

Week #:	197	Series:	God's Judgment	Title:	Downfall of Abimelech – Part 2
Scriptures:	Judges 9:34-57				
Songs:	Jehovah Jireh My Provider – Paul Wilbur (2:25)				
	Blow the Trumpet in Zion – Paul Wilbur (3:06)				
	Victor's Crown – Darlene Zschech (7:25)				
	Prayer	Come Alive (Dry Bones) – Lauren Daigle (4:52)			
Videos:	Judges Song – What's in the Bible #4 (Time- 31:31-33:25)				

## The Downfall of Abimelech (Part 2):

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 two lessons 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. Last week we learned about the first part of the downfall of Abimelech, and this week we will learn the rest of his story.

God's retribution for the spilling of innocent blood (killing the other sons of Gideon) was carried out in four stages of 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).

We stopped in the middle of the first battle last week.

Judges 9:34-40

<sup>34</sup> Avimelekh [Abimelech] and all the men with him came up by night and lay in wait against Sh'khem [Shechem] in four groups. <sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> 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." <sup>37</sup> 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. <sup>38</sup> 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!" <sup>39</sup> So Ga'al went out, leading the men of Sh'khem [Shechem], and fought Avimelekh [Abimelech]. <sup>40</sup> But Avimelekh [Abimelech] gave chase, and Ga'al took to flight; many fell wounded, strewn all along the way to the city gate.

In the morning Zebul and Ga'al were standing inside the open city gate, both (for different reasons no doubt) looking to see if Abimelech was anywhere to be seen; obviously Ga'al didn't know that Zebul had sent for Abimelech. When Ga'al saw Abimelech's men moving on the mountainside, with the morning light still dim and the shadows being long, Zebul tried to convince him that he was just seeing things just give Abimelech's men a little more time to get closer before they were discovered. But when it simply wasn't possible to

conceal the plan any longer Zebul turned and flung Ga'al's boastful comment right back into his face: "Where's your mouth, now?"

Now Zebul turns the tables and provokes Ga'al to leave the safety of the thick defensive walls of Shechem to go out and take on the man he had so little regard for. No details are given of the battle, only the outcome. As says verse 40, "But Abimelech gave chase, and Ga'al took flight; many fell wounded, strewn all along the way to the city gate".

Judges 9:41-

<sup>41</sup> 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]. <sup>42</sup> But the very next day, the people went out into the field, and Avimelekh [Abimelech] was told about it. <sup>43</sup> 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. <sup>44</sup> 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.

<sup>45</sup> Avimelekh [Abimelech] fought against the city all that day; captured it, killed its people, destroyed its buildings and sowed its land with salt.

Abimelech went back to Arumah, and left Zebul to drive out what few members of Ga'al's gang remained inside Shechem. With Ga'al now banished from Shechem Abimelech could do almost as he pleased in bringing full destruction to those who rebelled against him. The morning after the last of Ga'al's men were expelled, the regular townsfolk of Shechem went out the city gates to tend their fields figuring that the fighting was over and it was time to get back to normal life. Wrong. Abimelech and his men were lying in wait to take revenge and as soon as all the Shechemites were in the fields and deep into their hoeing, pruning and harvesting, the attack came.

Abimelech used the rather standard battle tactic of dividing his men into 3 groups; the one he led immediately headed to the city gates where he secured the entrance into the city. By doing this the townsfolk, caught out in the field, had nowhere to run. They were slaughtered out in the fields. When this wanton act was completed, Abimelech led his troops inside the city to begin destruction there. The text says the fighting and destruction went on all day and he effected a rather senseless slaughter of all the inhabitants of Shechem, destroyed the buildings, and sowed the land with salt. Sowing the land with salt is not literal, although it may have been ceremonial. It simply means that the land, and the city, became a wasteland, unusable.

Judges 9:46-49

<sup>46</sup> 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]. <sup>47</sup> Avimelekh [Abimelech] was told that all the men from the Sh'khem [Shechem] fortress had gathered together; <sup>48</sup> 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!" <sup>49</sup> 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 [Shechem] fortress died, about a thousand men and women.

While the commoners were fighting and dying, the upper class (who lived in another area of the city) made a mad dash to a place meant for their special protection: the fortress-Temple of their god called El-Berith (meaning, covenant with El). El was the Canaanite word for "highest god," usually considered to be even above Ba'al. Of course, we use this term for the true highest God: Jehovah. While the move from inside the city was obviously because the lords of Shechem and their families felt that the Temple fortress was the

strongest building now available to them, without doubt the main reason they went there was the hope that their god, El, would protect them.

When Abimelech observed this he took counter measures; he led his men to a nearby hill that had a dense growth of fir trees. He and his men chopped off branches, brought them to this Temple-Tower now packed with the upper crust of Shechem, laid the branches against it and lit them on fire. The greenness of the branches would have made for horrific choking smoke while it burned through the wooden door and wooden roof that were standard in that time, thus killing many where they sat huddled together, and driving others out to be struck down by the waiting army. Over 1000 men and women were killed at the base of this temple.

Judges 9:50-55

<sup>50</sup>Then Avimelekh [Abimelech] went to Tevetz [Thebez], set up camp against Tevetz [Thebez] and captured it. <sup>51</sup>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.

<sup>52</sup>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, <sup>53</sup>a woman dropped an upper millstone on Avimelekh [Abimelech]'s head, cracking his skull. <sup>54</sup>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. <sup>55</sup>When the men of Isra'el saw that Avimelekh [Abimelech] was dead, they all went back home.

With the central city of Shechem now in ruins Abimelech moved against the neighboring city of Thebez that lay about 9 miles northeast of Shechem who apparently had acted in sympathy with Shechem. The central part of the city of Thebez was taken rapidly and many of the city people (not just the aristocracy as in Shechem) fled to the refuge of what is called a fortified tower. Never one to waste a successful tactic, Abimelech used fire to force those who took refuge in the tower to come out. However, this time there was a different result. As Abimelech approached the side of the tower to take hateful revenge by personally setting the branches laid against it on fire, a woman on the roof flung an upper millstone over the edge, striking Abimelech on his head and crushing his skull.

An upper millstone was around 15 inches in diameter and 3 or 4 inches thick; it would have weight around 20 pounds. It must have struck a glancing blow because if it had hit his cranium bluntly, he would have died instantly. However, he was aware enough to know that it was a woman who had done him in, and so asked his armor bearer to run him through so that he didn't suffer what was seen as the humiliation of being killed by a woman in battle.

Judges 9:56-57

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

Verse 56 and 57 needs to leave an indelible mark on our memories: God pays back. Perhaps we, as His followers, are not to pay back but God does. God repaid Avimelech and the men of Shechem for all the wrong they had done. If God does not pay back, then His justice system is a farce. What is "justice" if there is no punishment for a crime? Paul brings this exact principle forth in Galatians 6.

Galatians 6:7

<sup>7</sup>Don't delude yourselves: no one makes a fool of God! A person reaps what he sows.

God's law of retribution will not be foiled; it may not happen in this world, but it will in the next.