

Week #:	196	Series:	God's Judgment	Title:	Downfall of Abimelech – Part 1
Scriptures:	Judges 9:22-33				
Songs:	Awesome God – Hillsong Live (5:13)				
	I Love You Lord (3:31)				
	Oh Lord, You're Beautiful – Jesus Culture (5:00)				
	Prayer	I Speak Jesus – Here Be Lions (5:11)			
Videos:	Judges Song – What's in the Bible #4 (Time- 31:31-33:25)				

The Downfall of Abimelech (Part 1):

The first five judges in our study have been:

1. Othniel: He was Caleb's nephew. Israel lived in peace after him for 40 years.
2. Ehud: He was known for the physical feature of being left-handed. Israel lived in peace after him for 80 years.
3. Shamgar: He was known for killing 600 Philistines with a farm tool, an oxgoad.
4. Deborah: She was a female prophetess, whom God used to free the people from Jabin [Yavin], King of Hazor, and his commander Sisera.
5. Gideon: Called God's valiant hero. Israel lived in peace for 40 years, until he died.

Our last lesson in the book of Judges was about the son of the fifth judge Gideon – a man named Abimelech. He was not a righteous man. He killed all of his family, except one, who prophesied a curse and the demise of Abimelech. Now we will see God's judgment on Abimelech and Shechem. Shechem was a city that called Ba'al its god. There was a temple to Ba'al built there, and both the Canaanites and the Hebrews who lived in Shechem bowed down to this god.

Judges 9:22-24

²² Avimelekh [Abimelech] was chief over Isra'el for three years. ²³ But God sent a spirit of discord between Avimelekh [Abimelech] and the men of Sh'khem [Shechem], so that the men of Sh'khem [Shechem] dealt treacherously with Avimelekh [Abimelech]. ²⁴ This came about so that the crime against the seventy sons of Yeruba'al might be avenged and the responsibility for their bloody death be placed on Avimelekh [Abimelech] their brother, who murdered them, and on the men of Sh'khem [Shechem], who helped him kill his brothers.

It wasn't long before the self-serving and wicked Abimelech starting having friction with the Shechemites. Such kinds of people who ruled (and those who were ruled over) that are capable of such heinous acts as callously murdering 69 brothers just so a personal ambition can be realized don't make easy companions for the long term; trust would not be the basis of such a relationship. So it wasn't long before trouble started (verse 23 says it was 3 years to be exact).

This is the first statement of the theme of retribution. God sending of the "spirit of discord" will set in motion the first of four stages in the judgment against Shechem and Abimelech:

1. The first battle of Shechem (Judges 9:25-41).
2. The second battle of Shechem (Judges 9:42-45).
3. The battle at the Tower (Judges 9:46-49).
4. The battle of Thebez and Abimelech's death (Judges 9:50-54).

Judges 9:25-29

²⁵ So the men of Sh'khem [Shechem] sent out men to ambush him on the mountaintops. They robbed everyone who went past them, and Avimelekh [Abimelech] was told about it. ²⁶ Ga'al the son of a slave came with his brothers and went on to Sh'khem [Shechem], and the men of Sh'khem [Shechem] put their trust in him. ²⁷ They went out into the field, gathered their grapes and pressed the juice out of them. Then they held a feast and went into the house of their god to eat and drink, and there they

insulted Avimelekh [Abimelech].²⁸ Ga'al the son of a slave said, "Who is Avimelekh [Abimelech]? Think of the contrast with Sh'khem [Shechem]! Why should we serve Avimelekh [Abimelech]? Isn't he the son of Yeruba'al [Gideon]? Isn't Z'vul [Zubul] his officer? Serve the men of Hamor the father of Sh'khem [Shechem]! Why should we serve Avimelekh [Abimelech]?"²⁹ If I were in control of this people, I'd get rid of Avimelekh [Abimelech]!" Then, addressing his words to Avimelekh [Abimelech], he said, "Come out and fight! I don't care if you make your army even larger!"

Abimelech had chosen Arumah as his personal place of residence, and placed a handpicked governor to rule in his stead over the city of Shechem. Zebul lived in Shechem, guided the city, and made regular reports to his boss, Abimelech. That Abimelech chose to live elsewhere was the greatest insult to those who made his reign possible. His very own family lived in Shechem, put their own reputations on the line to get Abimelech coronated, and you can be sure there was an implied understanding that here would be his seat of government over his kingdom. But after 3 years the people of Shechem caught on to Abimelech and realized that only his personal agenda for power mattered and they were but a means to an end. These people (who were hardly particularly moral or just themselves) made plans to counter Abimelech's efforts as a first step towards deposing him. Among those plans was the one stated in verse 25 where they stationed men to lie in wait in the mountaintops above Shechem. In other words, they put some willing men upon the twin hills of Ebal and Gerizim so that they could look down upon the main trade highways running through Shechem that connected the east with the west and north with the south, and robbed the caravans.

Not only did this give these robbers a boost in their personal incomes, it caused a great deal of trouble for Abimelech (which was the intent). The kings of this era forced taxes and tolls from the traders and merchants who traveled the trade routes that ran through their territories. Part of the reason these traders agreed to pay these tolls was that they were to receive the king's protection from thieves and nomads. If the local king failed in providing security and the thievery got too out of hand, traders would avoid the area and the king would lose a major source of funds for his treasury. Abimelech soon learned of this, understood immediately what was happening, and so the stage was set for a showdown.

About this same time a new character enters the scene; his name is Ga'al son of Ebed. Ga'al led a band of men who bore no allegiance to any particular tribe or king. Rather they were like pirates or privateers that would ride into an area they thought they could control and take charge. They were like a hired mercenary army and did the bidding of a king or a group of people if there was sufficient gain in it for themselves.

Under Adonai's providential guidance this group of thugs arrives at Shechem at the time of the grape harvest and the accompanying festival; since we now understand the rather amoral character of the residents of Shechem, Ga'al and his bunch fit right and the townspeople trusted Ga'al.

Ga'al showed up at a very auspicious time: the Great New Year event of the pagan Mystery Babylon religions. The main event of this celebration was the gathering of grapes, fermenting their juice into wine, and then having a long drunken party in honor of Ba'al.

Its counterpart in Israel was Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles. In fact, when we look at the original Hebrew in verse 27, where it says in English that, "they went into the house of their god to eat, drink and make merry", what it actually says is that they went to the house of their god to "give Hallel"; this means "praise offerings" and is directly connected to the Hebrew word Hallel (praise) that is central to the Feast of Tabernacles celebration. So, here we have words reserved for describing the singing of praises to Jehovah, but they're being used to sing praises to Ba'al!

Under the influence of the Canaanites Sukkot melded with the pagan New Year wine fest and became nothing but a time of over-indulgence, decadence and it lost all spiritual meaning. The Israelites represented the majority population of Shechem and they felt perfectly justified in adopting these completely pagan practices in lieu of the God-ordained ones Moses gave to them.

At this time of feasting and drinking Ga'al used the moment to challenge the people of Shechem to openly revolt against Abimelech. He says, "who is this Abimelech that WE should bow down to HIM"? After all Abimelech is nothing more than a son of Yeruba'al. Remember: Yeruba'al is a nickname for Gideon, and it means, "Ba'al fighter." Here the people of Shechem (Hebrew and Canaanite) were having a drunken bash in honor of Ba'al, and Ga'al says, "Why should we have a king over us who is the son of a man who hates Ba'al's and broke down his altar?" Ga'al goes on to say that if they're to have a ruler he ought to be from "Hamor the father of Shechem." Remember that Hamor was a Hivite king who founded the city of Shechem. So now whereas Abimelech used his Canaanite (or Hivite) blood as a reason for the people of Shechem to invite him to be their king, now Ga'al is reminding the people that Abimelech is also 1/2 Hebrew and so Ga'al is using his Hebrew blood lines against him.

Then Ga'al throws out a not so hidden hint: "If I were in control of this people, I'd get rid of Abimelech". In other words, if you'll agree to help me dispose of Abimelech, I will become your leader. Then in his inebriated state he throws down the gauntlet to Abimelech and challenges him to come to Shechem with whatever loyal army he has, and fight.

Judges 9:30-33

³⁰ When Z'vul [Zebul] the ruler of the city heard the words of Ga'al the son of a slave, he was enraged.

³¹ He sent messengers to Avimelech [Abimelech] in Tormah with this message: "Ga'al the son of a slave and his brothers have come to Sh'khem [Shechem], and they're inciting the city against you. ³² You and the men with you should come up now at night and lie in wait in the field. ³³ In the morning, get up early, as soon as the sun rises; and attack the city. Then, when Ga'al and the men with him come out to fight you, do whatever you can to them."

Notice that Abimelech did not live and rule from Shechem; rather he appointed an overseer or governor named Zebul to deal with Shechem. The trouble that started was a direct result of God's intervention. It's hard to imagine, but remember God is God over all – even over the evil spirits. There are times He uses them to fulfill His ultimate purpose. (Later in the scripture we see this again during the story of Ahab and Jezebel). God's purpose was to avenge the blood of the sons of Gideon that Abimelech murdered.

One of the principles God established in the Torah is that murder (blood) must be dealt with by executing the murderer. (This is in Genesis 4:10 in the story of Cain who killed his brother Abel.)

The reason for this principle is that the shedding of innocent blood (unjust killing) pollutes the land spiritually and the only way that spiritual pollution ends is when the blood of the killer is spilled. Otherwise, the land is under the curse of the law. So, God takes the matter in these lawless times into His own hands and arranges for the circumstances to bring the perpetrator (Abimelech and his henchmen) to justice. It is interesting that even though the wicked plans of evil men can be hidden from the people for a time, eventually it comes to light.

When Zebul, the governor of Shechem (who is loyal to Abimelech) hears of this battle plot he sends a message to Abimelech of this pending revolt. That Zebul was able to continue on in the face of this growing and unhidden rebellious mindset speaks to the divided nature of Shechem; just as there was no consensus in choosing Abimelech 3 years earlier, there is no consensus to revolt against him now. Zebul suggests to Abimelech that he get his army together, come to Shechem under the cover of darkness, and then lie in wait out in the fields that surround the city. Then when dawn breaks, he should attack. Ga'al's men are bound to respond in kind, and by drawing them out from behind the city walls into the open, if Abimelech is properly prepared he should be able to defeat Ga'al. Abimelech acted in accordance with Ga'al's advice.

Part 2:

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Judges 9:34-

³⁴ Avimelekh [Abimelech] and all the men with him came up by night and lay in wait against Sh'khem [Shechem] in four groups. ³⁵ Ga'al the son of a slave went out and stationed himself at the entrance to the city gate. Then Avimelekh [Abimelech] and his men rose from their ambush. ³⁶ When Ga'al saw the men, he said to Z'vul [Zebul], "Look, there are men coming down from the mountaintops." Z'vul [Zebul] answered, "You're seeing the shadows of the mountains as if they were men." ³⁷ Ga'al said again, "Look, there are men coming down from the main hill in the land, and one group is coming on the road from the Fortuneteller's Oak. ³⁸ Z'vul [Zebul] said to him, "Where's your mouth now? You said, 'Who is Avimelekh [Abimelech]? Why should we serve him?' Aren't these the people you despise? Go on out and fight them!" ³⁹ So Ga'al went out, leading the men of Sh'khem [Shechem], and fought Avimelekh [Abimelech]. ⁴⁰ But Avimelekh [Abimelech] gave chase, and Ga'al took to flight; many fell wounded, strewn all along the way to the city gate.

⁴¹ Then Avimelekh [Abimelech] took up residence in Arumah, and Z'vul [Zebul] drove out Ga'al and his brothers, so that they could not live in Sh'khem [Shechem]. ⁴² But the very next day, the people went out into the field, and Avimelekh [Abimelech] was told about it. ⁴³ He took his men, divided them into three groups, and lay in wait in the field. When he saw the people going out of the city, he came out of hiding and slaughtered them. ⁴⁴ Avimelekh [Abimelech] and his group rushed forward and occupied the entrance to the city gate, while the other two groups attacked all those in the field and killed them. ⁴⁵ Avimelekh [Abimelech] fought against the city all that day; captured it, killed its people, destroyed its buildings and sowed its land with salt.

⁴⁶ When all the men in the fortress at Sh'khem [Shechem] heard about this, they took refuge in the stronghold of the temple of El-B'rit [Berith]. ⁴⁷ Avimelekh [Abimelech] was told that all the men from the Sh'khem [Shechem] fortress had gathered together; ⁴⁸ so he led all his men up to Mount Tzalmon [Zalmon], where he took an axe in his hand, cut a branch off a tree, and laid it on his shoulder. Then he said to those with him, "Quick! Do just what you saw me do!" ⁴⁹ They all did likewise, each man cutting off his branch; and they followed Avimelekh [Abimelech]. They put the branches up against the stronghold, set them on fire, and

burned down the stronghold; so that all the people from the Sh'khem [Sheckem] fortress died, about a thousand men and women.

⁵⁰ Then Avimelekh [Abimelech] went to Tevetz [Thebez], set up camp against Tevetz [Thebez] and captured it.

⁵¹ But there was a fortified tower inside the city; and all the men and women took refuge in it, everyone in the city. They shut themselves inside and went up onto the roof of the tower. ⁵² However, when Avimelekh [Abimelech] approached the tower, attacked it, and then came up close to the tower's door in order to burn it down, ⁵³ a woman dropped an upper millstone on Avimelekh [Abimelech]'s head, cracking his skull. ⁵⁴ He quickly called out to the young man holding his armor, "Draw your sword, and finish me off, so that people won't say a woman killed me." So his attendant ran him through, and he died. ⁵⁵ When the men of Isra'el saw that Avimelekh [Abimelech] was dead, they all went back home.

⁵⁶ This is how God paid back Avimelekh [Abimelech] for the wrong he did to his father in murdering his seventy brothers. ⁵⁷ God also repaid the men of Sh'khem [Sheckem] for all the wrong they had done; on them came the curse of Yotam [Jotham] the son of Yeruba'al [Jerubbaal].