianites (8:22, 34-35). Jotham, like his father, must have supported the theocracy of Israel, namely God as their king (cf.8:23), since, as his parable implied, no worthy person would desire the kingship, for only the Lord was worthy to be King.

The parable clearly denounced the appointment of such a man as Abimelech to be king. He was compared to a thorn bush or bramble. The olive tree, fig tree, and vine all produced valuable products, yet they were too busy with their honorable occupations to desire to be king. Only the worthless, useless, and troublesome bramble desired to lord it over others. The bramble who promised shade (protection) was not even able to provide it, but rather brought only pain and ruin, since dry brambles often cause fires (v.15).

Abimelech was not considered a judge or even a king for all Israel. He was probably only ruling over a small territory within the country, and this was only for three years, yet his tyranny and oppression caused animosity between him and the people, especially the people of Shechem who were his first supporters, yet now they were planning a rebellion against him. They began by robbing him of his tribute money and goods (v.25). The prediction of Jotham was coming true.

Abimelech, with an army of Israelites, killed all the people of Shechem. He not only destroyed the city but also “sowed it with salt” (v.45), so it could not be reinhabited, at least not for a long time, because the land would be rendered useless.

Abimelech continued his treachery on the people of Thebez, a few kilometers north of Shechem, who must have been involved in the rebellion. During the siege, some found refuge in the tower. The men of the city had weapons with which to fight, but the women had only stones. It was one of these brave unnamed women who threw her millstone (probably weighing about 10 to 13 kilograms) down from the tower upon Abimelech. It no doubt cracked his skull, yet he was still alive after the blow, so before he died by the hand of woman (which was a terrible shame for any warrior), he asked his armor-bearer to kill him.

The death of Abimelech and destruction of Shechem are viewed as divine retribution for their crime against Gideon’s family (v.56-57). The Lord was then, as he still is the sovereign judge of mankind, and He will punish sin; yet for us He has provided a way of escape from his retribution for sin through Jesus who was made sin for us.

## **Prayer**

Thank You, Jesus, that You tasted death for us. We’ve not done the things Abimelech did, but we still are sinners and worthy of death. We identify today with Your death, burial, and resurrection by recognizing the fact that we who believe have our old nature dead and buried, and we are now alive in the new nature of Jesus.