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# Judges 9

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## Judges 9:1–57

## Abimelech

### Outline of Chapter 9:

- Vv. 1–6 **Abimelech, with help from Shechem, makes himself the first king over Israel**
- Vv. 7–21 **The fable-parable of Jotham, the only surviving son of Gideon**
- Vv. 22–25 **Abimelech and Shechem at enmity with one another**
- Vv. 26–29 **Gaal ben Ebed offers himself as a ruler in Abimelech's stead**
- Vv. 30–33 **Zebul sends word to Abimelech concerning this fomenting revolution**
- Vv. 34–45 **Abimelech attacks and defeats Gaal and his soldiers**
- Vv. 46–49 **Abimelech attacks and destroys the leaders of Shechem**
- Vv. 50–57 **Abimelech is defeated in battle in disgrace, the fatal blow being delivered by a woman**

### Charts:

- v. 31 **B<sup>o</sup> thâr<sup>o</sup>mâh or Ba`ârûwmâh**

**Introduction:** Judges 9 is a tremendous valley in a basin of low points in the history of Israel. Gideon, although a man of unrecognized greatness in Judges 6–8, still, at the end of his life, had many wives and even sired a bastard son named Abimelech by his mistress. Abimelech, in a power grab, will kill all but one of Gideon's seventy sons, and rule over Israel. It is this chapter which deals with his mafia-like hit on Gideon's children and his brief rule over Israel. Had Gideon asked, "Give me one good reason why I should not have a mistress." The answer would have been *Abimelech*.

This is one of those chapters which, if it is simply placed in your *read the Bible in one year* program, that you will never fully grasp. You won't know who is who; you won't grasp why Jotham says what he says; you won't fully grasp who is the bad guy and who is the good guy. In fact, this is a chapter which can be every bit as meaningless as a genealogy chapter tends to be, even though it is fraught with meaning. You don't have the equipment and the resources to unearth what is found here. That is my job. Once you have read this explanation, you will fully grasp pretty much every phrase found in this chapter. If you don't believe me, then put this commentary down and read through this chapter once or twice in whatever version you use—or, better yet, pick up a couple of versions and read through. Then ask yourself if you really grasp what is going on. The job of the pastor or a commentator is to exegete the Word of God—the make it understandable to his congregation. The pastor is not supposed to merely give two or three light messages a week, tell his congregation to study the Bible for themselves, and then spend the rest of the week going to meetings and acting as a poor man's psychiatrist. A pastor is supposed to dig out the meaning of God's Word and give you ample application to your life. That is what I have done here.

One of the things which you might miss is that there is a great change in the book of Judges with this chapter. The book of Judges is broken down into three sections, and we are in the second section—the chronological portion of the list of judges. This chapter is the end of the four chapter set and is the literary center of the book of Judges. What occurred in the book of Judges from chapters 3 through 8 was consecutive and non-overlapping. Judges 9 will continue with that. However, Judges 8:28 was the last time that we hear the phrase *and the land was undisturbed for \_\_\_ years*. At this point, Israel will get the ruler she deserves, and then the oppression that she deserves.

In Judges 6, we introduced the person of Gideon, and through chapters 6–8 we examined Gideon directly and in this chapter we will examine his offspring, particularly the evil Abimelech. The NIV Study Bible notes: *Abimelech...stands in sharp contrast to his father Gideon (Jerub-Baal), who had attacked Baal worship and insisted that the Lord ruled over Israel. Abimelech attempted this Canaanite revival in the very place where Joshua had*

earlier reaffirmed Israel's allegiance to the Lord (Jos. 24:14–27). In every respect, Abimelech was the antithesis of the Lord's appointed judges.<sup>1</sup>

Abimelech was not a judge per se—Abimelech was the first king of Israel. I should point out that the NIV Study Bible sees him as simply a city-king, not unlike the Canaanite city kings in that area.<sup>2</sup> Most commentators, except for Keil and Delitzsch, do not see him as a sovereign ruler over Israel, despite the fact that he is said to be, in the Bible, a ruler over Israel. It is never clear how far his rule extended, but it was definitely over more than one city, as he placed his own man in power over the city of his youth, and later at the end of the chapter attacks another rebellious city. Therefore, he is a ruler over a more significant portion of Israel than just one city. Furthermore, he has a mobile army to back him up which is large enough to be split into four companies, which also suggests that he ruled over an area much more extensive than a city. The result of all of this will be essentially a scattered, disorganized civil war in Israel. Some expositors reject Abimelech's rule simply because they do not like Abimelech. His rule is sudden and usurpative.<sup>3</sup> However, he came to power allowed by God. *"The Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes, and sets over them the lowliest of men."* (Daniel 4:17b NIV<sup>4</sup>).

McGee wrote: *Even today when a good ruler comes into office, many folk say, "God raised him up." What about the wicked ruler? God permits him to come to the throne also. Do you know why? Because...people get the ruler they deserve. The people of Israel wanted this boy Abimelech to rule over them; and they got the caliber of man they deserved. Friends, when we look around our world today, we find this principle is still true.*<sup>5</sup>

We have quite a number of characters in this chapter, so that it is easy to get lost even in a careful read of the narrative. Therefore, we would be benefitted to get to know them first. Our chief character is Abimelech, the bastard son of Gideon. In his position as bastard son, he has developed jealousy and other mental attitude sins, which he combines with power lust. Now, he is bold, and he is more gutsy than his father, Gideon. He desires power and he acts like a mafia godfather, except without any regard to his own family. He first goes to his immediate family, to see if they will support him. Then he has them speak to the leaders of Shechem, his home town. The result is that Shechem, as a city, will support his bid for power. Keep in mind that Israel desires a national leader and that Gideon, prior to his death, declined that position. What Gideon did not decline were the ladies and he had many wives and sired 70 children and Abimelech saw these offspring as his enemies in his bid for power. Therefore, Abimelech assassinated his seventy half-brothers. Insofar as we know, Abimelech appears to be the only bastard son of Gideon. One son escaped, the very youngest, Jotham.

Jotham, surprisingly, plays a fairly large part in this narrative, although the actual time frame for his appearance is quite brief. He speaks a few words to the men of Shechem, disparaging their choice to follow Abimelech, pointing out that it defames the honor of Gideon. He predicts destruction for the leaders of Shechem, who stood behind Abimelech, and then flees for his life. There is a possibility that he authored this chapter.

Three years pass during which Abimelech rules over Israel (probably the northern portion of Israel). His right-hand man, Zebul, is placed in charge of Shechem. We are not told much about Zebul and his background; it would be reasonable to guess that he was Abimelech's second-in-command in his personal army.

Then Gaal ben Ebed strolls into Shechem, at a time when the leaders of Shechem had become disenchanted with Abimelech. We are not given any specifics as to *why*; we can certainly speculate that they would have expected

<sup>1</sup> *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 341.

<sup>2</sup> *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; pp. 340–341.

<sup>3</sup> One of the fun parts of writing is that occasionally, one finds oneself using words which one has never read or used before; and, which occasionally, fall outside the realm of the WordPerfect dictionary. Fortunately, Webster heard of this one.

<sup>4</sup> Most of the time, I quote a personal bastardization of the NASB (replacing the *thee's*, *thou's* and *shall's*, besides taking a few other liberties). I use the NASB because it is probably the best translated of the readable translations. Occasionally, when readily available, I use my own.

<sup>5</sup> J. Vernon McGee, *Joshua Judges*, ©1976 by Thru the Bible Books; p. 168.

Shechem to act as a capitol city, whereas, all Abimelech did was install some other man over them, perhaps as simply his yes-man and puppet (this would be Zebul). So the leaders of Shechem gravitate toward this Gaal, who, during a party, tells these men what he would do with their support. *“If Abimelech were here right now, I’d....I’d...”* And that was pretty much good enough for the men of Shechem, so they threw their support behind this Gaal. Zebul, while not betraying his loyalties to Abimelech, appears to have at least a speaking relationship with Gaal, which we will see in vv. 36–38. However, prior to that, he will contact Abimelech and submit his plan of attack to Abimelech.

After being contacted by Zebul, Abimelech will bring his army into town and destroy Gaal ben Ebed and his army. Then he will take out the leaders of Shechem and the city of Shechem. Finally, at the end of this chapter, shortly after all of this has taken place, Abimelech will be mortally wounded by a woman, causing him to request an assisted suicide.

After a careful examination of this chapter, it is clear that it should be kept as one literary unit, although it is possible the last few verses were written by a different person. We have this theme which runs through this chapter, almost from the beginning, and certainly to the end. In vv. 1–6, we have the union of Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem and the awful deed that they commit (the killing of Abimelech’s 70 half-brothers). When Jotham stands up and speaks to the people of Shechem, some of whom would have been these leaders who sided with Abimelech, he warns them metaphorically of Abimelech destroying himself and the men of Shechem due to their alliance (v. 15). Since the interpretation of this verse could be disputed, Jotham interprets it himself in v. 20, making it clear that a fire will come out of Abimelech and it will destroy the leaders of Shechem; and that a fire would likewise come out from the men of Shechem and destroy Abimelech. Later, in v. 45, Abimelech destroys the city of Shechem; and he locates the leaders of Shechem in the stronghold of Shechem (which was possibly something like a mostly underground shelter with ties to idolatry). Abimelech then orders that this be set afire, which kills all those inside (vv. 46–49). The last incident recorded in this chapter is the death of Abimelech, which occurs soon thereafter during a raid on another rebellious city (vv. 52–55). The very last two verses of this chapter then sum this all up: **Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father, in killing his seventy brothers. Furthermore, God returned all the wickedness of the men of Shechem on their heads, and the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal came upon them** (Judges 9:56–57). You don’t find a literary unit much tighter than that.

The tie-in between Abimelech’s own personal degeneracy and the degeneracy of Israel is not clear at first. The leaders of Shechem will come off as a little flaky, but other than that, Israel does not appear to be all that degenerate. However, what is easy to miss is that we have mention of several idolatrous establishments. V. 6 is the questionable reference; we either have a military camp or the oak of a pillar, which might refer to idolatry. We have idolatry alluded to in v. 27 in conjunction with a party; we have two separate areas of demon worship mentioned in passing in Shechem in vv. 46–48. In the city of Thebez, mentioned at the end of this chapter, there is another tower alluded to, which is likely a tower of demon worship. Where the idolatry of Israel is unmistakable is actually back in Judges 8:33, which reads: **Then it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the sons of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals, and made Baal-berith their god.** Finally, the reason that we know that the fight here is against idolatry is that we never find the name *Gideon* in this chapter; the author uses only Jerubbaal, which means, *contending with Baal*. You may think, *well, so what; that is his nickname, right?* In Judges 6, the name *Gideon* is found 11 times; in chapter 7, 13 times; and in chapter 8, 15 times. But we do not find the name *Gideon* even once in Judges 9. Over and over again—9 times—we read *Jerubbaal—contending with Baal* (*Jerubbaal* only occurs 4 times in chapters 6–8). The point is that, even though there is no emphasis given to Israel falling into idolatry, and no emphasis of how evil that is, when you read between the lines, you will recognize how steeped in idolatry Israel was and how opposed God was to idolatry (He was *contending with Baal*). My thinking is that this tells us something about the author. Most authors of the Bible will clearly state their opposition to idolatry. The author of this portion of Scripture only states as an aside that Israel is caught up in idolatry and he very quietly implies that idolatry is wrong by using the name *Jerubbaal* over and over again. When you read this chapter, the indications are that Israel was immersed in idolatry and that she clearly reaped the results of idolatry in her leaders. My thinking is that the person who wrote this was concerned that the manuscript might be found and that he might be persecuted by those who worshipped Baal. If Israel is so degenerate as to deserve

a ruler like Abimelech, who is no better than a gangster-thug, then Israel's degeneracy must be great enough to persecute those who do not worship Baal.

Now, this was not the only case in which the author of this chapter of Judges used a name with great underlying significance. Recall from Judges 8:31 that we do not have the normal language used when naming a child. Furthermore, we have this mistress giving birth to a bastard son away from Gideon, and the verse then reads *and He named him Abimelech*. Recall that Abimelech means *my father is king, my father is ruler*. Every time this name is used, it is a slight upon Abimelech. He is not a ruler; he is not a king; his father is king. And who gave him that name? This same unusual use of the verb is found in II Kings 17:34 and Neh. 9:7 where God designates a new name for Jacob and Abram. For that reason, we can assume that God ultimately assigned him this name so that every time his name is used in this chapter, it is tongue in cheek; it takes away from his rulership. *My father is king, not me.*<sup>6</sup>

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## Abimelech, with Help from Shechem, Makes Himself the First King over Israel

Slavishly literal:

**And so went Abimelech ben Jerubbaal to Shechem unto relatives of his mother; and so he speaks unto them and unto all of [the] family of a house of a father of his mother, to say,**

Judges  
9:1

Moderately literal:

**Then Abimelech ben Jerubbaal went to Shechem to the relatives of his mother; and he spoke to them, and to all of the family of the house of the father of his mother, saying,**

**After the death of his father, Abimelech ben Jerubbaal went to Shechem and he spoke to the entire family on his mother's side, saying,**

Abimelech, if you will recall, is the illegitimate son of Gideon from the previous chapter. Gideon had many wives which bore him, in all, seventy children. He also had a child by a servant woman in Shechem and that was Abimelech. Very little is said in the Bible directly about Gideon's polygamy and adultery. The Bible actually renders surprisingly few moral condemnations of individuals throughout the historical narratives. That is, we rarely find *Bob the saint did this and that was a bad thing to do*. The Bible often just records what happened and allows the results to speak for themselves. In this chapter, we will see the result of Gideon's inappropriate relationship with a woman outside of marriage. We will also see how fruitless having 70 children was. At the death of Gideon, who perhaps saw very little of Abimelech, Abimelech decided to use the fact that he was a son of Gideon's to his own advantage, which is what the first few verses of this chapter are all about.

We will see that the seventy children of Gideon were completely lacking in backbone as this narrative continues; however, Abimelech is the exception. Edersheim writes: *Abimelech seems to have possessed all the courage, vigour, and energy of his father; only coupled, alas! with restless ambition, reckless unscrupulousness, and daring impiety.*<sup>7</sup> As noted in the previous chapter, we do not even know that Abimelech was actually named Abimelech (Judges 8:31).

Shechem is apparently where Abimelech was born and where his mother and her family lived. The NIV Study Bible: *Ruins dating from the Canaanite era give evidence of a sacred area, probably to be associated with the temple of*

<sup>6</sup> Although Keil and Delitzsch caught the fact that his was a name given later to Abimelech, they do not fully grasp why he was named that or its significance. Ditto for Edersheim. In fact, this might be the first time that the correct significance of these names is actually explored. Keil and Delitzsch and Edersheim all realized that this was not Abimelech's given name at birth, but they all unfortunately mangle both the meaning of the name and the significance of the name.

<sup>7</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *Bible History Old Testament*; ©1995 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; p. 369.

*Baal-Berith or el-Berith (vv. 4, 46). Archaeological evidence, which is compatible with the destruction of Shechem by Abimelech, indicates that its sacred area was never rebuilt after this time.*<sup>8</sup> ZPEB speaks disparagingly of the city of Shechem, citing its ties to Canaanite culture—however, this city has a rich spiritual background as well, which was covered in Joshua 24:1. It is clear from v. 4 that there were ties between the people of Shechem and pagan religion.

Whom Abimelech went to is the masculine plural construct of *ʾâch* (אָח) [pronounced *awhk*], which means simply *brother, close relative, fellow countrymen*. Strong's #251 BDB #26. He said *unto them* and to all of the feminine singular of *mishpâchâh* (מִשְׁפַּחָהּ) [pronounced *mish-paw-KHAWH*], which means *family, clan, class*. Strong's #4940 BDB #1046. This is followed by *of a house of* and then we have the masculine singular construct of *ʾâv* (אָב) [pronounced *awv*], which means *father*, both as the head of a household or the head of a clan. Strong's #1 BDB #3. This is followed by the feminine singular of *ʾêṁ* (אִמָּ) [pronounced *aim*], which means *mother*. Strong's #517 BDB #51. With *mother* there is a 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular suffix. So Abimelech goes to Shechem to the relatives of his mother; and says *to them and to all of the family of the house of the father of his mother...*

**“Speak, please, in [the] ears of all [the] supervisors of Shechem, ‘What [is] good to you, a ruling over you seventy men—all of [the] sons of Jerubbaal—or a ruling over you of a man one?’ And you remember that your bone and your flesh I [am].”**

Judges  
9:2

**“Speak, please, into the ears of all of the aristocracy of Shechem, ‘What is better to you: [having] seventy men rule over you (all the sons of Jerubbaal) or one man ruling over you?’ And you will recall that I [am] your bone and your flesh.”**

**“Say, if you will, to all of the aristocracy of Shechem, ‘Which is preferable: having seventy men rule over you (i.e., all of Jerubbaal’s sons) or having just one man rule over you?’ Don’t forget that I am tied to you by blood.”**

Abimelech is obviously aware of what had been offered to his father. He knew that the people of Israel had asked his father, Gideon, to rule over them as a king; and he knew that his father had refused. Therefore, Abimelech knew that the timing was right. Abimelech first goes to his entire family and anyone remotely related to his mother’s side of the family. Then they are to approach the decision-makers of the city of Shechem. This is the masculine plural construct of *baʾălêy* (בְּאֱלֵי) [pronounced *bah-uh-LAY* or *bah-guh-LAY*], which means *aristocracy, leaders, landowners, movers and shakers, supervisors, lords, baal’s, administrators, citizens, inhabitants*. *Lords* is probably the best rendering, as it is more in keeping with the etymology of the word. Strong’s treats it as a separate word; BDB and the New Englishman’s Concordance treat it as a form of Strong’s #1167 (*baal*). It is a form of the word *baal*, which certainly can refer to the god Baal, but can also refer to the influential people of a city. They were not to speak to just the rabble but to the movers and shakers of Shechem. What appears to be the case is that this is actually a reference to *landowners* or to people who both have a say in their government as well as a stake in it decisions. Therefore, we will go with the translations *supervisors* or *aristocracy*. Strong’s #1181 BDB #127.<sup>9</sup> Their power was not conferred upon them through any official appointment or ceremony; it was more of an understood thing. Their age, influence, civic involvement, etc. were all part and parcel to their unofficial power.

They are to ask *what is* and then he uses the masculine singular adjective *ṭôwḇ* (טוֹב) [pronounced *toeḇ*], which means *pleasant, pleasing, agreeable, good*. Strong’s #2896 BDB #373. We might think of this more in a comparative way and use the word *better*.

<sup>8</sup> *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 341.

<sup>9</sup> As a personal note, I began translating this word as *citizens*, which would have been acceptable with the understanding that these are the ones who would vote and make the decisions, very similar to the restrictions which were in effect early on in our own history—male landowners. However, *citizen* does not generally connote that, so I went back, luckily being able to use *find and replace* and changed *citizens* to either *supervisors* (to preserve the plural noun), or to *aristocracy*, which is the translation which I prefer, but which does not preserve the plurality of the noun.

Abimelech's case is first presented to those who would be most sympathetic to him—his own immediate family. Obviously, they would prefer to have one of their own as a ruler over Israel as opposed to anyone else. Because of the relationship between Gideon and his mistress, they are actually related to Abimelech whereas the other sons of Gideon are not related at all to Gideon's slave-mistress. Abimelech does not spell it out, but it is obvious that this family will receive preferential treatment, as they are actually related to Abimelech. Furthermore, the city of Shechem, for supporting Abimelech in this endeavor, will also receive preferential treatment.

Abimelech suggests that he would be better suited to rule over Israel, as opposed to all seventy of his half-brothers. This does not mean that his seventy brothers had aspired to any form of rulership over Israel. What Abimelech has set up is a completely false alternative. The choice is not between *whether he rules over Israel or his seventy brothers rule*; the actual reality is that there might have been a judge or two, and possibly even from his half-brothers, who would have *ruled*, so to speak, over Israel.

By the way, there are only two times in the Bible that this particular phrase is used “[I am your bone and your flesh](#)”; and in each case, the speaker would use it to manipulate the person listening. When Jacob fell in love with Rachel and went home to meet her father (they were related), Laban said the same thing to Jacob. Then Laban got seven free years of labor from Jacob, hooks him up with the wrong daughter (purposely) and then gets another seven years of free labor out of Jacob. Furthermore, in both cases, the person who was manipulated got exactly what they deserved (recall how Jacob was quite duplicitous in his own actions). This incident is recorded back in Gen. 29.

**And so spoke brothers of his mother concerning him in an ear of all of [the] supervisors of Shechem all these words; and so he [Abimelech] inclined their hearts after Abimelech for they said, “He [is] our brother.”**

Judges  
9:3

**Then his mother's family spoke all these words concerning him in the ears of the aristocracy of Shechem: and so he [Abimelech] inclined their hearts after Abimelech, for they said, “He [is] our brother.”**

**Therefore, his mother's family said these things to the aristocracy of Shechem so that they were persuaded to place their support with Abimelech. In fact, they even said, “He is our brother.”**

After the family of his mother spoke to them we have the 2<sup>nd</sup> person masculine singular, Qal imperfect of *nâṭâh* (נָטָה) [pronounced *naw-TAWH*], which means *to stretch out, to spread out, to incline, to bow, to extend*. Strong's #5186 BDB #639. We have no masculine singular nouns in this verse other than Abimelech; therefore, the subject is simply *he*. This is a reference back to Abimelech from actually the previous verse rather than to Abimelech of this verse (same Abimelech; however, Abimelech is used as an object in this verse).

Abimelech begins his grass roots platform. He goes first to his election committee, which just happens to be his mother's immediate family. Since his mother was the mistress of Gideon, she did not have any special rights or privileges and was, therefore, outside of the loop, when it came to leadership in Israel. Having one of her own as a political power was tempting to her and it was tempting to her immediate family. When these immediate relatives of his mother then spoke to the town of Shechem, they were also convinced. In this way, Shechem had some say in the government of Israel. In fact, with one of their own as the ruler of Israel, Shechem could very likely become the capital of Israel (or, of northern Israel—we do not know over how much of Israel that Abimelech ruled). This behavior is common to many groups and regions and quite well-known, even in today's world (perhaps, I should say especially in today's world). Some candidates here are voted for because they are or are not a woman, because they are or are not Black (or, Hispanic); and some people will vote for a candidate because of his regional origin as well. Israel behaved the same way and the split between the Northern and Southern kingdoms of Israel occurred partially because the Northern kingdom did not feel they were receiving adequate representation in government due to regional differences (see I Kings 12:16).

**And so they gave to him seventy [pieces of] silver from a house of Baal-berith and so hired with them [the pieces of silver] Abimelech men of worthlessness and easily-influenced [or, procured]; and so they went after him.**

Judges  
9:4

**So they gave to him seventy [pieces of] silver from the house of Baal-berith; therefore, Abimelech hired with them [the pieces of silver] worthless and easily-procured men and they went after him.**

**Therefore, they gave him campaign financing from the house of Baal-berith, a local heathen temple. Abimelech used these funds to hire mercenaries to follow after him.**

What they gave to him were seventy and then the masculine singular of keṣeph (כֶּסֶף) [pronounced *KEH-sef*], which means *silver*. We may have to infer *shekels of* or *pieces of* in this verse. Young goes with *silverings*, but loses the singular in that. Strong's #3701 BDB #494. If we are speaking of shekels, then we are only speaking of a couple of pounds of silver, which is not too much. For this reason, I would go with 70 pieces of silver. Recall that Baal-berith was a god which Israel worshipped after the death of Gideon (Judges 8:33); it is apropos that the money to finance the mafia-like take over of Abimelech should be financed from the treasury of an idol. The NIV Study Bible points out: *Ancient temples served as depositories for personal and civic funds. They payments of vows and penalties, as well as gifts, were also part of the temple treasury.*<sup>10</sup>

It is here where we have a bad mix of church and state. The church of Baal has emptied out its coffers to support their political candidate. A similar situation occurs during the time of Asa in I Kings 15:18.

Who Abimelech hires is *men* first qualified by the masculine plural of rêq (רֵק) [pronounced *rake*] means *empty, vain, worthless*. Strong's #7386 BDB #938. The second qualifier is the masculine plural, Qal active participle of pāchaz (פָּחַז) [pronounced *paw-KHAHZ*], the meaning of which is given as *to be wanton, to be reckless, to be lascivious, to be proud*. It is properly used of water, referring to either *boiling over* or to the fact that it takes the shape of the object that it is placed in. Since this verb and its cognates occur in only Gen. 49:4 Judges 9:4 Zeph. 3:4. The translators know that the reference is negative; it is just that they don't know how to render it for certain. Reuben is the key—he knew what was right and he allowed himself to be wrongly influenced by his brothers. Rather than taking the correct stance with regards to Joseph, Reuben intended to go along with his brothers and then come back later and make everything right. Therefore, we will go with the meanings *easily influenced, easily bought, easily lead, procured*. In other words, these men did not stand for any principles; they were paid and that convinced them. Strong's #6348 BDB #808. Essentially, what he hired were mercenaries or soldiers of fortune. They were soldiers of Baal, purchased with the money of a temple dedicated to Baal. Money determined their political loyalties. Now, several people hired soldiers: Jephtah did this in Judges 11:3, as well as David (I Sam. 22:1–2), Absalom (II Sam. 15:1), Adonijah (I Kings 1:5), Rezon (I Kings 11:23–24) and Jeroboam (II Chron. 13:6–7).<sup>11</sup>

Now, if you are giving this much thought, you must be asking yourself, how can these men agree to go to work for Abimelech for so little money? Actors will often forgo a large salary in order to take a percentage of the proceeds; these men were expecting to get more by way of power and money when Abimelech became king over Israel. You will also notice how Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem avoid assassinating the sons of Gideon directly; the leaders of Shechem give the money to Abimelech and he hires the hit men.

**And so he went [to] a house of his father [in] Ophrah and so he killed his brothers, sons of Jerubbaal, seventymen, upon one stone. And so was left over Jotham ben Jerubbaal the youngest for he hid himself.**

Judges  
9:5

**Then he went to the house of his father in Ophrah and killed his [half] brothers, the sons of Jerubbaal, seventy men, on one stone. And Jotham ben Jerubbaal, the youngest, remained, because he hid himself.**

<sup>10</sup> *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 341.

<sup>11</sup> This list was given by *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 341.

**Then he went to the house of his father in Ophrah and he killed the seventy sons of his father Jerubbaal, his half-brothers, all upon one stone. Only one son, Jotham ben Jerubbaal, escaped this attack.**

The second verb is the Qal imperfect of *hârag* (הָרַג) [pronounced *haw-RAHG*] means *to kill, to slay*, and, occasionally, *to execute*. Strong's #2026 BDB #246. What Abimelech did was essentially a mob-style execution. He hired 70 hit men, each of whom had a target—one of his half brothers. They went to Ophrah and took out all of his family, every single person that might be able to take on a position of leadership.

I have no clue what it means to be *against [or, upon] one stone*. The NIV Study Bible suggests that they were killed like sacrificial animals. **So Manoah took the kid with the grain offering and offered it on the rock to Jehovah, and He performed wonders while Manoah and his wife looked on. For it was when the flame went up from the altar toward heaven, that the angel of Jehovah ascended in the flame of the altar. When Manoah and his wife saw, they fell with their faces to the ground** (Judges 13:19–20). They also quote I Sam. 14:33–34 to support this. *In effect, he inaugurated his kingship by using his Israelites half brothers as his coronation sacrifices (see 2Sam 15:10, 12; 1Ki 1:5, 9; 3:4).*<sup>12</sup> Keil and Delitzsch take a stab at interpreting this, but merely say that *upon one stone* means that Abimelech's half brothers were formally executed. My educated guess is that all of these brothers were round up, all at once, and then taken to the same place and killed. In other words, it had the appearance of civility, legality and formality, even though it was the brazen act of a power-lusting heathen. In other words, the seventy men which Abimelech hired did not go out and kill the half-brothers in various places; but they collected them all, brought them to the same place, and then executed all of them there, *against one stone*. The most probably explanation is that they were lined up against a huge stone or against a stone wall or against a face of Gerizim<sup>13</sup> and then publically executed. In any case, this was not a piecemeal operation, but it was all done at once. Barnes points out that such wholesale slaughter of rivals are common in eastern countries and is a common result of polygamy (see II Kings 10:7 11:1–2 II Chron. 22:9).

I must point out a great weakness in the line of Gideon at this time. Here he has seventy sons and apparently seventy enemies would contracted to round these men up. Baal worship is rampant in that area. These sons of Gideon have taken no stand against idolatry, even though together they make up a large and influential portion of the population of Shechem (keep in mind that they probably are relatively wealthy as well). Furthermore, note that it only requires seventy men to gather them up and execute them. Edersheim writes: *If we may judge from their connivance at the worship of Baal around, from the want of any recognised outstanding individuality among them, and especially from their utter inability to make a stand even for life against an equal number of enemies, they must have sadly degenerated; probably were an enervated, luxurious, utterly feeble race.*<sup>14</sup> This is a testimony to the fact that quantity does not necessarily produce quality. Gideon produced seventy sons, one of who has great nerve but is degenerate; and one, Jotham, who we will find, has some nerve, some charisma, but does not feel as though he can do much more than stand, give a speech of condemnation, and then flee for his life. I am not putting Jotham down, here, as he is the most noble of all the sons of Gideon, insofar as we can tell. My point is that none of these seventy, save the most degenerate mutt of the bunch, Abimelech, who was able to parlay his birth of half-noble origins and his influence in the city of Shechem into the greatest position of authority in Israel since Moses or Joshua.

As you might suspect, the name of Jotham is also significant. Jotham, in the Hebrew, is *yôwthâm* (יֹתָם) [pronounced *yoh-THAWM*], which means *yah is perfect, yah is complete*. It is abbreviated for *Jehovah is perfect, Jehovah is complete*. Strong's #3147 BDB #222.

The second to the last verb is the Niphal imperfect of *yâthar* (יָתַר) [pronounced *yaw-THAHR*], which means *to remain over, to remain*. In the Niphal, it means *to be left over, to be left behind*. Strong's #3498 BDB #451. The final verb is the Niphal perfect of *châ<sup>b</sup>vâ<sup>ʾ</sup>* (חָבַא) [pronounced *khaw<sup>b</sup>-VAW*], which means *to withdraw, to hide*; in the

<sup>12</sup> *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 341.

<sup>13</sup> Keil and Delitzsch describe Mount Gerizim, which is right there, as *a steep wall of rock* which rises 800 feet above the valley of Shechem (Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 2, p. 262).

<sup>14</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *Bible History Old Testament*; ©1995 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; p. 369.

Niphal, it means *to hide oneself, to be hidden*. Strong's #2244 BDB #285. Jotham, the youngest son that escapes this slaughter, actually shows some leadership potential later on in the chapter. Unfortunately, we never hear from him again after this chapter. The reason for that is that a people often get the ruler that they deserve, and Israel got Abimelech.

**And so gathered together all supervisors of Shechem and all a house of Millo and so they went and so they [caused to be] made king Abimelech for a king near an oak of a pillar [or, military camp] which [was] in Shechem.**

Judges  
9:6

**And so all the aristocracy of Shechem were assembled and all the house of Millo; and they went and made Abimelech reign for a king near the oak of the pillar [or, military camp] which [was] in Shechem.**

**Then all of the aristocracy of Shechem, along with the house of Millo, assembled. They declared Abimelech king near the oak of the military camp in Shechem.**

The first verb is the Niphal imperfect of *ʿâçaph* (אָ צַחַף) [pronounced *aw-SAHF*], which means *transfer, transport, gather, to gather and remove, to remove*. In the Niphal, it means *to assemble, to be assembled, to gather, to be gathered*. Strong's #622 BDB #62.

In this verse, we have the curious reference to *a house of Millo* or *Beth-millo*. This apparently has been a confusion to exegetes for many years, but the explanation is simple—Millo is the father (or, chief ancestor) of the mother of Abimelech. One would expect the city of Shechem, which stood behind Abimelech, to stand tall with those who convinced them, which would reasonably be the house of mother of Abimelech, or the house of Millo.<sup>15</sup>

After they went, we have the Hiphil imperfect of *mâlak*<sup>e</sup> (מָלַךְ) [pronounced *maw-LAHK<sup>e</sup>*], which means *to reign, to become king or queen*. In the Hiphil, it means *to cause to become king (or queen), to cause to rule over*. Strong's #4427 BDB #573. This is a different verb than we saw back in Judges 8:22–23. There we have the Qal imperative and Qal imperfect of *mâshal* (שָׁלַט) [pronounced *maw-SHAHL*], which means *to rule, to have dominion, to reign*. Strong's #4910 (see #4911) BDB #605. The KJV differentiates between these two by generally rendering the former as *to reign* and the latter as *to rule*. The verb found in conjunction with Abimelech here is the most often used of the two verbs in the Old Testament. Other than that, the verb found here is more often found in the Hiphil than *mâshal*, which is only found in the Hiphil three times. Furthermore, *mâshal* is found more often as a participle, and is in that way used as a noun. *Mâlak<sup>e</sup>* is the verb most often associated with the kings of Israel.

Abimelech is the direct object and he is followed by the lamed preposition and the masculine singular noun *melek<sup>e</sup>* (מֶלֶךְ) [pronounced *MEH-lek*], which means *king, prince*. Strong's #4428 BDB #572. The likely scenario is that he became king over a limited portion of Israel that did not include Judah or Simeon (and possibly some of the other tribes, like those east of the Jordan). So far, this gives us: **And so gathered together all supervisors of Shechem and all a house of Millo and so they went and so they [caused to be] made king Abimelech for a king...**

now we need to ask: was Abimelech really a king or just a city-ruler? First of all, there are three verbs which are translated *to reign, to rule, to have dominion over*; and all three of these verbs are used in conjunction with Abimelech. We find *mâshal* in Judges 9:2 (as well as Judges 8:22–23); *mâlakê* is found in Judges 9:6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18; and *sûwr* (or, *sârar*) is found in Judges 9:22. Abimelech first got the support of his family to rally support in Shechem in order to represent them as ruler. However, he did not simply rule in Shechem, as he would

<sup>15</sup> There is another Millo altogether different, which is found near Jerusalem which Solomon reconstructed (see I Kings 9:15, 24 11:27). The city already existed during the time of David (II Sam. 5:9 I Chron. 11:8). It is uncertain which location is referred to in II Kings 12:20 (as the house of Millo would take on a place meaning as well as the reference to a family). The NIV Study Bible offers a completely different take on this, claiming that *Millo* is derived from the Hebrew word *to fill*, and they suggest that this refers to the fill dirt upon which platforms and walls were built. They also suggest that this could be identical to the stronghold mentioned later on in v. 46. See *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 341. Barnes suggests that Beth Millo is a fortified place, also possibly the same as the stronghold in v. 46. Keil and Delitzsch suggest that it is a rampart of two walls, with rubbish piled between (Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 2, p. 262).

have no reason for the men of Shechem to give him money to hire the mercenaries if he were only going to rule over them. He left Shechem and went to the city of Ophrah and killed all of Gideon's sons, his half-brothers. He will put his own man over Shechem as he is obviously ruling from some place else (Judges 9:30). Later, Abimelech will travel to Thebez to quash a rebellion (Judges 9:50). Finally, Abimelech is said to rule over Israel for three years (Judges 9:22) whereas Ebed is said to be the ruler of the city of Shechem in Judges 9:30. For these reasons, Abimelech is more than just a city ruler in the tradition of the Canaanite kings. By the testimony of the Bible itself, he is a ruler of Israel.

After *king*, we have the preposition ʿîm (עִם) [pronounced *geem*], which is generally rendered *with*. It also can be used for nearness and vicinity, and be rendered *at, by, near*. Strong's #5973 BDB #767. This is followed by the feminine singular construct of ʿêlôwn (עֵלֹוֹן) [pronounced *AY-loan*], which means *oak, terebinth, tall tree, a strong and hardy tree*. Strong's #436 BDB #18. This is the *tall oak of* and then we have a problem: the next word is either the Hophal participle of nâtsaʰv (נָצַח) [pronounced *naw-TSAH<sup>PV</sup>*], which means *to stand up, to set something upright, to erect*. In the Hophal, it means *to be placed, to be set, to be planted, to be fixed, to be settled*. Strong's #5324 BDB #662. However, rather than this be the Hophal participle of this verb, it could be the masculine noun mûtstsâʰv (מוֹטְסָאֵב) [pronounced *moots-TSAW<sup>BV</sup>*], which means *a garrison, a station (of soldiers)*; it is taken from the verb. Strong's #4674 BDB #663. This is why we have the translations *camp* (Young), *pillar* (NASB, NIV, NRSV, Owen, Rotherham), *propped up* (REB), *memorial pillar* (NAB), and *cultic stone* (NJB).<sup>16</sup> It makes sense for Abimelech to set up his rule in the shadow of a pagan pillar as well as in the shadow of a military camp.

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## The Fable-Parable of Jotham, the Only Surviving Son of Gideon

It may help us to further subdivide this section of Judges 9:

- V. 7 **Jotham is introduced**
- Vv. 8–15 **Jotham speaks a fable-parable to the people of Shechem**
- Vv. 16–20 **Jotham explains his parable to the people of Shechem**
- V. 21 **Jotham escapes**

**And so they were made known to Jotham; and so he went and so he stood at a top of Mount Gerizim and so he lifted up his voice and so he called out and so he said to them, “Listen unto me, men of Shechem, and will listen to you [all] God:**

Judges  
9:7

**And so [these things] were made known to Jotham, so he went and stood on top of Mount Gerizim and lifted up his voice and called out and said to them, “Listen to me, men of Shechem, and God will listen to you all:**

**when Jotham heard that Israel was about to make Abimelech king, he stood at the top of Mount Gerizim and shouted to the crowd which had gathered, “Listen to me, men of Shechem and listen to God.”**

Recall that Jotham is the one remaining son of Gideon that Abimelech did not assassinate. We have a verse filled with *wâw* consecutives, which draws our attention to the rapidity of the action. Many men who had just had 69 or 70 of his brothers killed might be making a dash for the next state, but Jotham is a rather nervy young man. The first verb is the Hiphil imperfect of nâgad (נָגַד) [pronounced *naw-GAHD*], which means *to make conspicuous, to make known, to expound, to declare, to inform, to make it pitifully obvious that*. Strong's #5046 BDB #616. Jotham stands on a hill and calls out to the men of Shechem. What will follow is one of the very few parables of the Old Testament.

<sup>16</sup> The Septuagint has *the oak of Sedition* (this is my English rendering of it); they mention that this is a place where there was a double translation (in the Septuagint itself); we have the choice of *to find* or *stationary* in the Septuagint.

Mount Gerizim was an appropriate place for him to speak from. First of all, apparently the acoustics were good there for a crowd. When Israel entered into the land, they were to hike on over to Mount Gerizim and to Mount Ebal and the blessings would be read from Mount Gerizim and the cursings would be read from Mount Ebal (Deut. 11:29–30 27:12–28:68 Joshua 8:33–34). This is very likely where Jesus spoke to the woman of Samaria (John 4:7–38; see v. 20). Finally, Mount Gerizim was the more likely place to speak from, as Shechem was built at the foot of Mount Gerizim.

What we will find in the subsequent verses is a parable, one of the very few in the Old Testament. In fact, this is actually a fable/parable. A fable is when inanimate objects (e.g., trees) or animate objects (like animals) talk and act as people do. Fables are apparently was quite common in the ancient world but found only two times in the Bible (II Kings 14:9–10 is the other occurrence). A parable is a situation which involves people doing and saying things that people normally would. It is a fictional story which could have happened.

The parables of the Old Testament are found in II Sam. 12:1–4 14:5–11 I Kings 20:39–40. The most well-known of these parables is the one found in II Sam. 12:1–4 where King David had not only had an adulterous affair with Bathsheba, but she was bearing his child and David saw to it that her husband was killed in battle. Nathan, the prophet during the time of David, told David about a rich man who had many flocks and herds and a poor man who had just one ewe lamb. Nathan describes the relationship between the poor man and his lamb as a warm and loving one, much like a person who is unmarried and has a dog or a cat. The rich man decided that he wanted a meal, so, rather than take from his own flocks and herd, he takes the ewe of the poor man and slaughters it and prepares it for a meal. Of course, David is outraged at the arrogance and greed of the rich man, and Nathan then tells David, **“Thou are the man!”** (II Sam. 12:7b).

The primary reason a parable is used to is set up some common ground of agreement and understanding and then to proceed to an area of disagreement or to a point which is being made. I use this in mathematics teaching all of the time. When I perceive that a student is confused about a particular topic or just doubts the rules and regulations as applied to a particular topic, I take them back to something which is analogous and remind them how it was done there; and, because they understand that, they better understand the new topic. For instance, when adding rational expressions, the procedure might seem long (a rational expression is simply a fraction with variables). When I teach how to add rational expressions, I first go back to the concept of adding simple fractions and run through the procedure there. Once I have the students nodding their heads up and down, then we move on to rational expressions, which operate under the same rules. Nathan’s speaking to David takes David to a situation where it is obvious what is right and what is wrong. Nathan does not immediately attack King David—he takes David to some neutral ground, allows David to make the judgment call, and then point out to David that he has done exactly what the rich man did in the parable—he stole the one and only ewe lamb that the poor man had. David even placed judgment on this man: **“As Jehovah lives, surely the man who has done this deserves to die. He must make restitution for the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and because he had no compassion.”** You see the Nathan got just the response that he expected from David. Had he gone to David and simply told him that he had done wrong, David may or may not have disagreed. However, here, David not only realizes what a great wrong the man of the parable (and therefore, he himself as well) had done, but David himself sets the standard for the judgment which was to be imposed upon the man and, therefore, upon himself. Jotham will use a parable for two reasons—first, he has a point of view that will be readily understood and perhaps even accepted when first given in parable form. However, he has a more important reason for using a parable, which will be divulged below.

### [Return to sub-outline]

**“A going out went forth the trees to anoint over them a king; and so they said to the olive tree, ‘Reign over us.’**

Judges  
9:8

**“A going out: the trees went out to anoint a king over them; and they said to the olive tree, ‘Reign over us.’**

**The going out: The trees went out to anoint a king over them. First they said to the olive tree, ‘Reign over us.’**

This verse begins with the Qal infinitive absolute of *hâlak*<sup>e</sup> (הָלַךְ) [pronounced *haw-LAHK<sup>e</sup>*], which means *to go, to come, to depart, to walk*. Strong's #1980 (and #3212) BDB #229. The infinitive absolute presents a verb in the active voice used as a verbal noun, generally used as a complement of affirmation. It is immediately followed by the 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine plural, Qal perfect of the same verb. Together, they are various translated as: *once went forth* (Owen); *went their way* (Rotherham); *actually went* (Rotherham footnote: *verb emphatic by re-duplication*); *have diligently gone* (Young); *went forth* (NASB); *set out* (REB). I wonder if it could behave more like a title here, rather than an emphatic verb. It does describe what the trees do for the entirety of this parable.

Interestingly enough, Jotham will communicate to them via a parable. My thinking here is that parables require a person to think before they can respond to what is being said. To some really dense people, they may not get it for a few hours. It appears to soothe the actions of a mob because not every single person gets it at the same time, so they are less likely to act in unison. In other words, this sort of approach would help to defuse a mob, if the mob will listen in the first place. So far, the analogy to the listener will seem to be quite obvious: the trees are the people of Shechem and the olive tree is Abimelech. Don't misunderstand me, this is not the correct interpretation, but it is what the listener would have thought to begin with. Therefore, what they hear does not disturb them. A few might realize that the olive tree is actually Gideon (Judges 8:22–23). In any case, they listen to Jotham and hear him out. So far, the parable seems harmless enough.

**“And so said to them the olive tree, ‘Will I leave [or, forsake] my fatness which [is] in me are honored [by] gods and men [or, God and men] and I will go to sway over the trees?’**

Judges  
9:9

**“Then the olive tree said to them, ‘Will I forsake my oil, which [is] in me—[which] gods and men [or, God and men] honor—and will I go to sway over the [other] trees?’**

**“But the olive tree answered them, ‘Is it worth it for me to forsake the oil in me, which oil is honored by both God and men, and rule over the other trees?’**

Let's first see what some others have done with this verse:

<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, which in me gods and men do honour, —and go to wave to and fro over the trees?
NASB	“But the olive tree said to them, ‘Shall I leave my fatness with which [lit., which by me] God and men are honored, and go to wave over the trees?’
REB	But the olive tree answered: “What, leave my rich oil by which gods and men are honoured, to go and hold sway over the trees?”
TEV	The olive tree answered, ‘In order to govern you, I would have to stop producing my oil, which is used to honor gods and men.’
<i>Young's Lit. Translation</i>	And the olive saith to them, Have I ceased from my fatness, by which they honour gods and men, that I have gone to stagger over the trees?

As you can perceive, this will first be a difficult verse to properly translate; and then it might even be more difficult to interpret. The first word in the olive tree's dissertation is the interrogative particle, which acts as an upside down question mark in Spanish. The verb is the Qal perfect of *châdal* (חָדַל) [pronounced *khaw-DAHL*], which means *to leave off, to cease, to desist, to forsake, to leave*. Strong's #2308 BDB #292. The olive tree, which is Abimelech, says, “Will I forsake...” and then we have the thing which he will forsake, the masculine singular noun *deshen* (דֶּשֶׁן) [pronounced *DEH-shen*], which means *fatness, fat ashes, fertility, prosperity, abundance*; in this context, *oil* would be a reasonable rendering. Strong's #1880 BDB #206.

Then we have the relative pronoun, the *bêyth* preposition and the 1<sup>st</sup> person suffix, which is, literally, *which in me*. This is followed by the 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine plural, Piel imperfect of *kâ<sup>v</sup>vêd* (כָּבַד) [pronounced *kaw(b)-VADE*], which means *to honor, to glorify, to be heavy, weighty, burdensome*. In the Piel, it means *to honor, to do honor to*. Strong's #3513 BDB #457. The subject is *gods and men*. This gives us: **And so the olive tree said to them, “Will I forsake my oil which is in me, honored [by] gods and men,...** The oil of the olive tree was used in both the grain offerings (Lev. 2:1–16) and in the holy anointings (Ex. 30:24–25).

Then we have the wâw conjunction and the Qal perfect of *to go* followed by the Qal infinitive construct (with a lamed preposition) of nûwâ (נוּעַ) [pronounced *NOO-ahg*], which means *to sway, to quiver, to wave, to tremble, to shake, to totter*. Strong's #5128 BDB #631. This tree, although regarded for its oil by which he honors both men and the gods, is called upon to stand taller than the other trees and therefore to wave or shake over them. The taller the tree, the greater the wave.

Now, I must admit to, at first, at this exact point, being lost in this particular focus of Jotham's story. I am certain that his half-brother also has a quizzical look in his face, if he is now listening. However, the point which is being made is that Gideon, when asked to rule over Israel, really had it made already. He had no need to rule over Israel as his opinion was valued and he himself was honored for his past deeds. He had been in public service already, for all intents and purposes, and so he retired.

When this second tree is mentioned, all who are listening are supposed to think the first tree must be Gideon and the second tree is therefore Abimelech. However, a third tree will be mentioned below.

**“And so said the trees to the fig tree, ‘Come, you, and reign over us.’** Judges 9:10 **“Then the trees said to the fig tree, ‘You, come, and reign over us.’**

**“Then the other trees went to the fig tree and said, ‘You there—come and rule over us.’**

The olive tree refused, so the trees go to a fig tree and demand that it rule over them. Those listening, including Abimelech, would decide that the olive tree is Gideon and the fig tree here is Abimelech. However, as the fable/parable goes on, it will become clear that that is not the correct interpretation.<sup>17</sup> The real meaning was that Israel desired to have a king rule over her and she was desperate for such a ruler. First we have the logical choices and then we will have the most illogical choice. The three flora mentioned—the olive tree, the fig tree and the grape vine—were quite important to the middle east. The fig tree, like the oak tree, had no part in the sacrifices of the Law.

With this mentioned of the third tree, the crowd should become nonplused. Those who stay with it, assume that this third tree must be Abimelech.

**“And so said to them the fig tree, ‘Will I forsake my sweetness and my fruit the good and go to sway over the trees?’** Judges 9:11 **And so the fig tree said to them, ‘Will I forsake my sweetness and my good fruit and go to sway over the trees?’**

**“But the fig tree said to them, ‘Why should I forsake my sweetness and my produce so that I can rule over the other trees.’**

The fig tree asks if it should forsake the masculine singular noun môtêq (מֹתֵק) [pronounced *MOH-thek*], which means *sweetness* and is found only here in Scripture (although it has 3 cognates). Strong's #4987 BDB #608. The other thing the fig tree would have to forsake is the feminine singular of t<sup>e</sup>nûwâvâh (תְּנוּבָה) [pronounced *t'noo-VAW*], which means *fruit, produce*. Strong's #8570 BDB #626. This is qualified by the personal pronominal suffix and the adjective tōw<sup>b</sup>v (טוֹב) [pronounced *toe<sup>b</sup>v*], which means *pleasant, pleasing, agreeable, good*. Strong's #2896 BDB #373. This parable suggests that Gideon was not the only person that Israel asked to reign over them. It is likely that several groups of people approached several of his sons in the past, suggesting that they rule over Israel. However, this is only an inference that we can get from the fable at hand; we have no other support for this notion.

<sup>17</sup> In fact, according to Keil and Delitzsch, the Rabbis of old interpret these two trees and grape vine as being Othniel, Deborah and then Gideon, but this is not the correct interpretation.

**“And so said the trees to the vine, ‘Come, you, reign over us.’**

Judges  
9:12

**“Then the trees said to the vine ‘You, come, and reign over us.’**

**“So then the trees said to the vine, ‘You come and rule over us.’**

Now the trees are getting desperate; they are no longer going to trees, but they are going to mere vines, and asking that the vines reign over them. Now that Jotham is a bit into his story, all of the listeners realize that the first big oak tree was clearly not a reference to Abimelech but rather to Gideon. You have to recall that in real time, people don't always absorb everything correctly.

**“And so said to them the vine, ‘Will I forsake my wine—the cheering [of] gods and men [or, God and man]—and go to sway over the trees?’**

Judges  
9:13

**“And so the vine said to them, “Will I forsake my wine—the cheering [of] God and men—and go to sway over the trees?’**

**“But the vine said to them, ‘Should I forsake my wine, which cheers both men and God, to go rule over the trees?’**

A point of interpretation here: we have here the word *ʿēlōhîym* (אֱלֹהִים) [pronounced *el-o-HEEM*], which can refer both to the Godhead or to foreign gods. Context generally helps us to distinguish. However, this is one of the few places where it is difficult to tell whether Jotham is referring to the Godhead or whether he is referring to the heathen gods. Strong's #430 BDB #43. Actually, such a distinction may be unnecessary. Jotham can allow the listener here to interpret it either way, and still, his point is made. In fact, it may be a part of his quick-thinking mind to insert this to further slow down those listening to him. Some of them might be thinking, right at this moment, *now did he mean God or gods?*

Now, here, even the grape vine turns them down. This is not to dis the grape vine, as the wine of the grape is used in the drink offerings (Lev. 30:24–25 Num. 15:10) and it is associated with the happiness of man as well (Psalm 104:15). It was also thought, in the ancient world, that the gods also partook of wine (they acted as bigger than life alter egos of man; therefore, they drank a lot of wine and chased women).

Anyway, the deal is that you will notice this steady progression downward from the majestic oak to the olive tree, to the fig tree and now the grape bush. I recall remarking to a friend while standing in her front yard observing a small oak (it was maybe 20 feet tall). I told her how this oak would be here long after we were both gone and probably long after her house was gone as well. The people have gone from asking this incredible oak to rule over them (Gideon) to asking a grape vine to rule over them. Even though the crowd, and possibly Abimelech, realize that the first great oak was not Abimelech, they are now caught up in the story, to get the point that Jotham is making.

**“And so said all of the trees unto the thornbush, ‘Come you; reign over us.’**

Judges  
9:14

**“And so all the trees said unto the thornbush, ‘You—come; reign over us.’**

**“Finally, all of the trees said to the thornbush, ‘You come and reign over us.’**

Here is where we realize that Jotham is bringing this parable to a close. It may not be obvious in the English, but the Hebrew has huge flags denoting this. No longer is it just *the trees* but it is now *all the trees*; and no longer do they speak *to* (lâmed) some king candidate, but they speak *unto* (ʿel) him. And they speak not to some great tree but to some bramble; some weed with stickers or thorns; a thornbush. The NIV Study Bible notes: *Probably the well-known buckthorn, a scraggly bush common in the hills of Palestine and a constant menace to farming. It produced nothing of value and was an apt figure for Abimelech.*<sup>18</sup> Edersheim said of this thornbush that it could

<sup>18</sup> *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 341.

yield no fruit, it provided no shade and that it would wound all those who took a hold of it.<sup>19</sup> Barnes called it the Rhamnus Paliurus of Linnæus, also called Christ's Thorn, which was a shrub with sharp thorns. *The application is obvious. The noble Gideon and his worthy sons had declined the proffered kingdom. The vile, base-born Abimelech had accepted it, and his act would turn out to the mutual ruin of himself and his subjects.*<sup>20</sup>

**“And so said the bramble unto the trees, ‘If in truth you are anointing me for a king over you, come, take refuge in my shadow.’ And, if not, will come out a fire from the bramble and devour cedars of the Lebanon.**

Judges  
9:15

**“So the bramble said to the trees, ‘If in truth you are anointing me as a king over you, then come and take refuge in my shadow.’ If not, then a fire will come out from the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon.**

**“So the thorn bush said to the tree, ‘If you are really anointing me as your king, then come and take refuge in my shadow.’ If not, then a fire will begin in this bramble and eventually burn down even the cedars of Lebanon.**

It is difficult to determine where to end the quote of the bramble bush here. The first line has the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person used and the second line is all done in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person. However, since this is a fable, and therefore might even border on the poetic, the NKJV, the NIV and with the NASB both extend the bramble bush's quote at the end of this verse rather than in the middle. They probably did that because Jotham will interpret this all in the next five verses, which means that the end of v. 15 is not an interpretation, but the end of the parable. However, I would place it outside of the quote, to both signify what the bramble bush would have said (except in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person), yet also how the fable/parable ends. In other words, the jumping into the 3<sup>rd</sup> person in the middle of a quote linguistically tells us that this is the end of the fable. A king or a president often speaks of his office in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person, which would be natural for this bush when being named king. This would give a good reason to place the quotation end at the end of this verse. The second sentence (or, phrase) also continues the thought of the first. Still, I placed my inner quotation marks around just the first sentence, and allowed the second one to speak of the natural results and to end the story.<sup>21</sup>

What the bramble says begins with the hypothetical particle, the bêyth preposition and the feminine singular noun ʿēmeth (אֵמֶת) [pronounced *EH-meth*], which means *firmness, faithfulness, truth, certainty, stability, perpetuity, fidelity, reliable, stable, dependable*. Strong's #571 BDB #54.

The bramble uses the Qal imperative of châçâh (חָצֵחַ) [pronounced *khaw-SAW*] and it means *to take refuge*, and hence *to trust [in]*. Strong's #2620 BDB #340. What they are to take refuge in is the masculine singular of tsêl (צֶל) [pronounced *tzale*], which means *shadow*. Strong's #6738 (and #6751).

*Taking refuge in the shade of something* is often used when referring to placing oneself under the protective care of another's authority. There is obviously a trade-off—freedom is traded for authority; however, ideally speaking, the authority protects the freedom of the ones that it is an authority over. This may or may not occur. However, the wording is repeated several times throughout Scripture. In Isa. 30:2, God is speaking to the people of Israel and He says: **“Who will proceed down to Egypt without consulting Me? Who takes refuge in the safety of Pharaoh, to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt?”** See also Dan. 4:12 and Hosea 14:7.

Right now, your mind should be thinking, *the shadow [or shade] of a bramble?* On the next bitterly hot day, take a walk over to the bramble bushes for a little shade. The alternative to this (lack of) shade is fire. The bramble bush acts as kindling; it catches on fire immediately and such a fire will take out a great forest of cedars in Lebanon. Now, personally, I wanted to give the identity of the *cedars of Lebanon* to the great men outside of Shechem. However, they will be interpreted by Jotham, the speaker, as referring to the men aristocracy of Shechem in v. 20.

<sup>19</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *Bible History Old Testament*; ©1995 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; p. 370.

<sup>20</sup> *Barnes' Notes, Volume 2*, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 440.

<sup>21</sup> insofar as I know, I am the only person who does this. It should not affect the interpretation of the passage.

Abimelech has offered two choices to the people of Israel—they can place themselves under his rule, which is akin to using a bramble bush for shade (and, in the analogy given, it is similar to a group of trees taking shade under a bramble bush); or, Abimelech will ignite a fire of revolution (which, to some degree, he already has). To explain that last sentence, whether placed within the quotation marks of the bramble bush's or not, is simple: you don't get to place yourself under a particular king and then change your mind a few months (or, years) later. The end result will naturally be revolution. In the ancient world, a king did not step up to the plate, turn out to be unpopular, and then simply just step down. You can't un-ring a bell and you cannot remove a king apart from revolution. This is the purpose at the beginning of this sentence where we have the little words *in truth*. If the movers and shakers of Shechem are stupid enough to place themselves under the authority of Abimelech, then they have to live with that choice. They don't get to simply try him out as a king. Once he is king, then they must bow to his authority completely. Anything else foments revolution, and a fire will spread from the bramble bush even to take out the cedars of Lebanon. We have similar imagery used in Num. 21:28 Ezek. 19:14. Jotham interprets this himself in v. 20: **[“But, if not, then let a fire come out from Abimelech and consume 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 consume Abimelech.”](#)**

The imagery which is found here is marvelous. All it takes is a small fire to start by the aid of the bramble bush, and, unchecked, such a fire can spread over thousands and even millions of acres, taking out even the most majestic of the trees, the cedars of Lebanon. In fact, it is frightening how something so small could cause such devastating damage. If the men of Shechem so chose to place Abimelech over them, and then choose to change their mind, the small spark of a fire would ignite a revolution throughout all of Israel. Jotham is urging those listening to him to not make such a choice without completely considering the consequences. **[\[Return to sub-outline\]](#)**

**[“And now if in truth and in integrity you have acted \[lit., have done\] and so you \[all\] made king Abimelech and if good \[or, upright\] you \[all\] have done with Jerubbaal and with his house and so if as a \[proper\] recompense of his hand you have done to him—](#)**

Judges  
9:16

**[“Thus, if you have acted with truth and with integrity and made Abimelech king; and if a good \[or upright\] \[thing\] you have acted with Jerubbaal and with his house and if you have done a proper recompense of his hand to him—](#)**

**[‘Now, therefore, if you have acted with truth and integrity when you made Abimelech king; and if you have acted uprightly with the Jerubbaal and his house; and if you have properly recompensed him for his service to you—](#)**

in the next few verses, Jotham will interpret his fable to the listeners of Shechem. Now, most people get the general gist of it, and we, certainly after all of this exegesis, have a fairly clear understanding of what Jotham has said. So, you may wonder, *why beat a dead horse*. *Why not just leave them with the fable/parable and be gone?* We have spent much more time exegeting this story than the fable itself was given. Jotham spoke this parable in a minute or two. Then it was done. At first, the parable threw the listeners off, who thought they understood, but really did not. Then it was easy to get lost in assigning real persons' names to the various flora. Jotham, having gotten their attention and their agreement that the choices made by these trees were stupid, now explains the problems of their choice of Abimelech for king over Israel.

Okay, this verse is difficult. Jotham is drawing a conclusion and it isn't stated in simple terms. The gist of what he has to say will be easy to grasp; in fact, I pretty much explained it in the previous verse. However, the proper rendering of this verse is not easy. Therefore, I have listed below what others have done:

*The Emphasized Bible*

**[Now therefore, if in truth and sincerity ye have acted, in making Abimelech king,—and if ye have dealt well with Jerubbaal and with his house, and if according to the deserving of his hands ye have done unto him;...](#)**

NASB

**[“Now therefore, if you have dealt in truth and integrity \[or, sincerity\] in making Abimelech king, and if you have dealt will with Jerubbaal and his house, and have \[lit., if you have\] dealt with him as \[lit., according to the dealing of his hands\] he deserved—...](#)**

NIV	“Now if you have acted honorably and in good faith when you made Abimelech king, and if you have been fair to Jerub-Baal and his family, and if you have treated him as he deserves—...
Young's Lit. Translation	'And, now, if in truth and in sincerity ye have acted, when ye make Abimelech king; and if ye have done good with Jerubbaal, and with his house; and if according to the deed of his hands ye have done to him—...

First thing that you notice is that this verse will be continued. In fact, Jotham's thought will be carried all the way through v. 16 through some long verses. This makes me think that Jotham is an excellent candidate for authorship of this chapter.

Now, there are a whole lot of *if's* in this verse. Jotham, the son of Gideon, is speaking to a large group of people who are looking to make Abimelech king over them. Jotham questions this appointment. Next thing that you notice is that we are going into a conclusion. We have the *wâw* conjunction and the adverb *ʿattâh* (הַתָּאֵחַ) [pronounced *gaht-TAWH*], which is an adverb of time meaning *now*. Literally, it is *and now*. Sometimes, the idea of time is lost when it is used as a word of incitement, especially when followed by an imperative; ditto for interrogative sentences; it can describe a present state with the *wâw* conjunction and be translated *and so, thus, things being so, therefore*. Strong's #6258 BDB #773.

Then we have the hypothetical particle (found three times in this verse), which, keep in mind, is the same as an interrogative particle. The only reason that we know that this is an hypothetical particle rather than an interrogative particle, is that in v. 20, we have the hypothetical particle and the negative, which means that we have arrived at the alternative of the first groups of *if's*. Next we have the phrase *in truth* and then we have the masculine singular adjective, used as a noun *tâmîym* (תָּמִים) [pronounced *taw-MEEM*] means *complete, whole, entire*. This adjective is used most often when referring to a sacrificial animal being *without blemish* (Ex. 12:5 29:1 Lev. 1:3, 10 3:1, 9 4:3). As a noun, it means *integrity*. Strong's #8549 BDB #1071. The preceding *bêyth* can be rendered *in* or *with*.

Then we have the 2<sup>nd</sup> person masculine plural, Qal perfect of a verb which is found also three times in this verse: *ʿâsâh* (הַשָּׂאָה) [pronounced *gaw-SAWH*] which means *to do, to make, to construct, to fashion, to form, to prepare*. *ʿÂsâh* is one of the problem verbs noted by Young in his preface, having been translated over 70 different ways in the KJV; however, even Young has a problem being consistent here as it occurs first without an object. The NASB was the most consistent in this verse, rendering it *have dealt* all three times. Young renders it *have acted* and *have done* (twice). The NIV renders this as *have acted, have been fair, have treated*. Owen went with *acted, have dealt* and *have done*. Strong's #6213 BDB #793. The repetition of the verb gives great power to what Jotham is saying. His first question to the crowd is did they act in honor and integrity when they made Abimelech king. These two verbs are tied together with a *wâw* consecutive and *made king* is in the Hiphil imperfect. For the idea of *when you made Abimelech king* we would normally have an infinitive construct preceded by a *bêyth*. Now, although the four translations cited all contain more of a temporal connection between the two verbs, the best that I can justify that translation with is a *wâw* consecutive *identifies an event as going on at roughly the same time as a previous event*.<sup>22</sup> Obviously, that is not quite the same thing, although I agree in spirit with what the other translators have done. It is not unreasonable to suppose that Jotham was rather nervous in this presentation, as his life was in jeopardy, and making a public speech did not improve the situation. The first clause therefore reads, literally: *And now if in truth and in integrity you have acted [lit., have done] and so you [all] made king Abimelech...*

The next concern that Jotham brings up is the treatment of this crowd of Gideon's family (or, house). Keep in mind that by ratifying Abimelech as their king, they are then condoning his actions, which included a mass assassination of Gideon's sons. Here we have the *wâw* conjunction and the hypothetical particle and the feminine singular noun *ṭôw<sup>h</sup>vâh* (טוֹבָה) [pronounced *TOWB-vaw*], which means *welfare, benefit, good, good things*. Strong's does not differentiate between the masculine and feminine forms of this word; and, although BDB does, it does not really give us a substantially different definition. Further differentiation would be difficult, as the *New Englishman's Hebrew Concordance* groups these words together. Strong's #2896 BDB #375. At this point, one would have expected instead an adverb to go with the second time *ʿâsâh* is found (2<sup>nd</sup> person, masculine plural). This is followed by

<sup>22</sup> J.C.L. Gibson, *Davidson's Introductory Hebrew Grammar~Syntax*; 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, © T&T Clark Ltd., 1994, p. 103.

with *Jerubbaal and his house*. The second clause, also rather ragged in the Hebrew, is: *...and if good [or, upright] you have done with Jerubbaal and his house...*

At this point, we should not expect that Jotham's Hebrew is going to be perfect. My thinking is not that he is uneducated, but that he is simply extremely nervous. Then we have, literally, *and if as* and the masculine construct of  $g^{\circ}m\acute{u}wl$  (לגמול) [pronounced *g<sup>o</sup>-MOOL*], and it means [*proper*] *recompense, dealing, benefit*. Strong's #1576 BDB #168. The entire last phrase reads: *and if a [proper] recompense of his hand you [all] have done to him*.

Part of the reason that this is difficult to translate, is the sentence structure here and what follows. We have a whole series of *if's* in this verse which beg for a *then*; and this *then* is not forthcoming for several verses. Jotham, who apparently is a rather complex and erudite individual, with break for two verses to tell exactly who his father was and what he did. Now we know this, because we just studied Judges 6–8. However, the people to whom he is speaking do not really know about Gideon and what he did, so this is appropriately placed. Jotham will explore the *if's* and then give a little history, so that the *then* will have the maximum impact and that the choice made by this people will be a choice made with a full understanding of the options and the results of their choice. To sum up: Jotham will launch into a set of *if's* in this verse, which will not see their apodosis for several verses. In vv. 16–18, he will both give a brief history of what his father Gideon did and make the treachery of the men of Shechem clear. Then, he will resume these *if's* in v. 19, and give one possible *then* in that verse. Finally, in v. 20, he will give the expected results of the choice of the men of Shechem—the final *then*.

Gideon was a national hero and for good reason. He not only delivered the Israelites, but he completely decimated their enemies. His remaining son asks these men if they have dealt properly with the memory of Gideon and with his house. After all, they have just assassinated all of his children, save one and they have installed as king over them his bastard son who has behaved like a mafia thug. Then Jotham reminds the people of what Gideon did on their behalf. The next two verses are inserted, and Jotham will pick up his *if...then* statement later in vv. 19 and 20.

**“who fought—my father—concerning you and so threw his soul in front of and so rescued you from a hand of Midian;**

Judges  
9:17

**“who fought—my father—for you and threw his soul in front of and so rescued you from the hand of Midian;**

**“who, by the way, placed himself in danger when he rescued you from the hand of Midian;**

Jotham begins by saying *who fought* and then adds that this is his father, so there is no confusion. Then we have the preposition  $\acute{a}l$  (לַ) [pronounced *ahl* ], which means *upon, against, above, by, beside, concerning, in regards to*. This is perhaps one of the most versatile prepositions in the Hebrew language. Strong's #5920, #5921 BDB #752. The people that Jotham is speaking to is the next generation; they are the sons and the grandsons of the Israelites who were under the oppression of the Midianites. They did not fully appreciate what was done on their behalf. What Gideon did directly impacted the lives of his contemporaries; and indirectly affected the lives of all Israel that was to follow. Therefore, we have  $\acute{a}l$  rather than  $l^{\circ}ma\acute{c}an$ .

The second verb is the Hiphil imperfect of  $sh\acute{a}lak^{\circ}$  (שָׁלַח) [pronounced *shaw-LAHK<sup>o</sup>*], which means *to throw, to cast, to fling*. It is found only in the Hiphil and the Hophal and, surprisingly enough, is consistently rendered in the KJV. Strong's #7993 BDB #1020. What Gideon threw was the feminine singular noun  $nephesh$  (נֶפֶשׁ) [pronounced *NEH-fesh*], which *soul, life, living being, desire*. Strong's #5315 BDB #659. This is followed by the preposition  $m\acute{in}$  and the neged ( $\tau\lambda\grave{a}$ ) [pronounced *NEH-ged*], which means *what is conspicuous* when it is a substantive and, as a preposition, *in front of, in the sight of, opposite to*. With  $m\acute{in}$ , this means *in front of, from before*. Strong's #5048 BDB #617.

The final verb is the Hiphil imperfect of ( $\lambda\grave{a}$ ) [pronounced *naw-TSAHL*], which means, in the Hiphil, *to snatch away, to deliver, to rescue, to snatch out of danger, to preserve*. Strong's #5337 BDB #664.

**“And you [even] you have risen up against a house of my father the day and so you have killed his sons, seventy men on stone one, and so you have made king Abimelech, son of his maidservant over supervisors of Shechem because your brother [is] he—**

Judges  
9:18

**“And you, even you, have risen up against the house of my father this day and you have killed his sons, seventy men on one stone. Then you made Abimelech, son of his maidservant, king over the aristocracy of Shechem because he [is] your brother—**

**“Yet you have actually stood up against the house of my father this day and you have killed all of his sons—seventy men on one stone; and you then made Abimelech, the son of his maid, the king over you simply because he is your relative—**

This verse won't be too difficult to unravel; the biggest problem is that the preposition ʿal (אֲל) [pronounced *ahl*] is found two times, and in both cases, used quite differently than in v. 17; it generally means *upon, against, above, by, beside*. Strong's #5920, #5921 BDB #752. In this verse it is used with *house of my father* and *one stone*. Other than that, I am still perplexed as to what it means to say *upon one stone* or *against one stone*; and, again, this is like the sacrifice of seventy animals on the same altar. The sons of Gideon were rounded up and taken to one place, perhaps the backdrop of a solid rock portion of Mount Gerizim, and their lives were all taken at one time. Jotham clearly blames the people of Shechem for this. Although they did not pull the trigger, so to speak, they did provide Abimelech with the financing to assassinate his half-brothers. This makes them equally guilty in the eyes of God.

What the people of Shechem did was to place Abimelech, who is an enemy to the house of Gideon, over them only because they are from the same city. In fact, to have this kind of influence, they had no problem disrespecting the house of Gideon and assassinating his seventy sons. It is almost difficult to imagine generating such great disrespect for a national hero. During his generation, he is respected and revered, even to the point of being asked to be king over Israel; and in the next generation, his own people destroy his family. The sons of the people he delivered out of the hand of Midian assassinate all of his sons. One generation rarely has even an inkling of the importance and the sacrifice of their predecessors.

**“—And if in truth and integrity you have done with Jerubbaal and with his house the day the this, [then] rejoice in Abimelech and he will rejoice now—[even] he—in you.**

Judges  
9:19

**“—And if in truth and integrity you have done with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, [then] rejoice in Abimelech and he, [even] he, may now rejoice in you.**

**“—and if you have so dealt with Jerubbaal and his house in truth and integrity this day, then rejoice in Abimelech and he will rejoice in you.**

Jotham begins to bring his message to a close. He returns to the *if's* of v. 16. If what the aristocracy of Shechem did was a result of truth and integrity, then they should rejoice in Abimelech and he should rejoice in them. That verb is first found in the Qal imperative and then in the Qal imperfect; it is *sâmach* (נִשְׂמַח) [pronounced *saw-MAHKH*], and it means *to rejoice, to be glad*. Strong's #8055 BDB #970. The alternative, which is the way things really are, is presented in the next verse.

**“And if not, will come out a fire from Abimelech and she will devour supervisors of Shechem and a house of Millo and will come out a fire from supervisors of Shechem and from a house of Millo and she will devour Abimelech.”**

Judges  
9:20

**“And if not, [then] a fire will come out from Abimelech and it will devour the aristocracy of Shechem and the house of Millo; furthermore, a fire will come out from the aristocracy of Shechem and form the house of Millo and it will devour Abimelech.”**

**“And if you have not dealt with Gideon’s house with truth an integrity, then a fire will come out from Abimelech and this fire will devour the aristocracy of Shechem as well as the house of Millo. Furthermore, a fire will come out from the aristocracy of Shechem and from the house of Millo and that fire will devour Abimelech.”**

The conclusion of Jotham is simple: Abimelech and the people who put him into power will destroy one another. It is interesting that Jotham seems to gain more and more courage and what he says as he concludes is more and more clearly spoken. Whereas it was more difficult to follow him at first, what he says in these past couple of verses is crystal clear. What Jotham says here was alluded to back in v. 15, using the imagery of the fire proceeding from the bramble to take out even the cedars of Lebanon. It will be fulfilled in vv. 45–49 and looked back upon in vv. 56–57 of this chapter. [\[Return to sub-outline\]](#)

**And so hastened [quickly] Jotham and so he fled and so he went [to] Beer and so he lived there from faces of Abimelech his brother.**

Judges  
9:21

**And so Jotham hasten quickly and he fled and went [to] Beer and lived there away from the face of Abimelech his brother.**

**Then Jotham quickly fled to Beer, where he lived in safety, far enough away from Abimelech.**

The first verb is the Qal imperfect of *nûwç* (נוּחַ) [pronounced *noose*], which means *to flee from, to hasten quickly*. Strong’s #5127 BDB #630. The second verb is the Qal imperfect of *bârach* (בָּרַח) [pronounced *baw-RAHKKH*], and it means *to go through, to flee*. Strong’s #1272 BDB #137.

Abimelech did not hear anyone in the crowd call out *he’s right; we screwed up!* Therefore, there was no reason for him to hang around. The best he could hope for, particularly after what he had said, was to die slowly at the hand of the cronies of Abimelech.

Beer is only mentioned one other time in Scripture, and that is in Num. 21:16.<sup>23</sup> Once Israel settled in the land, Gad, Reuben and half of the tribe of Manasseh would reside east of the Jordan River. Reuben took the southernmost portion of this land, with the Arnon River being the border between Reuben and Moab. Beer was just north of the Arnon River, still in the territory of Reuben, but quite close to the Moab border. This indicates that Abimelech’s influence had not yet spread to Reuben (my guess is that he did not have full authority over Israel, but primarily over the northern kingdom, excluding Judah and Simeon in the south as well as these three tribes in the east. However, Jotham had so little confidence in what he had said, even though it was obviously inspired by God, that he left Shechem and fled as far away as he could. His courage is quite similar to the courage of his father, as we first found him at the beginning of Judges 6 (in fact, all things considered, his courage to stand up and say what he did is much greater than that of his father early on; however, he did not have the courage to remain, as his father, reassured by God, would have done).

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### Abimelech and Shechem at Enmity with One Another

**And so ruled [as a prince] Abimelech over Israel three years.**

Judges  
9:22

**So Abimelech was a prince over Israel for three years.**

**After this, Abimelech had dominion over Israel for three years.**

<sup>23</sup> ZPEB suggests that Beer = Beer-elim of Isa. 15:8 (*The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; ©1976; Vol. 1, p 506). Unfortunately, we cannot say without any doubt that the Beer mentioned here is the same as the one in even Num. 21:16, as *beer* is a very common word which means *well*. Since many cities were organized around a well or a system of wells, many were called *Beer-something*. However, the narrative holds together quite well if we do consider this Beer to be the same one as found back in the book of Numbers and since these are the only two instances in the Bible where a city is called simply *Beer*.

The verb here is the Qal imperfect of *sârar* (שָׂרַר) [pronounced *saw-RAHR*], which means *to be prince, to rule over, to hold dominion over*. This is not the strongest word for *to rule, to reign over*. It refers to *princes ruling over something* in Prov. 8:16 Isa. 32:1 Hosea 8:4. Strong's #7786 & 8323 BDB #979. The preposition which precedes Israel is *ʿal* (עַל) [pronounced *ahl*], which means *upon, against, above, over, by, beside*. Strong's #5920, #5921 BDB #752.

In any case, here is a bit of Bible trivia: who was the first king of Israel? Most people would guess Saul (those who knew anything about the Bible, anyway). However, Abimelech was the first king of Israel. His rule was not absolute, as we have seen (neither were those of the divided kingdom). Whereas certainly extended far beyond Shechem, it very likely did not extend over southern or eastern Israel. Still, he likely ruled over as much territory as any king over Judah or any king over Israel after the north south split.

**And so sent God a spirit evil between Abimelech and between supervisors of Shechem and so behaved deceitfully [and faithlessly] supervisors of Shechem against Abimelech...**

Judges  
9:23

**Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the aristocracy of Shechem and the aristocracy of Shechem acted deceitfully [and in bad faith] against Abimelech...**

**And God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem and the leaders of Shechem acted deceitfully against Abimelech...**

This verse would be the idea place for a chapter break. We are dealing with the same persons—the supervisors of Shechem and Abimelech; however, in this portion of God's Word, they will be at odds with one another. Furthermore, this chapter is tied together primarily by the relationship between Abimelech and the men of Shechem.

What God sends is the feminine singular of *rûwach* (רוּחַ) [pronounced *ROO-ahkh*], means *wind, breath, spirit, apparition*. Strong's #7307 BDB #924. It is further modified by the noun *raʿ* (רָע) [pronounced *rahg*], which means *evil, bad*. Strong's #7451 BDB #948. It might appear as though they are not dealing with a being of some sort but that God set a divisive spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem, which is what you would expect when dealing with people of that ilk. Neither Abimelech nor the men of Shechem have any sort of personal integrity; therefore, it is easy for them to become jealous, vindictive, petty, and competitive. On the other hand, it would not be difficult to imagine that God had withdrawn any divine protection and support from Abimelech and the men of Shechem, thus allowing the demons to involve themselves in their lives. Recall from the book of Job, God did withdraw his protection from Job and He allowed Satan to torment Job on this earth. Given that scenario, it is not difficult to imagine a similar, but severely scaled-down involvement here. When God had Samuel anoint David as king of Israel, while Saul was still king, God withdrew His divine protection from Saul. **Now the Spirit of Jehovah departed from Saul and an evil spirit from Jehovah terrorized him** (I Sam. 16:14; see I Sam. 19:9 as well). We have Jehovah putting a deceiving spirit into the mouths of the (false) prophets of Israel in II Chron. 18:22 (these are the ones who proclaimed peace and prosperity to Israel; see I Kings 22:22 as well). Given these other passages, I would think that we could speculate that there was more than just a feeling of dissension between Abimelech and the men of Shechem, but that God actually sent to them a spirit being, which, in these cases, would be demons. In terms of the workings of demons in these cases, we can only go on clues (for instance, we could speculate that the ventriloquist demons could be involved with the false prophets). However, the extent of the demonic influence as well as the actual mechanics is unknown to us. Further, if we would rather that this be some pansy concept like a spirit of dissension or an attitude or disposition of distrust and bitterness,<sup>24</sup> then that will not obscure the events of this passage. Keil and Delitzsch write: *"An evil spirit" is not merely "an evil disposition," but an evil demon, which produced discord and strife, just as an evil spirit came upon Saul...not Satan himself, but a supernatural spiritual power which was under his influence. This evil spirit God sent to punish the wickedness of*

<sup>24</sup> As per *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 342.

*Abimelech and the Shechemites. Elohim, no Jehovah, because the working of the divine justice is referred to here.*<sup>25</sup>

The final verb in this verse is the Qal imperfect of bâgad (בָּגַד) [pronounced *baw-GAHD*], which means *to behave deceitfully, to act covertly, to act fraudulently, to act in bad faith, to behave faithlessly; to oppress, to afflict, to deal treacherously with*. Strong's #898 BDB #93. Again, we do not know the mechanics of what fuels the situation; however, it is clear that there is something working in the background that we do not fully understand which sets off an enmity between the leaders of Shechem and their king, Abimelech.

**...to come violence of [the] seventy sons of Jerubbaal and their blood; to place [it] upon Abimelech their brother who killed them and upon [the] supervisors of Shechem who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers.**

Judges  
9:24

**...to [the purpose that] the violence of the seventy sons of Jerubbaal and their blood might come; to place [it] upon Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and upon the aristocracy of Shechem who had strengthened his hands to kill his brothers.**

**...so that the violence committed against the seventy sons of Jerubbaal and the revenge of their deaths might be turned against Abimelech, their half-brother, and against the leaders of Shechem who supported and participated in this mass assassination.**

This is a tad bit more difficult, so let me give you a couple of other translations first:

*The Emphasized Bible*

...that the cruel wrong to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might come [upon them],—and that their blood might be laid upon Abimelech their brother, who slew them, and upon the owners of Shechem who strengthened his hands to slay his brethren.

NASB

...in order that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood might be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers. God did this in order that the crime against Jerub-Baal's seventy cons, the shedding of their blood, might be avenged on their brother Abimelech and on the citizens of Shechem, who had helped him murder his brothers.

NIV

...God did this in order that the crime against Jerub-Baal's seventy sons, the shedding of their blood, might be avenged on their brother Abimelech and on the citizens of Shechem, who had helped him murder his brothers.

NRSV

This happened so that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might be avenged and their blood be laid on their brother Abimelech, who killed them, and on the lords of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers.

*Young's Lit. Translation*

...for the coming in of the violence to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal, and of their blood to place *it* on Abimelech their brother, who slew them, and on the masters of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to slay his brethren.

V. 24 appears to be a continuation of v. 23 where God had sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the aristocracy of Shechem. This verse gives us the result or the upshot of the whole thing. We begin with the lamed prefixed preposition and the Qal infinitive construct of *bôw'* (בּוֹא) [pronounced *boh*], which means *to come in, to come, to go in, to go*. Strong's #935 BDB #97. Since we have three Qal infinitive constructs in this verse, all preceded by the lamed preposition, it might do us well to examine this part of speech. The infinitive construct is one of the two infinitives found in the Hebrew language without reference to person, gender or number. The short explanation is that the lamed plus the infinitive construct can introduce a purpose clause, a result clause or a temporal clause. It can act as a noun or a gerund in any syntactic position. The subject or agent will generally follow an infinitive construct. The subject can be separated from the infinitive by the object or by other intervening words, breaking the construct relation and the infinitive construct acts primarily as a verb. When placed before an object, an

<sup>25</sup> Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 2, p. 264.

infinitive construct generally acts like a verb, particularly when preceded by lâmed. The lâmed with an infinitive construct generally expresses purpose or result, although it can have three other common uses with the infinitive: (1) It can have a gerundial or adverbial sense to explain the circumstances of a previous action; (2) it can act as a periphrastic future in nominal clauses; and, (3) it can behave as a gerund, in the sense of *is to be, must be, ought to be*.<sup>26</sup> This first infinitive construct acts primarily as a verb which expresses purpose and result. What is to come is what God purposes to result from sending this evil spirit.

Then we have the masculine singular construct of *châmâç* (חַמָּאֵץ) [pronounced *khaw-MAWS*], which means *violence, wrong, cruelty*. This is the word that we find in Gen. 6 which prompts God to flood the earth. Strong's #2555 BDB #329. This is followed by the phrase *seventy sons of Jerubbaal and their blood*. What we are dealing with is the violence and cruelty done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal.

The next verb is the Qal infinitive construct of *sîym* (סִיַּם) [pronounced *seem*] which means *to put, to place, to set*. Strong's #7760 BDB #962. It appears as though the construct of *violence* does somewhat of a double duty here, referring to what was done to the other sons of Gideon as well as what would be laid upon Abimelech. So far, this gives us: **To come violence of [the] seventy sons of Jerubbaal and their blood; to place [it] upon Abimelech their brother...**

Then Abimelech is described as the one *who killed them*. The purpose and end result of this evil spirit is further extended to the men of Shechem. The remainder of the verse reads: **and upon supervisors of Shechem who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers**. Now, neither Abimelech nor the leaders of Shechem did the actual killing of Abimelech's half-brothers. What was done is that Abimelech got the support from the men of Shechem; the men of Shechem then gave Abimelech some money; with the money, Abimelech hired some killers, and they assassinated his half-brothers. **"Cursed is he who accepts a bribe to strike down an innocent person."** (Deut. 27:25a).

Now, what follows throughout the remainder of this chapter is that God will see to it that both Abimelech and the men of Shechem will not only turn against one another, but that they will all die as a result of their plotting.

**And so placed against him [the] supervisors of Shechem ambushers [or, ambushes] upon tops of the mountains and so they robbed all who passed by them in the way. And so [it] was told to Abimelech.**

Judges  
9:25

**Then the aristocracy of Shechem placed ambushers against him upon the tops of the mountains and they robbed all who pass by them in the way. Then Abimelech was told [this].**

**Then the leaders of Shechem posted thieves on the tops of the mountains and they robbed everyone who passed by them along the road. Then Abimelech was told about this.**

The first thing that will be done is that these men of Shechem will station thieves on the mountain tops and they will rob all those who pass by them. Abimelech is in charge of Israel and for this type of thing to go on puts him in a bad light with the people in general. The word used for these men is the masculine plural, Piel participle of the verb *ʾâra<sup>b</sup>v* (אָרַב) [pronounced *aw-RA<sup>b</sup>V*], which means *to ambush, to lay in wait*. As a masculine plural participle, it means *bushwackers, ambushers, ambushes*. In this context, as *they* rob everyone who passes by, *they* more likely refers back to *ambushers* rather than to *ambushes*. Strong's #693 BDB #70. What these men of Shechem were doing was stirring up civil unrest.

Keil and Delitzsch: *The faithlessness of the Shechemites toward Abimelech commenced by their placing liars in wait for him...upon the tops of the mountains (Ebal and Gerizim, between which Shechem was situated), who plundered every one who passed by them on the road. In what way they did harm to Abimelech by sending out liars in wait to plunder the passers-by, is not very clear from the brevity of the narrative. The general effect may have*

<sup>26</sup> the bulk of this was paraphrased from J.C.L. Gibson, *Davidson's Introductory Hebrew Grammar-Syntax*; 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, © T&T Clark Ltd., 1994, pp. 127–132 and from *Biblical Hebrew*; by Page Kelley, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., ©1992, p. 434.

been, that they brought his government into discredit with the people by organizing a system of robbery and plunder, and thus aroused a spirit of discontent and rebellion.<sup>27</sup> After all, Israel has placed herself under the control of one man and this made Abimelech and his government appear weak. People of that general area would think to themselves and speak to their neighbors commenting, *what good is paying taxes and having Abimelech rule over us? If he cannot even provide us simple protection under the law, who needs him?* Keil and Delitzsch also suggest that these men sat in wait for Abimelech himself, but I don't know that the men would have wanted to face Abimelech and his army. However, they acted as mosquitos, and Abimelech seemed to be swatting mosquitos pretty much everywhere he went.

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## Gaal Ben Ebed Offers Himself as a Ruler in Abimelech's Stead

**And so went Gaal ben Ebed and his close relatives and so they moved into Shechem and so trusted in him supervisors of Shechem.**

Judges  
9:26

**Then Gaal ben Ebed and his close relatives went and moved into Shechem; and the aristocracy of Shechem trusted in him.**

**Also, Gaal, the son of Ebed, along with his associates and relatives, moved to Shechem; and the leaders of Shechem began to place their trust in him.**

Like so many transient players in the game of life, Gaal ben Ebed<sup>28</sup> will be with us for this one chapter only. We do not know anything about his father Ebed and everything that we know about Gaal is found in this passage only. Many early manuscripts as well as some other translations (the Syriac and the Arabic) read Gaal ben Eber, owing to the strong similarity of the letters *d* and *r* in the Hebrew. The name *Eber* goes back a long way in Israel's history—in fact, it pre-dates Abraham, as there is an *Eber* in his lineage. Some have even drawn comparisons between the names *Hebrew* and *Eber*, as they have the same root. More than likely, however, *Eber* is a name applied to a much later descendant, as all Israelites would be sons of *Eber* because they are sons of Abraham. There are two *Eber's* mentioned in Scripture besides the predecessor of Abraham in I Chron. 5:13 8:12, 22. Certainly, there is no reason to assume that either of these are the *Eber* found here. What is more significant is Gaal's first name. Throughout this portion of Scripture, we have noticed that the names of the characters have had great significance. Gaal's name means *loathed, abhorred*. The leaders of Shechem had to look far and wide to find someone with even less character than Abimelech, but they finally managed to find the guy. Strong's #1603 (See Strong's #1602) BDB #172.

Barnes suggests that it is possible that Gaal ben Ebed (*Eber*) had been sent by Abimelech, who realized the tenuousness of his grip on Shechem. He could have simply been an opportunist who observed how easily Abimelech came into power on the shoulders of the leaders of Shechem. After all, Gaal did not have seventy rivals to deal with, when all was said and done, but only one. Therefore, he could have gone there of his own accord. The people who accompany Gaal ben Ebed are called the masculine plural of *ʾâch* (אָח) [pronounced *awhk*], which means simply *brother, close relative, fellow countrymen*. Strong's #251 BDB #26. What the men of Shechem did is the Qal imperfect of The second verb in Job 6:20 is the 3rd person masculine singular (recall the previous verb was the plural), Qal perfect of *bâṭach* (בָּטַח) [pronounced *baw-TAHKH*]. This is a very interesting word as it is only found once in the Pentateuch, four times in the Judges, no where in I or II Samuel, Joshua, Ruth, Nehemiah, Ezra or Esther; but it is found several times in Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah and Jeremiah. Bob Thieme used to describe this word as picking up your troubles and body slamming them on the Lord. There is a similar word in the Arabic which means *to throw one on the ground*, which is no doubt from when he got this meaning. It means *to trust, to rely upon, to have confidence in, to be secure in*; it means to essentially take everything that you

<sup>27</sup> Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 2, pp. 264–265.

<sup>28</sup> There are a few early printed editions which read *Eber* instead, because of the similarity of the *dâleth* and the *rêysh* in the Hebrew. Not that it makes any difference, as there is no more significance to the name of *Eber* than there is to *Ebed*. Even though *Eber* is an ancestor of Abraham, this person would not be known as the son of *that* Eber.

have and place it in the care of Jesus Christ so that you do not have to worry about a thing. Strong's #982 BDB #105. The love affair between the men of Shechem and Abimelech was over; what remained was distrust and hatred. Their newest deliverer was in the package of Gaal ben Ebed.

**And so they went out [into] the field and so they harvested their vineyards and so they trod and so they made thanksgiving-celebrations and so they went into a house of their gods and so they ate and so they drank and so they belittled Abimelech.**

Judges  
9:27

**So they went out [into] the field and they harvested their vineyards. Then they trod [the grapes] and made a thanksgiving-celebration. They went into the house of their gods and they ate and they drank and they belittled Abimelech.**

**So the men of Shechem went out into their fields and harvested their vineyards and fermented some wine from the grapes for a thanksgiving-style celebration. They went into the house of their gods and they ate and drank and belittled Abimelech between mouthfuls of food and drinks of wine.**

*They*, in this verse, refers to the aristocracy of Shechem and to their newest leader, at least in spirit, Gaal ben Ebed. The second verb is the Qal imperfect of *bâtsar* (בָּצַר) [pronounced *baw-TZÄHR*], whose meanings are given as *to cut off, to cut away, to cut out, to dig up, to restrain, to withhold*. That confuses the issue and the New Englishman's Hebrew Concordance of the Old Testament helps us out here. In the Qal imperfect, it means *to cut out*; and, by application, *to gather, to harvest* (i.e., they are cutting out the produce from the field; see Lev. 25:5, 11 Deut. 24:21 Judges 9:27; compare Psalm 76:12\*). In the Qal participle (also called the Poel in NEHC), it is translated *grape-gatherer* (Jer. 6:9 49:9 Obad. 5\*). It means *walled-up, fenced, fortified* in the Qal passive participle (called the Paül in the NEHC). In the Niphal, it means *to restrain, to withhold, to hinder* (Gen. 11:6 Job 42:2) and in the Piel it means *to fortify* (Isa. 22:10 Jer. 51:33). Strong's #1219 BDB #130. After harvesting the grapes from their vineyards, then they did the Qal imperfect of *dârak* (דָּרַךְ) [pronounced *daw-RAHK*<sup>o</sup>] and it means *to march, to tread*. It is used for treading, or walking over, the grapes or olives (Isa. 16:10 63:3 Amos 9:13 Micah 6:15); it is used to indicate dominance (Deut. 33:29 Job 22:15). When use in conjunction with a bow, it means *to bend* (I Chron. 5:18 Psalm 7:12 58:7 Jer. 51:3). Strong's #1869 BDB #201. The implication is that they took their grapes which they harvested and tread out the juice to make wine.

The next verb is the Qal imperfect of *ʿâsâh* (עָשָׂה) [pronounced *gaw-SÄWH*] which means *to do, to make, to construct, to fashion, to form, to prepare*. Strong's #6213 BDB #793. What they *do* or *make* is the masculine plural noun *chillûwîym* (חִילוּיִם) [pronounced *khil-lu-LEEM*], which means *celebration, merry-making, praising*. It refers to having some sort of a *Thanksgiving-type* celebration. It is only found in this passage and in Lev. 19:24. In Leviticus, this word was used for the celebration of the fourth year of a tree when it brings forth its first real harvest of fruit. That fruit was to be set aside for a praise-offering or a *thanksgiving offering* [which is this word] to God. The fruit would be eaten in conjunction with a *celebration of thanksgiving* to God. We don't hear of this more often as it was to be done only upon entering into the land. The trees that the Israelites planted anew upon their entrance into the land were not to be eaten from for three years, and the fourth year would be the year that they *celebrate and partake of the harvest*. I will render this as a *thanksgiving-celebration*. Strong's #1974 BDB #239. There were other legitimate celebrations in the ancient world which celebrated a new harvest. The Jews celebrated the Firstfruits in obedience to Lev. 23:9–14 and they celebrated Pentecost, which took place during the harvest (Lev. 23:15–21 Num. 28:26–31 Deut. 16:9–12). These were legitimate (see also Isa. 16:10). No doubt the celebration spoken of here was not the one sanctioned by God, but had no doubt *degenerated into [a] debauched drinking affair*.<sup>29</sup> It was a heathen perversion of what God had originally sanctioned. You will note the name of Jehovah is nowhere to be found, whereas we have heard the name of Baal-berith several times.

This all takes place in *the house of their gods*, which is actually downplayed throughout most of this chapter. That is, it is persistently mentioned, but the writer of this narrative does not strongly deprecate idolatry, as you would expect. This author simply lists it as having occurred without any real editorializing. However, we know that they

<sup>29</sup> *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 342.

were practicing idolatry, as this is mentioned in Judges 8:33. This apparently is also where they go for shelter (Judges 9:46–47).

At the very end of this verse we have the Piel imperfect of *qâlal* (קָלַל) [pronounced *kaw-LAL*] and it means *to curse, to despise, to be accursed, to belittle, to revile* in the Piel. Strong's #7043 BDB #886. In a verse like this, it is difficult to separate it into simple sentences as you see in the English. The *wâw* consecutive begins a new thought; however, it is unlikely that each *wâw* consecutive begins a new sentence as we think of a new sentence. Sometimes they behave almost like commas in a series of actions.

Their new golden boy was Gaal ben Ebed and they no longer regarded Abimelech as their great leader. While holding a celebration, they trashed Abimelech as they ate and drank. Barnes: *it was at an idolatrous feast in the house of Baal-berith, on occasion of the vintage, and when they were excited with wine, that the rebellion was matured. Those present began to "curse Abimelech," to speak insultingly of him, and to revile him...Gaal, the son of Ebed, who was watching the opportunity, immediately incited them to revolt from the dominion of Abimelech, offering himself to be their captain,; adding a message of defiance to Abimelech, addressed, probably, to Zebul, who was present but too weak to resent it on the spot.*<sup>30</sup>

**And so spoke Gaal ben Ebed, "Who [is] Abimelech and who [is] Shechem that we are serving him? Did not a son of Jerubbaal—and Zebul his officer—serve men of Hamor, father of Shechem? And then we are serving him? We?**

Judges  
9:28

**Gaal ben Ebed then said, "Who [is] Abimelech and who [is this] son of Shechem that we serve him? Did not the son of Jerubbaal and Zebul his officer serve the men of Hamor, the father of Shechem? Then we are serving him? We?**

**Suddenly, Gaal, the son of Ebed, spoke, saying, "Just who the hell is Abimelech and who are we of Shechem that we should serve him? Wasn't this son of Jerubbaal as well as his officer, Zebul, originally under the authority of the men of Hamor, the father of Shechem? Then why are we serving him?"**

We do have a problem with this verse, so I am going to list the renderings of some other translators:

<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	And Gaal son of Ebed said,: Who is Abimelech— and who is the son of Shechem, that we should serve him? Is he not the son of Jerubbaal? and Zebul his officer? Serve ye the men of Hamor, Shechem's father, but why should we serve him?
NASB	Then Gaal the son of Ebed said, "Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should serve him? Is he not the son of Jerubbaal, and <i>is</i> Zebul <i>not</i> his lieutenant? Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem; but why should we serve him?"
<i>Young's Lit. Translation</i>	And Gaal son of Ebed saith, 'Who <i>is</i> Abimelech, and who <i>is</i> Shechem, that we serve him? <i>is he</i> not son of Jerubbaal? and Zebul his commander? Serve ye the men of Hamor father of Shechem, and wherefore do we serve him—we?

You might be wondering what do we find *the son of Shechem* in *The Emphasized Bible* but not in the other good translations? It is found in the Septuagint but not in the Massoretic text, and it fits here. *Son of Shechem* would be a way to refer to Abimelech, as he got his power through the support of the people of Shechem, where he was raised as the bastard son of Gideon. Keil and Delitzsch explain why this is so: *We [must] bear in mind (1) that ה (who is?) In this double question cannot possibly be used in two different and altogether opposite sense, such as "how insignificant or contemptible is Abimelech," and "how great and mighty is Shechem," but that in both instances it must be expressive of disparagement and contempt, as in I Sam. 25:10; and (2) that Gaal answers his own questions. Abimelech was regarded by him as contemptible, not because he was the son of a maid-servant or of very low birth, not because he was ambitious and cruel, a patricide and the murdered of his brethren (Rosenmüller), but because he was a son of Jerubbaal, a son of the man who destroyed the altar of Baal at Shechem and restored*

<sup>30</sup> Barnes' Notes, Volume 2, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 441.

the worship of Jehovah, for which the Shechemites themselves had endeavoured to slay him (ch. 6:27ff.).<sup>31</sup> Keil and Delitzsch contend that the *son of Shechem* refers to Zebul, his chief officer in that area (Gaal answers his own question); however, I would still take this as a reference to Abimelech; what we have is a matter of emphasis in the repetition of his person using a different name.

It is not initially clear how these events took place. Obviously, Gaal did not step into town and everyone immediately looked to him as a leader. Some people are leaders and appear to be leaders, but then they must do and/or say what is necessary. My thinking is that what is illustrated in these few verses actually occurred prior to v. 26; that is, the men of Shechem, because of incidents like this, looked to Gaal for leadership.

The first verb in Gaal's diatribe is the Qal imperfect of  $\text{ʿā}^b\text{vad}$  (אָבַד) [pronounced *gaw<sup>b</sup>-VAHD*], which means *to work, to serve, to labor*. Strong's #5647 BDB #712. Gaal decides to sum up just *what's wrong with this picture*. He asks those listening to him to think about who Abimelech and who Shechem are that they, the men of Shechem, should served and work under Abimelech. There are two different interrogative particles in this verse, so it might do us some good to see them side by side. The first, used twice, is *mîy* (מִי) [pronounced *mee*], which is generally translated *who*. Strong's #4310 BDB #566. The second is the interrogative particle *hă* (הֲ) [pronounced *heh*], which acts almost like a piece of punctuation, like the upside-down question mark which begins a Spanish sentence. Strong's #none BDB #209. Then we have two less-than-familiar names given: Zebul has never been mentioned before. Obviously, he is second in command to Abimelech; or, he is the local commander in Shechem under Abimelech. In either case, the men of Shechem were very familiar with him. Hamor was an ancient, whose name we find all the way back in Gen. 33:19, where he is, indeed, called the father of Shechem. Shechem was an ancient city which was in existence even during the time of Abraham (Gen. 33:18), which was apparently either founded by Hamor in honor of his son Shechem, or founded by Shechem, or founded by the family of Shechem.

This approach of asking *just who is Abimelech and who is a son of Shechem* asks the listener to think about the origins of these men. Depending upon the way it is said, the speaker can sound quite condescending when referring to any person this way (as he must certainly have sounded when he spoke of Abimelech and Zebul (see I Sam. 25:10). It is unclear as to whether this *son of Shechem* refers to Abimelech or to the men of Shechem. Very likely, it is a reference to Abimelech, being that it is in the singular, the intention being to clearly indicate his origins and his responsibilities. *He is beholden to the people of Shechem, not the other way around* is the point which Gaal is making.

What Gaal is saying is that the men of Shechem chose Abimelech and put him into power. It was their push which placed him in power—therefore, why are they serving him? Shouldn't it be the other way around? Now, keep in mind, these men are in the middle of drinking and eating and partying down. And so begins the fulfillment of the last verse of the song of Deborah: **“Thus let all of Your enemies perish, O Jehovah, but let those who love Him be like the rising of the sun in its might.”** (Judges 5:31a).

**And who would place the people the this in my hand and I would remove Abimelech.” And he said to Abimelech, “Increase your army and so come out.”**

Judges  
9:29

**“O that someone would place this people in my hand, then I would remove Abimelech. And I would say to Abimelech, ‘Increase your army and come out.’ ”**

**“If only someone would place this people under my care, then I would remove Abimelech. Then I would say to Abimelech, ‘Bring it on, brother.’ ”**

This verse begins with *and who* and then the Qal imperfect of the verb *nāthan* (נָתַן) [pronounced *naw-THAHN*], which means *give, grant, place, put, set*. Strong's #5414 BDB #678. Literally, that is *and who would place*; but together these express a wish, e.g., *O that, would that some one would, would that there were*. We then have the definite article and the masculine singular noun  $\text{ʿam}$  (אָם) [pronounced *ahm*] and it means *people*. Strong's #5971 BDB #766.

<sup>31</sup> Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 2, p. 265.

Then Gaal says what he would do if these people were placed in his hand. What he is asking for is the authority over these people of Shechem, if not an even greater authority. He uses the wâw conjunction, which can also be rendered *then* and the Qal imperfect voluntative of שׁוּר (סוּר) [pronounced *soor*] generally means *to turn aside*, however, in the Hiphil, it means *to cause to depart, to remove, to take away*. Strong's #5493 (and #5494) BDB #693.

Also, without regards to time, we have Gaal speaking to Abimelech (probably through a messenger). He uses the Piel imperfect of רָבַח (רָבַח) [pronounced *raw<sup>b</sup>-VAWH*], which means *to become much, to become many, to multiply, to increase in population and in whatever else*. In the Piel, it means *to multiply, to increase, to acquire much*. Strong's #7235 BDB #915.

We do not have much by way of details here. We do not know when all of these things occurred and in which order. What makes sense to me is that Gaal ben Ebed strolled into town capturing the attention of those influential in Shechem. They attend a party together and what he says sparks their interest. He essentially vows to kick Abimelech's butt. With their support behind him (v. 26), he contacts Abimelech and tells him to be ready to go to war. However, by the next verse, what appears to be the case is that Gaal did not contact Abimelech, directly or through a messenger, but more approached this from the standpoint of "If Abimelech were here, this is what I would say to him." Gaal and his new drinking buddies are sitting around and Gaal looks off into the distance, toward where Abimelech lives, and he says, "Abimelech, bring it on!" Big talk from a little man. However, it was enough for the men of Shechem. In the next few verses, it will be clear that Abimelech was not aware *that this had been said to him* and that all of this was simply talk on the part of Gaal.

You will note a distinct difference between my two translations. The difference is between the Massoretic (the Hebrew) text and the Septuagint (the later Greek translation). Young stays with the Hebrew text ('...and oh that this people were in my hand—then I turn Abimelech aside;' and he saith to Abimelech, 'Increase thy host, and come out.')

Rotherham goes with the Septuagint (Would then this people were in my hand! that I might set aside Abimelech, —and say to Abimelech, Increase thine army and come out!). Apparently, LXX α has this as ...and they said to Abimelech, "Increase your army and come out." My feeling is that the *he* is probably correct, as it is found that way in the Massoretic text and in the Aramaic targum and in the Dead Sea Scrolls. What has occurred is that Abimelech is bragging and bragging, and then he looks out in the distance toward Arumah, where Abimelech was ruling from, and he mockingly calls to him. It's like calling someone a turd bucket when he isn't there. However, this is good enough for the drunken leaders of Shechem, who had become quite disillusioned and disenchanted with Abimelech.

We have similar pomposity when Absalom rebelled against his father, King David, and said: "Oh that one would appoint me judge in the land, then every man who has any grievance or complaint could come to me, and I would give him justice." (II Sam. 15:4b). Psalm 10:3 is apropos at this point: For the wicked boasts of his heart's desire and the greedy man curses and spurns Jehovah.

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## Zebul Sends Word to Abimelech Concerning this Fomenting Revolution

**And so heard Zebul, ruler of the city, words of Gaal ben Ebed and so burned his anger.**

Judges  
9:30

**So Zebul, the ruler of the city, heard the words of Gaal ben Ebed, and his anger burned.**

**Zebul, the ruler of the city of Shechem, also heard these cocky words of Gaal, the son of Ebed, and his anger burned against Gaal.**

In this verse, we become fully aware of who Zebul is—Zebul is the man placed in charge of Shechem by Abimelech. Apparently, the men of Shechem were less than pleased by this selection of Zebul. Zebul is furious when he hears Gaal bragging that he can stand up to Abimelech. Therefore, he decides to deal with this.

And so he sent messengers unto Abimelech in Thormah [possibly, surreptitiously and possibly in Arumah?], to say, “Behold, Gaal ben Ebed and his near relatives, having come into Shechem, and they are besieging the city against you.

Judges  
9:31

Then he sent messengers to Abimelech in Thormah [Arumah?], saying, “Listen, Gaal ben Ebed and his relatives are coming into Shechem and, listen, they are stirring up the city against you.

So Zebul sent messengers to Abimelech in Arumah, saying, “Listen, Gaal, the son of Ebed, along with his associates and relatives, have come into Shechem and they are fomenting a revolution against you.

We have several ways that a particular word is translated, so let’s see what others have done here:

<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	And he sent messengers unto Abimelech by deceit saying,—Lo! Gaal son of Ebed and his brethren are coming into Shechem; and lo! are fortifying the city against thee.
NAB	...and sent messengers to Abimelech in Arumah with the information: “Gaal, son of Ebed, and his kinsmen have come to Shechem and are stirring up the city against you.”
NASB	And he sent messengers to Abimelech deceitfully [or, in Tormah], saying, “Behold, Gaal the son of Ebed and his relatives [lit., brothers] have come to Shechem; and behold, they are stirring [lit., besieging] up the city against you.”
NIV	Under cover he sent messengers to Abimelech, saying, “Gaal son of Ebed and his brothers have come to Shechem and are stirring up the city against you.”
NRSV	He sent messengers to Abimelech at Arumah [Heb., Tormah], saying, “Look, Gaal son of Ebed and his kinsfolk have come to Shechem, and they are stirring up [Heb., are besieging] the city against you.”
Owen's Translation	And he sent messengers to Abimelech at Arumah [possibly, in treachery], saying, “Behold, Gaal the son of Ebed and his kinsmen have come to Shechem and (behold) they are stirring up the city against you.”
The Septuagint	And he sent messengers to Abimelech secretly, saying, “Behold, Gaal son of lobêl and his brothers are come to Suchêm; and behold, they are besieged the city against you.”

Zebul, who was likely Abimelech’s right-hand man, received what was felt to be the most plum assignment—the highest leadership position in Shechem, Abimelech’s home town. Zebul, being in that position, has his ears everywhere. As soon as what was said was reported to him, he sent to messengers to Abimelech. At this point we have two or three possible readings in the Hebrew:

B° thâr°mâh or Ba`ârûwmâh	
b° thâr°mâh (בְּתַרְמָה) [pronounced <i>bê-thaw-r°-MAW</i> ], which could mean <i>in treachery</i> , but the form is found only here and does not really fit the passage. This is the reading which is found in the text. Compare Strong’s #4820. Strong’s #8549 BDB #941.	ba`ârûwmâh (בְּאַרְוֹמָה) [pronounced <i>bah-uh-ROO-maw</i> ], and it is thought to be a proper noun referring to the city from whence Abimelech ruled (it is not mentioned anywhere else in Scripture except in Judges 9:41). Strong’s #725 BDB #72.
If you will notice, these words are spelled quite differently, and there would have been two major mistakes (i.e., two consonantal differences) between the two words. It is possible that the long <i>u</i> was incorporated into the vowel point, thus giving us one consonant difference, but that is unlikely, since alternative spellings of the same word are more likely to be found by different authors in different passages, rather than by the same author in the same passage. There are negatives to translating this <i>in secret</i> or <i>surreptitiously</i> ; and there are negatives to rendering this as <i>in [or, at] Arumah</i> . If this is to be taken as a proper noun, it should be rendered <i>in Thormah</i> . All of this is why the translators are so split on this passage.	
One of the nice things about the New Englishman’s Hebrew Concordance of the Old Testament is that one can	

### B<sup>e</sup> thâr<sup>e</sup>mâh or Ba<sup>`</sup>ârûwmâh

look up the English word in the back and find which Hebrew words are used behind the translation. Unfortunately, there is nothing under *secret* which even vaguely resembles this word. Rotherham, generally a wealth of information in these cases, says nothing by way of footnote.

A third consideration, one which is rarely considered, is that there were two cities, Arumâh and Thormâh; or that these are different designations for the same city, familiar to the people of that time, but lost in history. This third possibility would allow for the different spellings. The only reason that few gravitate toward this possibility is that Arumah is found in only one passage (v. 41) and Thormâh is found in only one passage (v. 31).

You will obviously notice that I have not taken a stand with respect to the correctness of any of these renderings, as there are negatives associated with any position here. After taking no position on this matter, I have noticed that Keil and Delitzsch also took no position, claiming that, *As the word only occurs here, it is impossible to decide with certainty in favour of either view.*<sup>1</sup>

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In any case, Zebul contacts Abimelech and warns him of the nefarious activity in his old home town.

After Gaal ben Ebed and his relatives, we have the masculine plural, Qal active participle of bôw' (בּוֹא) [pronounced *boh*], which means *to come in, to come, to go in, to go*. Strong's #935 BDB #97. Then he uses the wâw conjunction and the interjection *behold* (or, *listen*), and the masculine plural, Qal active participle of tsûwr (צָוַר) [pronounced *tsoor*], whose meanings are given variously as *to confine, to bind, to besiege, to shut in, to incite against, to show hostility to, to treat as an enemy, to fashion, to delineate*. Because of the noun cognates (see Strong's #4692 and 4694), it definitely means *to besiege*. In this passage, tsûwr is translated variously as *stirring up* (NASB and NRSV, both with, footnote *besieging*; NAB, NJB, NIV, Young); *fortifying* (Rotherham, who footnotes this as *constraining*; Young); and *raise up (in rebellion)* (Edersheim). Strong's #6696 BDB #848 BDB #849.

Now, as an aside, this is a particularly interesting narrative from the standpoint of authorship. We have a lot of direct quotes found in this chapter. We have exactly what Abimelech said to the leaders of Shechem; we have Jotham's speech preserved, possibly in its entirety; we have what Gaal ben Ebed says to the men of Shechem during a drunken party; and here we have the text of the message which Zebul sent along to Abimelech. Then we will have an exchange between Zebul and Gaal prior to Gaal's battle with Abimelech. There is perhaps only one person who could have heard all of these exchanges and that is Zebul,<sup>32</sup> about whom we know very little; or a scribe (or, secretary) of his. Another very good reason that this could have been written by Zebul or someone close to him is that in v. 30, Zebul's emotions are mentioned. His anger burned toward Gaal. This is something that Zebul would know or someone close to him; however, an historian writing this years later would not be as likely to include that fact. Furthermore, just because Abimelech was a blowhard and an evil man, does not mean that every person appointed under him was also an unbeliever and a jerk. Another possibility is that there was a believer in Shechem who fancied himself an historian and recognized the significance of the events, and therefore recorded them faithfully.

**“And now rise up [by] night—you and the people—and lie in wait in the field.** Judges 9:32 **“And now you and the people, rise up [by] night and lie in wait in the field.**

**“My suggestion is that you and your army approach Shechem by night and lie in wait in the field.**

Zebul actually gives his commander some orders. The first is the Qal imperative of qûwm (קוּם) [pronounced *koom*], which means, in the Qal stem, *to stand, to rise up*. Strong's #6965 BDB #877. This is followed by the

<sup>32</sup> The first exchange between Abimelech and the men of Shechem he would have had to have heard second-hand by Abimelech.

masculine singular noun *lay<sup>o</sup>lâh* (לַי לָהּ) [pronounced *LAY-law*], which means *night*. This often seems to take on the quality of an adverb. Strong's #3915 BDB #538.

The second order is the Qal imperative of *ʿâra<sup>b</sup>v* (אַרַב) [pronounced *aw-RA<sup>B</sup>V*], which means *to ambush, to lay in wait*. Strong's #693 BDB #70. Zebul, apparently a good military man, has formulated a plan. Again, recall that war and battle were in their infancy. There were a number of approaches to a battle, many of which we saw in the book of Joshua. Joshua used an ambush on Ai and we will find another ambush used in Judges 20:37.

**“And he is in the morning as a rising of the sun; you will rise early and you will spread out [in hostile array] against the city and, behold, he and the people who [are] with him are coming unto you and you will do to him according as finds your hand.”**

Judges  
9:33

**And it is, in the morning about the [time of the] rising of the sun; you will rise up early and you will spread out [in hostility] against the city. Then, observe, he and the people who [are] with him will be coming out to you and you will do to him according as your hand finds.”**

**“And then, when it is morning and the sun is just rising, you will rise up early and position yourselves against the city, then, you will see that he and the people will come out to you and you will do to him what you will.”**

Although most of this verse is fairly easy, there are parts which will require some work, so let me add in some other translations:

*The Emphasized Bible*

...and it shall be in the morning about sunrise thou shalt get up early and spread thyself out against the city, —when lo! he and the people that are with him coming out against thee, so shalt thou do unto him as thy hand shall find opportunity.

NASB

“And it shall come about in the morning, as soon as the sun is up, that you shall rise early and rush upon the city; and behold, when he and the people who are with him come out against you, you shall do to them whatever you can.”

*Young's Lit. Translation*

‘...and it hath been, in the morning, about the rising of the sun, thou dost rise early, and hast pushed against the city; and lo, he and the people who *are* with him are going out unto thee—and thou hast done to him as thy hand doth find.’

We begin with the 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular, Qal perfect of the verb *hâyâh* (הָיָה) [pronounced *haw-YAW*], which means *to be*. Without a specific subject and object, it often means *and it will come to be, and it will come to pass, then it came to pass* (with the wâw consecutive). Strong's #1961 BDB #224. Then we have *in the morning* and the kaph preposition (*as, like, about*), and *a rising of the sun*.

Now, for some reason, Zebul is no longer giving orders but he uses the Hiphil imperfect of *shâkam* (שָׁכַם) [pronounced *shaw-KAHM*], which means *to start, to rise, to rise early, to make an early start*. Strong's #7925 BDB #1014. Then we have the Qal perfect of *pâshaṭ* (פָּשַׁט) [pronounced *paw-SHAHT*] and BDB gives the meanings *to strip off, to make a dash, to make a raid*. In the KJV, they translate different verbs *fell upon*; and the NKJV tries to fix this by rendering these two different verbs as *raided*. Strong tells us that this comes from the ancient root *to spread out* (i.e., to deploy in a hostile array) and therefore *to strip, to flay, to plunder, to unclot*. This verbs use in terms of an army coming and *spreading* itself out in a hostile array can be found in Judges 9:33, 44 I Sam. 27:8. The relationship to removing one's clothing is that when clothing is put on, it is bound together and when it is removed, it is *spread out*. This word can also be used *to flay* a victim; that is, the remove their skin (Lev. 1:6 ii Chron. 29:34 35:11). Strong's #6584 BDB #832.

So far, this has been fairly easy, with only one difficult verb. However, the last phrase is the most difficult of them to deal with. We have the simple wâw conjunction and the 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular, Qal perfect of *ʿâsâh* (עָשָׂה) [pronounced *gaw-SAWH*] which means *to do, to make, to construct, to fashion, to form, to prepare*. Strong's #6213 BDB #793. This is followed by *to him* and the kaph preposition (*as, like, about*), the relative pronoun, *kaʿâsher* (כַּאֲשֶׁר) [pronounced *kah-uh-SHER*]. BDB and Gesenius both classify these two together as a separate word, and gives

the meanings *according as, as, when, as who, as one who, according to [that] which, according to what manner, because, as if, so as*. The kaph preposition = Strong's #none BDB #453. `āsher = Strong's #834 BDB #81. Together they = Strong's #834 BDB #455.

Then we have the Qal imperfect of *mātsâ`* (אָצַח) [pronounced *maw-TSAW*] and it means *to attain to, to find, to detect, to happen upon, to come upon, to find unexpectedly, to discover*. Strong's #4672 BDB #592. The subject of the verb follows, which is *your hand*. We have the same phrase in I Sam. 10:7. The hand has to do with *control, power, volition*—in other words, Abimelech is to do as he sees fit with these rebels.

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## Abimelech Attacks and Defeats Gaal and His Soldiers

**And so Abimelech rose up and all the people who [were] with him [by] night and so lay in wait against Shechem four companies.**

Judges  
9:34

**And so Abimelech rose up, and all the people who [were] with him [by] night; and four companies lay in wait against Shechem.**

**In response, Abimelech and his army arose by night, and he split them into four companies and placed them in waiting hiding right outside Shechem.**

The first verb is the 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular, Qal imperfect of *qûwm* (קָוַם) [pronounced *koom*], which means, in the Qal stem, *to stand, to rise up*. Strong's #6965 BDB #877. You will notice that often in the Hebrew when dealing with a leader and the people under him, even though both he and the people commit to the same verb, still, the verb might only be in the singular to match him.

Then we have the 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine plural, Qal imperfect of *`āraḅ* (אָרַב) [pronounced *aw-RA<sup>B</sup>V*], which means *to ambush, to lay in wait*. Strong's #693 BDB #70. Abimelech apparently trusts the judgment of Zebul implicitly and follows his instructions exactly. Furthermore, choosing to do something different would confuse Zebul from the inside. Finally, there really weren't a lot of different options.

Abimelech's men are broken down into four, and then we have the masculine plural noun *rô`sh* (רֹאשׁ) [pronounced *roshe*], which means *head, top, chief, front, choicest*. In the plural, this can mean *divisions* of an army, *detachments, companies, bands*. Strong's #7218 BDB #910. Although Abimelech is an ass, he is a good military man employing excellent military strategy. He separates his men into four companies in order to spread his presence out; in order to remain hidden from view, and in order to deal with more manageable groups of men. It will be difficult for his enemy to flee in just any direction.

**And so went out Gaal ben Ebed and so took a stand [at] an opening of [the] gate of the city; and so Abimelech rose up and the people who [were] with him from the ambush.**

Judges  
9:35

**Then Gaal ben Ebed went out and stood [at] the entrance of the citygate. Then Abimelech rose up—also the people who were with him—from the ambush.**

**Then Gaal ben Ebed took his men and they stood their ground at the gate of the city. When Abimelech observed this, he and his people also rose up.**

The stage has been set. Abimelech is on the outskirts of the city, separated into four companies. Gaal ben Ebed, with the support of the men of Shechem, is at the city, and he and his men take a stand at the entrance of the city. We do not have a *good guy* in this battle. Both men desire power only. Neither man can claim: *You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble; You surround me with shouts of deliverance* (Psalm 32:7). *Because you have said, "We have made a pact with death and we have made a covenant with Sheol. The overwhelming scourge will not reach us when it passes by, for we have made falsehood our refuge and we have concealed ourselves with deception."* (Isa. 28:15).

There is another thing which should become clear in subsequent verses—Abimelech can see Gaal but Gaal cannot yet see Abimelech. He is aware that Abimelech is coming; that seems to be apparent; however, he is unable to see the position or the extent of Abimelech's forces. He does not realize that Abimelech is out there right at that moment.

Now, what becomes clear in the next verse is that Gaal did not know that Abimelech was out there. He apparently went through this thing every day of taking his men and standing in front of the city gates, as if ready to defend the city and ready to fight against Abimelech. It was all for show, as he did not expect Abimelech to be out in the mountains before them. Apparently, Zebul was acquainted with Gaal and, insofar as Gaal was concerned, Zebul supported him just as the lords of Shechem supported him. Gaal was a stupid, unintuitive blowhard. Zebul was no doubt enjoying this moment, thinking to himself *Gaal, you ass*; and waiting for the attack of Abimelech upon Gaal. Zebul is an interesting and oft-times overlooked character in this overlooked narrative. Our initial tendency is to write him off as simply an ally of Abimelech, and therefore equating him with Abimelech. However, we do not know what transpired that Abimelech placed him in power there. Recall that King Saul was a jerk who suffered mental delusions; and his son, Jonathan, fought by his side. However, Jonathan was a marvelous man; and the greatest friend of David's. Therefore, we cannot unequivocally see Zebul as simply a crony of Abimelech's.

**And so saw Gaal the people; and so he said unto Zebul, "Behold, people coming down from tops of the mountains." And so said unto him Zebul, "Shadow of the mountains you are seeing as the men."**

Judges  
9:36

**then Gaal saw the people, and he said to Zebul, "Look, [there are] people coming down from the tops of the mountains." So Zebul said to him, "[Those are] the shadow of the mountains [that] you are seeing as men."**

**Gaal looked out and could barely see the people. He said to Zebul, "Look, people are coming down from the tops of the hills." Zebul replied, "It is simply the shadows being cast by the sun on the hills that you are mistaking for men."**

One of the things which we don't quite grasp is the relationship between Gaal and Zebul. Gaal is an upstart who desires to rule over Israel by taking Abimelech down. Zebul is quietly loyal to Abimelech, who apparently placed him in power over Shechem. Here, Gaal has set his men at the city gate entrance and Zebul is obviously with him. Although it is not stated, it appears as though Zebul is feigning support for Gaal, although his support is with Abimelech. Therefore, when Gaal looks out to the mountains, what he thinks he sees is accurate. However, Zebul attempts to dissuade him from this conclusion.

**And so continued again Gaal, to speak [dogmatically], and so he said, "Behold, people coming from with a navel of the land and a company one coming from a way of an oak of Astrologers."**

Judges  
9:37

**Then again, Gaal continued speaking [dogmatically], and he said, "Look, people are coming away from the center of the land; and one company is coming from the way of the Astrologers' oak."**

**Gaal corrected him, saying, "Look closer, there are people coming out from the center of the land; and there is another company coming from the direction of the Astrologers' oak."**

We need to examine this rendering here, even though I realize that this will cut into the action of the narrative. First we have the Hiphil imperfect of *yāçaph* (יָצַף) [pronounced *yaw-SAHPH*], which means *to add, to augment, to continue to do a thing*. It is very often followed by an infinitive to indicate what activity would be continued. Strong's #3254 BDB #414. This is followed by the adverb *ʿôwd* (עוֹד) [pronounced *gohd*] (it is also written עַד), which means *still, yet, again, besides, in addition to, even yet*. Strong's #5750 BDB #728. The action continued is often stated as an infinitive; and here we have the Piel infinitive construct of *dāḇvar* (דַּבַּר) [pronounced *daw<sup>b</sup>-VAHR*], which means *to speak, to declare, to proclaim, to announce*. In the Piel, it is stronger and it can be translated *to speak dogmatically*. Strong's #1696 BDB #180.

Where the people were coming down from is explained by the preposition *mîn* (מִן) [pronounced *min*] (*from, off*), which is combined with *ʿîm*, to give us *mê ʿîm* (מֵעִם) [pronounced *may-GEEM*], which means *from with, beside, from being with, away from, far from, from the possession of, from the custody of*. *Mîn* = Strong's #4480 BDB #577 and *ʿîm* = Strong's #5973 BDB #767, #768. What they are coming out of is described as the masculine singular construct of the noun *tabbûwr* (טַבּוּר) [pronounced *tahb-BOOR*], which means *navel*; which has come to mean *the center, the most prominent part, the highest part*. Strong's #2872 BDB #371. There was apparently a large number of people coming right down the center of the land, from the mountain which sits in front of Shechem. Although Gaal could not determine this from where he stood, this mass of people were probably three companies.

Then Gaal notices from another direction another group. We have the *mîn* preposition and the masculine construct of *derek*<sup>e</sup> (דֶּרֶךְ) [pronounced *DEH-rek*<sup>e</sup>] and it means *way, distance, road, journey, manner, course*. Strong's #1870 BDB #202.

At the end of this verse we have the feminine singular construct of *ʿêlôwn* (אֵלֹון) [pronounced *AY-loan*], which means *oak, terebinth, tall tree, a strong and hardy tree*. Strong's #436 BDB #18. This is followed by the masculine plural, Poel participle of *ʿânan* (אָנַן) [pronounced *aw-NAHN*] and in the Poel it seems to mean *to practice astrology*. Barnes renders this as *regarders of times*. Strong's #6049 BDB #778.<sup>33</sup> Throughout this chapter, spoken without condemnation, we find bits and pieces of evidence that the people in Shechem were heavily involved in idolatry. This particular oak, although we do not know its exact function, was connected to idolatry and very likely had something to do with the stronghold of the house of El-berith (vv. 27, 46). A lot has been made out of idolatry prior to this chapter; we are simply seeing the natural results here.

**And so said unto him Zebul, “Where now [is] your mouth [by] which you said, ‘Who [is] Abimelech that we serve him?’ Is not the people whom you despise in him? Go out, please, now, and fight against him.”**

Judges  
9:38

**So Zebul said to him, “Where now [is] your mouth [by] which you said, ‘Who [is] Abimelech that we serve him?’ Is [this] not the people whom you despise with him? Go out, please, now and fight against him.”**

**Then Zebul said to Gaal, “Now it is time to put your money where your mouth is. Recall that you said, ‘Who is Abimelech that we should serve him?’ He and his army, whom you despise, is out there. Now go out, if you will, and fight him.”**

Zebul continues to play his cards close to his chest. He does not reveal to Gaal with whom his true allegiance lay. You may wonder whether Gaal suspects that Zebul has betrayed him (actually, Zebul did not betray him, per se, as Zebul did not switch his allegiance to Gaal at any time). However, Gaal was so full of himself that he did not realize, even at this point in time, that Zebul was not behind him.

Zebul may have another reason for playing his cards close to his chest. There is the outside possibility that Gaal might defeat Abimelech. If Zebul is seen as a traitor to Gaal, then he and his small army would be destroyed next. If Gaal does not realize Zebul's intentions or actions, then Zebul would retain his position as head of Shechem, even if Gaal were victorious. Again, since Zebul's character and motivations are well-hidden in this narrative, we have a difficult time, even in retrospect, knowing the end from the beginning, of fully understanding what went on in his head. Don't forget that David expressed a great deal of respect toward the throne of King Saul, despite the fact that Saul abused his position of power and threatened David's life on numerous occasions.

In terms of sentence structure, I would like to have seen Gaal's *mouth* say, rather than *you said*, but I was not the person speaking to Gaal. The second question that Zebul asks does not have an *is* in it; however, the question must begin somehow, so we will use an *is* for that purpose. Then he uses the negative, the words *the people who* and then the 2<sup>nd</sup> person masculine singular, Qal perfect of *mâ`aç* (מָאַץ) [pronounced *maw-AHS*], which means *reject, despise, lightly esteem, refuse*. Strong's #3988 BDB #549. These are the things which Gaal said back in vv. 27–28.

<sup>33</sup> See Lev. 19:26 or Deut. 18:14 for further discussion of this verb.

At the end of this verse we have the *bêyth* preposition and the masculine singular suffix. This would be rendered *against him* or *with him*. *Him* refers to Abimelech. Note how carefully Zebul words himself. We know the score—we know that he called in Abimelech to fight against Gaal. However, he has not said anything to belie that to Gaal; in fact, those who know what Zebul did understand what he is saying, and, Gaal, who doesn't know what he did, thinks that he understands what he is saying.

**And so went out Gaal to faces of supervisors of Shechem and so he fought against Abimelech.**

Judges  
9:39

**So Gaal went out before the face of the aristocracy of Shechem and fought against Abimelech.**

**Then Gaal took his forces out before the leaders of Shechem and he fought against Abimelech.**

The aristocracy of Shechem pretty much just watch this battle, most of them sitting it out. They look to see how Gaal will do against Abimelech. They do not realize that their animosity toward Abimelech is well-known to Abimelech. On the other hand, their lack of participation indicates that they are not loyal to Abimelech and really not much help to Gaal.

**And so pursued him Abimelech and so fled from faces of him and so fell [fatally] wounded many up to an opening of a gate.**

Judges  
9:40

**Then Abimelech pursued him and he fled from before him; therefore, many [fatally] wounded fell up to the entrance of the gate.**

**Then Abimelech pursued Gaal, and Gaal and his men fled before him. Many of them were mortally wounded right at the entrance of the gate.**

Gaal's support from the men of Shechem appears to be quite thin. That is, even though they were against Abimelech, they do not join Gaal in battle (we will see that later in this chapter). Understand that Gaal may have blown into town with a fairly large group, but it was no match for Abimelech and all of his army. What one would think is that Abimelech would come at Gaal from three sides and give him no opportunity to retreat; however, there appear to be quite a number of significant holes in Abimelech's army and apparently Gaal and many of his men were able to escape. Those who fell are called the masculine plural of *châlâl* (לָלָה) [pronounced *chaw-LAWL*], which means *slain, fatally wounded, wounded, pierced*; it is from a verb which means *to bore, to pierce*. BDB lists this as a noun, as does Owen; Gesenius and New Englishman's Concordance as an adjective. It describes the result of someone who has been pierced. Strong's #2491 BDB #319. Merely calling them *wounded* is not strong enough. That is further modified by the masculine plural adjective *ra<sup>b</sup>v* (רַב) [pronounced *rah<sup>b</sup>v*], which means *many, much*. Strong's #7227 BDB #912.

**And so remained Abimelech in the Arumah and so drove out Gaal and his close relatives from a remaining in Shechem.**

Judges  
9:41

**So Abimelech remained in Arumah and he had driven out Gaal and his close relatives from remaining at Shechem.**

**After Abimelech had killed and/or run off Gaal and his men from Shechem, Abimelech returned to Arumah.**

The first verb in this verse is the Qal imperfect of *yâsha<sup>b</sup>v* (יָשַׁב) [pronounced *yaw-SHAH<sup>b</sup>V*] and it means *to remain, to sit, to dwell*. Strong's #3427 BDB #442. What he did to Gaal was the Piel imperfect of *gârash* (גָּרַשׁ) [pronounced *gaw-RASH*] and it means *to cast out, to throw out, to drive out*. Strong's #1644 BDB #176. Abimelech's actions prevented Gaal from living in Shechem. Gaal was in complete and total defeat before Abimelech and he would have been too embarrassed to show his face in Shechem. Apparently, Abimelech returned immediately to Arumah, which apparently is fairly close by. It is possible that Abimelech built this city in honor of himself.

**And so he was from a morrow and so went out the people [into] the field and so they told Abimelech.**

Judges  
9:42

**And so it was the next day and the people went out into the field; and so they told Abimelech.**

**Then, the next day, the people of Shechem went out into the field. Zebul informed Abimelech of this.**

This is a tad bit confusing, so let me give you some other renderings:

*The Emphasized Bible*      And it came to pass on the morrow that the people went forth into the field, —and they told Abimelech.

NASB                              Now it came about the next day, that the people went out to the field, and it was told to Abimelech.

*Young's Lit. Translation*      And it cometh to pass, on the morrow, that the people go out to the field, and they declare *it* to Abimelech,...

So our problem is not really with the translation. Obviously where Abimelech was headquartered, in Arumah, was nearby (much less than day's march away, as he fights the battle that morning and goes back to Arumah that day. We have people going out into the field, and what the problem is here, I don't fully grasp. My guess is that they are carrying on as if nothing happened and they are going out and harvesting their fields with impunity. They have just harvested, perhaps a couple of days ago, their first harvest, and now they went out into the fields as though nothing had happened. Another reasonable explanation is that, at the defeat of Gaal, we have his men being slaughtered at the opening of the city. It is possible that Abimelech did not have the time or the inclination to try to take the city, it being fortified as it was. In other words, he does not seek revenge on the men of Shechem as a matter of pragmatism. However, when he finds out that the gates are wide open the next day and that the people are simply out harvesting their crop, that gives him the opportunity to come right through the gates of the city and to get his revenge on the men of Shechem.

**And so he took the people and so he divided them to three companies and so he laid wait in the field. And so he looked and behold the people coming out from the city and so he rose up against them and so he struck them [down].**

Judges  
9:43

**Then he took the people and divided them into three companies and he laid wait in the field. Then he looked and observed the people coming out from the city so he rose up against them and struck them [down].**

**Abimelech again took his army and he divided them into three companies and again hid out in the field. When he observed the people coming out of the city, he rose up against them and struck them down.**

Whatever the problem was with the people coming out into the field, Abimelech put an immediate stop to it by killing those who came out into the field. And it may not have been that there was a problem. It was possible that the city of Shechem was too well-fortified for Abimelech to simply attack it. Note that Gaal and his men fought with Abimelech outside the city. What Abimelech expected was that the people of Shechem, who obviously had given their hearts over to Gaal, would remain holed up in their city for some time and Abimelech did not want to wage a war against a well-fortified city. However, the men of Shechem opened up the city and went out in the fields even the very next day, as if nothing happened, to continue harvesting their crops. This gave Abimelech the opportunity to quash the rebelliousness of the people of Shechem without having to deal with a long, drawn out siege against the city. Although it is not specifically stated, it would be assumed that Abimelech did not lift up his hand against Zebul or his men, as he remained loyal throughout this ordeal.

And Abimelech and the companies who [were] with him spread out [in hostile array] and so they stood [at] an opening of a gate of the city and two the companies spread out against all who [were] in [the] field and so he struck them [down].

Judges  
9:44

Then Abimelech and the companies who [were] with him spread out [in hostile array] and [one company] stood at the entrance of the gate of the city and the two companies spread out against all who [were] in the field and Shechem he struck them [down].

Abimelech quickly positioned his companies so that one was at the opening of the gate, and that the other two were spread out in the field in hostile array.

We have one verb used twice here—the Qal perfect of *pâshaṭ* (פָּשַׁט) [pronounced *paw-SHAHT*], which means *to spread out [in hostile array]*; as well as *to flay*. Strong's #6584 BDB #832. The separating of Abimelech's men into companies is fully explained here—one company is used to stand at the entrance of the gate, after the opposing army has been lured out onto the battlefield, to prevent them from returning into the city and being under cover there. Also, their presence at the gate of the city kept the city from being closed up so that, once the men in the field had been taken care of, Abimelech could take his men right into the city and tear it all down.

And Abimelech fought against the city all the day the that and so he captured the city and the people who [were] in her, he killed. And so he tore down the city and so he sowed her [with] salt.

Judges  
9:45

And Abimelech fought against the city all that day and captured the city and he killed the people who [were] in it. Then he tore down the city and sowed it [with] salt.

Then Abimelech fought against the city itself all that day and captured the city, killing the people who were inside. Then he tore the city down and sowed it with salt.

Let's just see what some others have done with this verse:

<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	And Abimelech fought against the city all that day, and captured the city, the people also that were therein he slew, —and brake down the city, and sowed it with salt.
NASB	And Abimelech fought against the city all that day, and he captured the city and killed the people who were in it; then he razed the city and sowed it with salt.
<i>Young's Lit. Translation</i>	...and Abimelech hath fought against the city all that day, and captureth the city, and the people who are in it he hath slain, and he breaketh down the city, and soweth it with salt.

The second to the last verb is the Qal imperfect of *nâthats* (נָתַט) [pronounced *naw-THAHTS*], which means *to pull down, to tear down, to break down*. Strong's #5422 BDB #683. You can see how sin can completely destroy a person. This is the very city of his mother, the city which supported him against all the other children of Gideon; and now Abimelech has come into the city in which he was raised and he razes that city; further, he sows the ground with salt, so that nothing else can grow there. However, *The Amplified Bible* considers this to be more symbolic than actual: *This strewing of salt over Shechem was not intended (even if Abimelech had been able to supply enough salt) actually to make the ground unfruitful; but it was a symbol of perpetual desolation, and that Shechem never would be rebuilt. However, such a forecast of a city's fate made by a true prophet of God, or by the Lord Himself, was one thing; but this forecast, symbolized by the wicked usurper Abimelech, was quite another thing. For Shechem was later rebuilt (I Kings 12:25), and so was denounced Jericho (I Kings 16:34). But Edom (Ezek. 35:9), or Tyre (Ezek. 26:3, 14), or Chorazin, or Bethsaida, or Capernaum (Matt. 11:20, 21, 23)). For that these cities, as such, would never be rebuilt permanently was foretold on the authority and by the order of God Himself. "Sky and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away" (Matt. 24:35).*<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> *The Amplified Bible*, The Lockman Foundation; ©1965 by Zondervan Publishing House; p. 302.

Barnes writes: *Expressing by this action his hatred, and his wish, that when utterly destroyed as a city, it might now even be a fruitful field. Salt is the emblem of barrenness.*<sup>35</sup> Related Scripture: Deut. 29:23 Psalm 107:33–34 Jer. 17:6 Zephaniah 2:9. As an aside, this is the only recorded instance in the Bible where a city is sown with salt.

Interestingly enough, we are not told anything about Zebul at this point. He is the one who informed Abimelech of Gaal's seditious behavior and it is reasonable to suppose that he told Abimelech of the people's casual regard for the attack upon Gaal the day prior. We have three possibilities—that Zebul died when Abimelech attacked the first time (recall that he was at the gate with Gaal); this would make someone else the messenger to Abimelech the next day. It is possible that Zebul was taken out in this particular attack on Shechem. Abimelech will again be informed of important classified information (the hiding place of the men of Shechem), which, again, may have been Zebul. Zebul might even be participating in this attack upon Shechem, having a greater loyalty to Abimelech than to Shechem. In any case, we last heard Zebul's name in v. 41 and we will never hear it again. As you recall, I mentioned that Zebul is a reasonable candidate for the writer of this portion of Scripture, which would imply that he was a believer in Jesus Christ. However, we do not hear his name again, making him somewhat of a conundrum.

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## Abimelech Attacks and Destroys the Leaders of Shechem

**And so heard all supervisors of a tower of Shechem and so they went into an underground stronghold of El-berith.**

Judges  
9:46

**All the aristocracy of the tower of Shechem heard and they went into an underground stronghold of El-berith.**

**Immediately upon hearing of the invasion by Abimelech, the leaders of Shechem moved quickly into the underground stronghold of El-berith.**

Apparently, off in the mountains, there was some sort of a tower of worship where the leaders of Shechem indulged in demon worship. However, they fled to a shelter within the city limits. They obviously saw no reason to go down with the ship. The people involved here are known by the masculine plural construct of the noun *ba'ălêy* (בְּעֵלַי) [pronounced *bah-uh-LAY* or *bah-guh-LAY*], which means *supervisors, aristocracy, leaders, citizens, inhabitants*. Obviously, there is some leadership implied here, although I use that term advisedly in this case. Strong's #1181 BDB #127. They are the supervisors of the masculine singular construct of *mig'dâl* (מִגְדָּל) [pronounced *mihg<sup>e</sup>-DAWL*], which means *tower*.<sup>36</sup> Strong's #4026 BDB #153. These supervisors or decision-makers for the city were aware of all that was going down and all that was to occur, so where they went to is called a masculine singular construct of *ts'rîyach* (צִרְיָח) [pronounced *tz<sup>e</sup>-REE-akh*], which means *underground chamber, excavation, stronghold, basement*. It is only found a handful of times in Scripture (Judges 9:46, 49 I Sam. 13:6\*), so we are making educated guesses about the meaning. Strong's #6877 BDB #863. What we possibly have here (and this would make the most sense), is an underground chamber inside the city, which would be safe from the attack of Abimelech. This was their bomb shelter/in-town place of demon worship. El-berith and the tower (next verse) both refer to different places of demon worship, the first one outside the town of Shechem and the second one in the town of Shechem.

**And so was declared to Abimelech that gathered together all of [the] supervisors of a tower of Shechem.**

Judges  
9:47

**And to Abimelech was declared that the aristocracy of the tower of Shechem were gathered together.**

**Abimelech was just as quickly informed that the leaders of the tower of Shechem had gathered themselves together in the underground stronghold.**

<sup>35</sup> *Barnes' Notes, Volume 2*, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 442.

<sup>36</sup> Apparently, the dagesh in the daleph is a dagesh lene rather than a dagesh forte, although it does not follow the rules.

We have the Hophal imperfect of *nâgad* (נָגַד) [pronounced *naw-GAHD*], which means *to make conspicuous, to make known, to expound, to declare, to inform*. The Hophal is the passive of the Hiphil (causative stem). It is the rarest of the seven stems. It is simply the causative passive stem. Strong's #5046 BDB #616. Abimelech, after this successful attack upon this city, was informed that the leaders of all of this conspiracy, his former supporters, were all holed up in the underground chamber/demon worship center of the city. When the city was collapsed, it was not easily apparent that this place even existed. However, someone knew, and this information was made known to Abimelech.

**And so went up Abimelech [to] a mountain of Zalmon, he and all the people who [were] with him. And so took Abimelech the axes in his hand and so he cut down a hedge of trees. And so he lifted her up and so he laid [her] upon his shoulder. And so he said unto the people who [were] with him, "What [do] you see I have done? Hasten, do as I [have done]."**

Judges  
9:48

**And so Abimelech went up [to] mount Zalmon, he and all the people who [were] with him. And Abimelech took the axes in his hand and he cut down a hedge of trees. Then he lifted it up and laid it on his shoulder. Then he said to the people who [were] with him, "What you have seen [that] I have done—hasten, do as I [have done]."**

**So then Abimelech and his men went up to Mount Zalmon and Abimelech quietly cut down a hedge of trees. Then he lifted up the firewood and laid it on his should. Then he said to the people who were with him, "Quickly, do as I have just done."**

Although we have several sentences in v. 48, it is all gathered together into one verse, for whatever reason (it is about the length of the sum of the previous three verses). Mount Zalmon is mentioned only here; and Zalmon is mentioned by itself in Psalm 68:14. ZPEB refers to it as probably a peak of Gerizim; I would think it might be a prominent foothill of Gerizim. Barnes suggests that it is the same as Ebal, which would be the most poetic, as it was from Ebal that Joshua's people were to read the cursings. Abimelech knows the area and knows where he can find some excellent brush for starting a fire. He takes the soldiers who are with him to this nearby hill and he hauls out the masculine plural of *qar<sup>e</sup>dôm* (קָרְדִּים) [pronounced *kahr<sup>e</sup>-DOHM*], which is a double sided hoe; one side can be used for apparently digging or hoeing and the other for chopping wood. Strong's #7134 BDB #899. The plural here means that everyone picked up an ax-hoe, although it is Abimelech who is spoken of as taking an ax-hoe.

What he cuts down is the feminine singular construct of *sôwkâh* (שׁוֹכָה) [pronounced *soh-KAW*], which means *hedge, branch*. Strong's #7754 BDB #962. I mention this, although this noun only appears here and in the next verse (more or less); however, its verbal cognate is found in Job 1:10. What is being cut down is the masculine plural of *'êts* (עֵץ) [pronounced *gayts*], which means *tree, wood*. Strong's #6086 BDB #781. Apparently this is a group of dry trees and Abimelech is cutting down a small portion of one of them. The *her* referred to is the branch or hedge of the trees (which is in the masculine gender).

Then, when Abimelech speaks, we have the interrogative particle *mâh* (מָה) [pronounced *maw*], which means *what, how*. Here, it is not used to introduce a question, but almost as a pronoun, meaning *what*. Strong's #4100 BDB #552. This is followed by *you have seen, I have done*; we might better render this *what you have seen me do*.

We have the Qal imperative of *mâchar* (מָחַר) [pronounced *maw-KHAHR*], which means *to hasten, to hurry*. Strong's #4116 BDB #554. He also throws in the Qal imperative of *to do*. This is an interesting way of leading his men—he hauls them all up, apparently almost wordlessly, to a nearby hill, and they watch him cut down some brush or small branches. Then he tells them to do likewise. You may wonder why he has chosen to do things this way; however, it is apparent to Shechem that there is a leak in his security. Therefore, he does not give the order for everyone to go up on this hill and to cut down some brush, as someone may figure out what he has planned and attempt to warn the leaders of the town formerly known as Shechem. So, without a word, they all go to this

hill, he cuts down some portion of a tree or some brush; then he tells them to do likewise. Since everyone is there on the hill, it would be rather apparent if one person suddenly left to return to the trashed city of Shechem.

And so cut down also all the people a man his hedge, and so they went after Abimelech and so put [it] against the stronghold and so they burn by them a stronghold in fire and so died also all of [the] men of a tower of Shechem—about a thousand—man and woman.

Judges  
9:49

So all the people also cut each his hedge and they followed after Abimelech and placed [it] against the underground chamber. Then they burn by them the underground chamber with fire so [that] all the men of the tower of Shechem—about a thousand men and women—also died.

Every person cut down some wood for fire kindling and they followed Abimelech and placed their kindling against the top of the underground chamber. Then they set fire to the kindling so that the entire underground chamber caught fire, causing all of the people of the tower of Shechem to be burned alive (there were a thousand casualties of both men and women).

In this verse we have the three of the primary uses of the noun *ʿiysh* (עִישׁ) [pronounced *eesh*], which means *man*. It can be used to mean *each, everyone*, as it does in the beginning of this verse. It can refer to people in general, without reference to gender, as it does in the midst of this verse; and it can refer to *men* by gender, distinguishing them from *women*, which is what we find at the end of this verse. Strong's #376 BDB #35.

Recall that we do not know exactly what the noun *ts<sup>e</sup>rīyach* (צִרְיָח) [pronounced *tz<sup>e</sup>-REE-akh*] means; we have guessed it means *underground chamber, excavation, stronghold*. Strong's #6877 BDB #863. My theory is that you have a lot of homes and offices built out of brick and mud, not exactly subject to fire (which is why this city was torn down rather than set fire to). However, an underground stronghold chamber was built—apparently quite a large one (this was more than a room; it was an underground fortress, apparently). Wood would be required to hold up wood, upon which dirt or other structures could be placed. Again, I am only theorizing. However, this would be why the entire town could have been torn down, and yet this structure still remained. The other possibility, of course, is that this structure was outside of the city and was not torn down when the city was; it remained standing and rather conspicuous. In either case, Abimelech was a former resident of Shechem; he had partied with the men of Shechem at this hall of demon worship, and was well aware of where it was.

The preposition found with *ts<sup>e</sup>rīyach* is *ʿal* (עַל) [pronounced *ahl*], which means *upon, against, above, by, beside*. Strong's #5920, #5921 BDB #752. So, unfortunately, although this could have helped us with the location of the *underground chamber* (i.e., is it even underground in the first place?), it does not. What is clear is its tremendous size. A thousand people from the city, who were apparently the leaders and decision-makers of the city, all hid here, along with whatever women they could find, and they were able to fit 1000 people in the stronghold. God uses the wrath of man to praise him (Psalm 76:10); He took out both the evil men of Shechem and their place of worship. In doing so, He literally fulfilled the words of Jotham: “A fire will come out from Abimelech and it will consume the men of Shechem—even the house of Millo.” (Judges 9:20b).

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## Abimelech Is Defeated in Battle in Disgrace, the Fatal Blow Being Delivered by a Woman

And so went Abimelech unto Thebez and so he encamped against Thebez and so he captured her.

Judges  
9:50

And so went Abimelech unto Thebez and he encamped against Thebez and he captured it.

Sometime later, Abimelech went to Thebez, a city that he then attacked and captured.

This is what is known as the rest of the story. Shechem is gone, completely destroyed by Abimelech, along with all of the men of Shechem who first raised him up and then rebelled against him. However, we follow Abimelech to Thebez, which is a fortified city in the territory of Manasseh, about 10 miles northeast of Nablus and north-east of Shechem along the road to Beth-shan.<sup>37</sup> We do not know exactly why Abimelech is attacking Thebes, although it is suggested that they too were in rebellion against his rulership. Barnes suggests that they had joined the men of Shechem in their rebellion. This would make sense—that Abimelech had gotten into a *mopping up mode* and was taking care of the areas who lacked loyalty to him. These would be examples to the rest of those under his rule.

**And a tower of strength was in a midst of the city and so fled there all the men and the women and all the supervisors of the city. And so they shut in them and so they went up upon a roof of the tower.**

Judges  
9:51

**And [there was] a strong tower in the midst of the city; therefore, all the men, the women and all of the aristocracy of the city fled there. Then they shut [it up] behind them and went up to the roof of the tower.**

**In the middle of the city of Thebez was a strong high tower, into which all of the men and women of the city fled. They shut up the door behind them and then went to the roof of the tower.**

What they fled to is the masculine singular noun mig<sup>o</sup>dâl (מִגְדָּל) [pronounced *mihg<sup>o</sup>-DAWL*], which means *tower*. Strong's #4026 BDB #153. These towers were apparently quite strong and almost indestructible and the last line of defense of any city. They were apparently safe enough from the roof to be able to look down below. My thinking is that this occurred immediately after the incident in Shechem as they do not realize how vulnerable they were to be simply burned down. Either their town was surrounded or they thought that Abimelech would not destroy a holy place (even though it was a heathen holy place).

**And so came Abimelech to the tower and so he fought against him and so he drew near to the opening of the tower to burn him in the fire.**

Judges  
9:52

**So Abimelech came to the tower and fought against it. Then he drew near to the entrance of the tower, to burn it with fire.**

**Abimelech approached the tower and fought against it, and drew closer to it for the purpose of setting the tower on fire.**

Apparently many of the cities of Israel had these towers, although they were not necessarily built by the Israelites. Recall from the book of Joshua that Israel inherited many cities which were already built. Now, simple common sense would tell anyone that if they got close to the tower, than the people at the top would throw anything in order to move them away. I picture Abimelech as being a brash young man, possibly not even thirty, whose mortality is not quite real to him. After all, he is the ruler of Israel and a survivor of several battles. That he might be killed does not seem to even occur to him.

**And so threw a woman, one, a piece of round (millstone) upon a head of Abimelech and so she [caused to] crushed his skull.**

Judges  
9:53

**Then a certain woman threw a piece of millstone on the head of Abimelech and it [caused to] crushed his skull.**

**Suddenly, a woman threw a piece of millstone down on the head of Abimelech and it crushed his skull.**

The woman here is modified by the numeral *ʿechâd* (אֶחָד) [pronounced *eh-KHAWD*], which has a variety of meanings, the chief being *one*. However, it is also used in the sense of a *certain* woman or *one* woman (meaning, essentially, the same thing). It refers to a particular, but unidentified person. Strong's #259 BDB #25. What the

<sup>37</sup> As usual, all these brief summaries are taken from *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; ©1976; Vol. 5, p. 717 and *The New Bible Dictionary*; editor J. D. Douglas; ©Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962; ©by W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; p. 1270.

woman tossed out was the feminine construct of pelach (נִלְחָ) [pronounced *PEH-lahkh*], which means *millstone, cleavage* (according to BDB), although the KJV consistently renders this with the word *piece*. Gesenius calls it either *a piece cut off* or *a mill-stone*. Strong's #6400 BDB #812. The accompanying noun is the masculine singular of reche<sup>bv</sup> (רֶכֶב) [pronounced *REH-khe<sup>bv</sup>*], which means *chariot, mill-stone, rider*. These may seem like very divergent concepts, however, they are all related to the wheel. A person might refer to his car as *my wheels*; their circular objects would also be given a similar name. Context makes it easy to distinguish the two different meanings. If we wanted consistency, we might want to render it *round*. Strong's #7393 BDB #939. This was the upper stone of a millstone, the one used for grinding. The grinding of the grain was generally considered to be a very menial task and something which free men generally did not do (Ex. 11:5 Judges 16:21). This was a task which belonged to women, slaves and animals.

The final verb of this verse is the Hiphil imperfect of râtsats (רָצַץ) [pronounced *raw-TSAHTS*], which means *to crush*. Strong's #7533 BDB #954. It is a tough call whether the woman or the millstone is the subject of the verb; however, the result was the same. Abimelech suffered from what he expected was a terminal concussion. As the Rabbis put it: *he that had slaughtered his brothers upon a stone, was killed by a stone.*<sup>38</sup>

The veracity of this passage (and therefore, of the book of the Judges) is attested to by Joab, one of King David's generals. When he was ordered to place Uriah the Hittite close to front of the battle by David, he sent a messenger to David to report on the results. If David said, *“Why did you go so near to the city to fight? Did you know that they would shoot from the wall? Who struck down Abimelech ben Jerubbasheth? Did not a woman throw an upper millstone on him from the wall so that he died at Thebez? Why did you go so near the wall?”* (II Sam. 11:20b–21a). Then the messenger was to say, *“Your servant, Uriah the Hittite, is also dead.”* (II Sam. 11:21c).

**And so he called quickly unto the young man bearing his manufactured goods and so said to him, “Draw your sword and kill me, lest say concerning me a woman killed him.” And so thrust through him his young man and so he died.**

Judges  
9:54

**Then he called quickly to the young man bearing his implements and he said to him, “Draw your sword and kill me, lest they say concerning me, “A woman killed him.’ ” So his young man thrust through him and he died.**

**Then Abimelech called quickly to his armor bearer, saying, “Draw out your sword and kill me, so that it is not said that a woman has killed me.” Therefore, the young man thrust Abimelech through with a sword and he died.**

What the young man was bearing was the masculine plural of k<sup>o</sup>lîy (כֹּלִי) [pronounced *k<sup>o</sup>lee*], which is an all-purpose word standing for anything which has been finished, made or produced. It could be translated *an article, utensil, vessel, object, stuff, load, baggage, implement, apparatus, weapon, furniture, receptacle*. Therefore, it can be rendered *accessories, articles, artifacts, instruments, equipment, manufactured goods*. Strong's #3627 BDB #479.

Not all soldiers had armor bearers; in fact, few soldiers had much armor apart from a sword or a bow. A fully-armed soldier would have *a bronze helmet, a coat of mail and...protective pieces...for his legs, with a bronze javelin...and...a spear made partly of wood and partly of iron.*<sup>39</sup> He also wore a belt of some sort and carried a large shield. We get this description of Goliath in I Sam. 17:5–7, 41, 51. This complete set of armor would not be owned by citizen soldiers who often provided their own weapons. However, it would be expected that the king and his generals would all have a full set of armor, which would consist of at least a shield and a spear. Therefore, he would require someone to carry his shield until he went into actual battle and needed it. What his young man did was the Qal imperfect of the verb dâqar (דָּקַר) [pronounced *daw-CAHR*], which means *to pierce, to pierce through*. Strong's #1856 BDB #201. It is amazing how affected by pride Abimelech is, even facing death. Most men would have wanted to have been kept alive no matter what; however, Abimelech knew that this was a fatal wound and he

<sup>38</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *Bible History Old Testament*; ©1995 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; p. 372.

<sup>39</sup> *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; ©1976; Vol. 1, p. 312.

did not want to be known as one who was killed by a woman in battle. However, despite this action, he was still seen centuries later as the king who was killed by a woman (II Sam. 11:20–21).

The book of Judges is a treatise of women's liberation. We have Deborah going into battle with Barak (Judges 4–5; in fact, Barak would not go into battle without her); the evil Sisera was killed by Jael, Heber's wife (Judges 4:17–21); here, an unnamed woman kills Abimelech and ends the revolution; and, finally, at the end of this book, Delilah, a whore, will make a fool out of Samson (Judges 16). It just so happens that this period of women's liberation is also the lowest point thus far in the history of Israel.

We have a similar ending to the life of King Saul. He was at war with the Philistines. He was retreating with his sons and his sons were first killed, and then he was mortally wounded by archers. He did not want to die at the hands of some uncircumcised Philistines so he asked his own armor bearer to kill him. When the boy would not do so, Saul fell on his own sword; then his armor bearer did likewise (I Sam. 31).

**And so saw men of Israel that died Abimelech, and so they departed a man to his home.**

Judges  
9:55

**And the men of Israel saw that Abimelech had died, so they departed, [each] man, to his home.**

**When the men of Israel saw that Abimelech had died, each one departed and returned home.**

This is the amazing effect that a ruler has upon the people under him. We are in the midst of a war—the siege of a city. However, at the death of Abimelech, the king of Israel, the fighting is suddenly concluded and both his army and the men of the city return to their places.

**And so [caused to] return God a crime of Abimelech which he did to his father to kill seventy his brothers.**

Judges  
9:56

**So God [caused to] return the crime of Abimelech which he did to his father to kill his seventy brothers;**

**In conclusion, this is how God caused the crime of Abimelech against his father and his seventy brothers to return and fall upon him;**

The first verb in this verse is the Hiphil imperfect of *shûw*<sup>lv</sup> (שׁוּב) [pronounced *shoo<sup>b</sup>v*]; which means *to return, to turn, to reminisce, to restore something, to bring back something, to recover something, to make restitution*. In the Hiphil (the causative) stem, it can mean *to be caused to return* (II Sam. 19:11 II Chron. 6:25), *to bring* (Gen. 14:16 28:15), *to be caused to turn back mentally, reminisce* (Deut. 30:1) *to return something, to restore, to bring back, to regain, to recover, to make restitution* (Neh. 5:11 Prov. 24:12 Lam. 3:64), *reconsider, think again* (Job 6:29), or *to be caused to return* (Psalm 78:38). Strong's #7725 BDB #996.

Job himself had said, “*Is it not calamity to the unjust and disaster to those who work iniquity?*” (Job 31:3). Solomon also wrote: *His own iniquities will capture the wicked and he will be held with the cords of his sin. He will die for lack of instruction and in the greatness of his folly, he will go astray* (Prov. 5:22–23). No one ever gets away with anything. You will spend much of your life upset about the sins of unbelievers (particularly when leveled against you) and the sins of believers as well. So that you don't become too disenchanting, God will see that all are repaid. What that unbeliever did to you is nothing compared to the pain and suffering that he will suffer for ten seconds in the Lake of Fire. God is in control of all events. *As Israel's true King, He brought Abimelech's wickedness to a quick and shameful end.*<sup>40</sup>

**And all the evil of men of Shechem returned God in their head. And so unto them came a curse of Jotham ben Jerubbaal.**

Judges  
9:57

**and God returned all the evil of the men of Shechem against their head. The curse of Jotham ben Jerubbaal had come to them.**

<sup>40</sup> The NIV Study Bible; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 343.

**and God returned all of the evil deeds of the men of Shechem back upon them. The curse of Jotham son of Jerubbaal was fulfilled.**

In this verse, we have *shûw<sup>b</sup>* (שׁוּב) [pronounced *shoo<sup>b</sup>*] again, but in the Hiphil perfect, meaning that the returning of evil for evil was an accomplished act. The mention again of Jotham makes me think that he would have been a likely person to compile this information. Because Abimelech killed the balance of his brothers and because he was in hiding, he obviously could not have been an eyewitness to many of the events which took place. God's vengeance is certain. **And He has brought back their wickedness upon them and He will destroy them in their evil. Jehovah our God will destroy them** (Psalm 94:23).

And so we end one of the most unusual chapters of the Bible. It is rare that many of the characters are unbelievers, as we have here. Shechem was one of the greatest cities of Old Testament Israel, but we will hear little about it after this time. Although smashed to the ground, it will be mentioned again in I Kings 12:1–19 II Chron. 10:1 Jer. 41:1 Hosea 6:9 (as well as in twin Psalms 60:6 108:7), meaning that it was rebuilt again. However, it will never be the great city that it once was. Jotham disappeared into history; Zebul disappeared into history. We do not know their ends. Even Zebul's character was never completely clear in the chapter; and, although he seems to be the best bet to be the author of this chapter (he was at more of the events than anyone else); we do not know if he was even a believer, nor do we even know if he is still alive at this point in time. And, at the end, Abimelech had his skull crushed by a millstone borne by a woman. The men of Shechem were burned alive.

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1. Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 2, p. 266. It always makes me feel better when I end up agreeing with the *big boys*.