

Judges Chapter 9 Continued

Judges 9:22 "When Abimelech had reigned three years over Israel,"

The word used for “reigned” here refers to a prince or commander rather than a true king.

The author of Judges does not dignify Abimelech with the verb that is normally used for kings because God had not anointed him.

In the last lesson, we saw that Abimelech (son of Gideon by his servant girl), killed 70 of his half-brothers except for Jotham.

This lesson begins three years after Abimelech had been made ruler over Israel.

Judges 9:23 "Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech:"

“God sent an evil spirit”:

In the course of God’s providence, there appeared jealousy, distrust, and hate.

God allowed it to work as punishment for the idolatry and mass murder.

It was either an evil spirit, a demon of Satan, or simply an evil attitude or disposition “sent” by God to cause strife between the two factions.

This was a spirit similar to the one God would send to trouble Saul (1 Sam. 16:14-16).

Jotham had stood over the city of Shechem on the mountain side, and proclaimed this very thing earlier.

God heard and saw all of that, and is now bringing it about.

We see that Abimelech, and the very men who put him in power, are dealing treacherously with each other.

Judges 9:24 "That the cruelty [done] to the threescore and ten sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood be laid upon Abimelech their brother, which slew them; and upon the men of Shechem, which aided him in the killing of his brethren."

That vengeance might come on the authors of it.

So things were ordered in Providence that this might come to pass.

"And their blood be laid upon Abimelech their brother, which slew them":

Be charged to his account, and he suffer for shedding it.

"And upon the men of Shechem, which aided him in the killing of his brethren":

By giving him money to hire men to go with him to do it.

And perhaps by words encouraging the assassins, and who might be of the city of Shechem.

We remember that Abimelech hired some ruthless people to help him kill his brothers.

We see from this that Shechem does not want to be accounted guilty of the murder of the brothers of Abimelech.

They want Abimelech and those he hired, to be held accountable for the crime.

Judges 9:25 "And the men of Shechem set liers in wait for him in the top of the mountains, and they robbed all that came along that way by them: and it was told Abimelech."

Of Ebal and Gerizim, which were near Shechem, by the way of which he passed when he came to that city.

And these they set there, either to slay him, or to seize his person, and bring him to them.

"And they robbed all that came along that way by them":

That belonged to Abimelech and others also.

And this they did to show their contempt of his government, and that they were no longer under it.

And every man did what was right in his own eyes, as if they had no governor over them.

Though some think this was done to draw him there to secure his subjects from such rapine and violence, that they might have an opportunity to lay hold upon him.

Or this they did on purpose to begin a civil war.

"And it was told Abimelech":

That they lay in wait for him, and so he kept himself from them.

We see from this action; they are trying to defame Abimelech.

They have made the road to Shechem unsafe for travelers.

Word was carried to Abimelech of this so that he would come out and check on the matter.

They are trying to trap him.

Verses 26-45

A failed coup.

Judges 9:26 "And Gaal the son of Ebed came with his brethren, and went over to Shechem: and the men of Shechem put their confidence in him."

Who this Gaal was, and who his brethren, and from whence he came, and the place he went over, are all uncertain.

Jarchi thinks he was a Gentile, and it looks, by some speeches of his afterwards, as if he was a descendant of Hamor, prince of Shechem.

In the times of Jacob, who, since the expulsion of the Canaanites, his family had retired to some distant parts.

But hearing of a difference between Abimelech and the Shechemites, Gaal, with some of the family, came over, perhaps over Jordan, to make what advantage he could of it.

"And the men of Shechem put their confidence in him":

Freely told him their mind and the ill opinion they had of Abimelech, and what was their design against him.

And he assuring them he would take their part, and defend them to the uttermost.

They depended on him, and therefore very securely went about their business in the fields, as follows.

There is very little known about this Gaal.

He seems to be an unknown.

He comes forward to lead the men of Shechem against Abimelech.

They put their confidence in him.

Judges 9:27 "And they went out into the fields, and gathered their vineyards, and trode [the grapes], and made merry, and went into the house of their god, and did eat and drink, and cursed Abimelech."

Before they kept within the city, and dared not stir out to gather in the vintage, the time being come, for fear of the troops of Abimelech.

For their lying in wait for him, and the robberies committed being made known to him, he had prepared to raise some forces.

And attack them, of which they had information.

But now being encouraged with the protection of Gaal, they ventured out to gather their grapes in their vineyards without fear.

"And trode the grapes, and made merry":

Sung songs and danced, as was usual at the ingathering of the fruits of the earth, and treading the winepress (Isa. 16:10).

Though Abendana thinks this joy and merriment were made to their idol.

To whom they gave the praise of their vintage, they should have done to the true God, and what follows may seem to confirm it.

"And they went into the house of their god":

The temple of Baal-berith (Judges 9:5).

"And did eat and drink":

In their idol temple, as was the manner of idolaters to do, bringing their firstfruits to rejoice, and make glad with.

"And cursed Abimelech":

Wished they had never seen him and known him.

Hoped they should be rid of him in a little time, and that he would meet with his deserved disgrace and punishment.

And this they did in that very temple from whence they had taken money to assist him in making way for his government of them.

So fickle and changeable were they.

The men of Shechem gathered their grapes, made fermented wine and had a drunken party.

They worshipped Baal.

They were drunk in the temple of Baal, and they cursed Abimelech in this evil temple.

Judges 9:28 "And Gaal the son of Ebed said, Who [is] Abimelech, and who [is] Shechem, that we should serve him? [is] not [he] the son of Jerubbaal? and Zebul his officer? serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem: for why should we serve him?"

As they were then making merry, drinking and carousing.

"Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should serve him?"

Who is this Abimelech the Shechemite?

Or who is he more than Shechem, the old prince of this place, long ago dispossessed of it?

The one is no better than the other, nor has a better title to rule and government than the other, that we should serve him.

Nay, of the two, the descendants of the old Shechem have the best title.

"Is not he the son of Jerubbaal?"

That pleaded against Baal, and threw down his altar, the god you now serve.

"And Zebul his officer?"

Has he not set him over you?

Not content to rule you himself, he has set up another as an officer over you under him.

And thus, you are like to be governed in a tyrannical manner, and oppressed.

"Serve the men of Hamor":

For why should we serve him?"

That is, rather serve them than him.

Which was speaking very contemptuously of his government, preferring the descendants of Hamor, the old Canaanites prince, that ruled in this place, to Abimelech.

And if Gaal was a descendant of his, he spoke in good earnest, and thought this a proper opportunity to get the government of the city restored to him and his family.

Since their old religion and idolatry were established among them.

And if they had received the one, why not the other?

In the Scripture above, it appears that Shechem is speaking of Abimelech who represented Shechem at this time.

Gaal is puffed up with pride and believes he can overpower Abimelech and all of his followers, and take Shechem for himself.

Some of the people have agreed to help Gaal against Abimelech.

He tries to turn the people against Abimelech by saying he is the son of Jerubbaal who is of Manasseh.

He is trying to start the old battle up between Manasseh's tribe and Ephraim's tribe.

He claims that Abimelech is really of the tribe of Manasseh.

Zebul was Abimelech's officer.

He is saying, what right does he have to rule you?

He is claiming rights through Hamor, who he says founded Shechem.

Judges 9:29 "And would to God this people were under my hand! then would I remove Abimelech. And he said to Abimelech, Increase thine army, and come out."

Or government, that I were but the ruler of their city, and general of their forces.

"Then would I remove Abimelech":

From his kingly office, and rid Shechem of him.

And all the country round about, and indeed remove him out of the world.

"And he said to Abimelech":

As if he was present, in a hectoring and blustering manner.

Or he said what follows to his officer under him that represented him.

Or he sent a messenger to him, saying.

"Increase thine army, and come out":

Bidding him defiance, challenging him to come into the open field and fight him.

And bring as many forces along with him as he could or would, not doubting but he should be a match for him.

And the men of Shechem would see they had nothing to fear from him, having such a man as Gaal at the head of them.

This he said to engage the Shechemites to make him their ruler.

He is bragging that he can defeat Abimelech and his army.

Judges 9:30 "And when Zebul the ruler of the city heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was kindled."

Whom Abimelech had placed there under him had heard;

"The words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was kindled":

Because he spoke slightly of him, and wished to have his place.

Perhaps before Zebul was inclined to be on the side of the Shechemites against Abimelech, or at least pretending that he was.

But now, being incensed at the words of Gaal, determined to take the side of Abimelech, and let him know how things were carrying on against him.

Judges 9:31 "And he sent messengers unto Abimelech privily, saying, Behold, Gaal the son of Ebed and his brethren be come to Shechem; and, behold, they fortify the city against thee."

In a secret manner, unknown to Gaal and the men of Shechem.

Or "craftily", as Jarchi and Kimchi interpret it.

Still pretending, notwithstanding his anger, to be in the interest of Gaal, and the men of Shechem, as appears indeed afterwards by a show of friendliness with Gaal (Judges 9:36).

Though, according to Joseph Kimchi and Ben Gersom, Thormah is the name of the place where Abimelech was, the same with Arumah (Judges 9:41).

And the sense is that he sent messengers to Abimelech at Thormah or Arumah.

"Saying, Gaal the son of Ebed and his brethren be come to Shechem":

A family that Abimelech well knew, and if they were of the race of the old Canaanites, he would easily perceive their design.

"And, behold, they fortify the city against thee":

By repairing its fortifications, or adding new works; or "besiege" it.

Which, as that is done by placing an army around it without, that none can come out of it.

So by setting a watch within, and upon the walls, and at the gates of it, that none can come in, which is here meant.

Though some interpret it of their design to besiege the city Thormah, where Abimelech was, of which he gives him notice.

Or rather they set the city against thee, make the inhabitants thine enemies.

Zebul was governor of the city under Abimelech.

Zebul somehow found a way to slip out messengers to Abimelech, to warn him that the city was fortified against him.

Judges 9:32 "Now therefore up by night, thou and the people that [is] with thee, and lie in wait in the field:"

The night following, that no time might be lost.

"And the people that is with thee":

The troops he had with him.

Not only such he had for his own guards, but what he had been raising.

Having intelligence before this of the revolt of the Shechemites from him.

"And lie in wait in the field":

He thought it most advisable for him to march with the forces he had, from the place where he was in the night, and less liable to be discovered.

And remain in the fields of Shechem till morning, and then come upon Shechemites before they were aware, and surprise them.

Judges 9:33 "And it shall be, [that] in the morning, as soon as the sun is up, thou shalt rise early, and set upon the city: and, behold, [when] he and the people that [is] with him come out against thee, then mayest thou do to them as thou shalt find occasion."

For being with his forces advanced near to it by a march in the night, he would be able by sunrise to attack the city before the inhabitants were up to defend it, and so surprise them.

"And, behold, when he and the people that is with him come out against thee":

That is, Gaul, and the men with him, as many as he has for a surprise or can get together.

"Then mayest thou do to them as thou shalt find occasion":

As the situation of things would direct him.

And he, in his wisdom, and according to his ability, and as opportunity offered, would see plainly what was fit and right to be done.

Zebul did not pretend to advise him further, but left the rest to his discretion, as things should appear to him.

He suggests that Abimelech come and hide very near the city during the night, so he can attack early in the morning.

They are assuming that Gaal and his followers will come out of the city to fight Abimelech.

Judges 9:34 "And Abimelech rose up, and all the people that [were] with him, by night, and they laid wait against Shechem in four companies."

According to the advice of Zebul.

"And they laid wait against Shechem in four companies":

He divided his army into four parts, which he placed on the four sides of the city, at some distance from it.

To act as they should have opportunity, to find ways and means of getting into it on either quarter.

We see that Abimelech took the suggestion of his governor in this.

He had scattered his men in 4 companies to surround the city.

Judges 9:35 "And Gaal the son of Ebed went out, and stood in the entering of the gate of the city: and Abimelech rose up, and the people that [were] with him, from lying in wait."

He rose up early that morning, being a man of vigilance and activity, and perhaps had some intelligence of the preparations of Abimelech, his design against the city, though he did not expect he was so near at hand.

"And stood in the entering of the gate of the city":

To see whether the guards were on their duty within, and whether he could observe anything of any approaching danger.

"And Abimelech rose up, and the people that were with him, from lying in wait":

Came out of their ambush, and appeared just as Gaul was at the gate.

Judges 9:36 "And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, Behold, there come people down from the top of the mountains. And Zebul said unto him, Thou seest the shadow of the mountains as [if they were] men."

Who was up as early, and came to the gate of the city, to see how things went.

And whether there was any appearance of Abimelech and his forces, and whether any opportunity offered to let him into the city.

And it seems as if he came and stood by Gaul, and appeared friendly with him.

"Behold, there come people down from the top of the mountains":

The mountains of Ebal and Gerizim, which were near to Shechem.

"And Zebul said unto him, thou seest the shadow of the mountains, as if they were men":

Either deriding him, as being just out of his bed, and his eyes scarce open, that he could not discern shadows from men.

Or rather as being of such a timorous spirit, that he was afraid of shadows.

Or else he said this, putting on an air of seriousness, as if he really believed this to be the case, on purpose to deceive him.

And keep him from talking about them, while Abimelech and his men made further advances before Gaul could make any preparation to meet them.

This is the very first that Gaal had known of this, because he stood in the open in the gate.

His quick eye saw the men approaching the city.

Zebul tried to tell him he was seeing shadows, and not men.

Judges 9:37 "And Gaal spake again and said, See there come people down by the middle of the land, and another company come along by the plain of Me-onenim."

"The plain of Me-onenim":

This was regarded superstitiously where mystical ceremonies and soothsaying were done.

Gaal continues to look, and sees the men separated into companies against the city.

Judges 9:38 " Then said Zebul unto him, Where [is] now thy mouth, wherewith thou saidst, Who [is] Abimelech, that we should serve him? [is] not this the people that thou hast despised? go out, I pray now, and fight with them."

Not being able to put him off any longer, and willing to take the opportunity to upbraid him with what he had said.

"Where is now thy mouth, wherewith thou saidst, who is Abimelech, that we should serve him?"

Dare thou say the same thou hast done, and utter the contemptuous language concerning Abimelech, asking who he was, that he should be served?"

Here he is, speak to his face.

What has become of those boasts and brags, and great swelling words?

What would you do if you had the command of this city?

"Is not this the people that thou hast despised?"

As small and insignificant, bidding Abimelech increase his army, and come out and fight.

"Go out, I pray now, and fight with them":

And show yourself to be a man of courage, and not a mere blusterer.

A man that can use his sword as well as his tongue.

Zebul tries to coax Gaal into leaving the city to fight Abimelech in the field, by reminding him of the proud statements he had made against these people.

He is saying, "If your statements are true, show us how brave you are."

Judges 9:39 "And Gaal went out before the men of Shechem, and fought with Abimelech."

At the head of them, to meet Abimelech, having gathered together as many, and put them in as good order, as he could, as the time would permit.

"And fought with Abimelech":

Outside the city.

Judges 9:40 "And Abimelech chased him, and he fled before him, and many were overthrown [and] wounded, [even] unto the entering of the gate."

Abimelech got the better of him in the battle, and obliged him to give way, and he pursued him closely as he was fleeing.

"And many were overthrown and wounded, even unto the entering of the gate":

Or "they fell wounded", or slain, as the Targum.

That is, many were killed and wounded, as in the battle, so in the pursuit, and lay all the way to the entrance into the gate of the city.

To which Gaal, and the men of Shechem, made for their safety, and got in.

He did just as Zebul coaxed him into doing.

Abimelech was ready for him, and put his men to flight.

Those who were not killed or wounded, ran back into the city for safety.

Judges 9:41 "And Abimelech dwelt at Arumah: and Zebul thrust out Gaal and his brethren, that they should not dwell in Shechem."

Called also Yarima as Jerom says, and in his time called Remphtis; which it seems to be not far from Shechem.

He returned to the place where he was before (see Judges 9:31), contenting himself with the advantage he had got.

And waiting when another opportunity would offer, which quickly did, to be revenged on the Shechemites.

"And Zebul thrust out Gaal and his brethren, that they should not dwell in Shechem":

There seems to have been two parties in Shechem before.

One that hated Abimelech, and another friendlier to his interest.

By which means Zebul his officer kept his post, and Gaal could not get the government into his hand.

And now by the loss in the battle, who were Abimelech's sworn enemies, and the disgrace Gaal fell into by being beaten.

Zebul was able, so far able to carry his point, as to drive Gaal and his brethren out of the city.

Though he had not strength to put him to death, or to seize him and deliver him into the hands of Abimelech.

Gaal and his men were defeated, and Zebul threw the remainder of them out of the city.

Arumah was near Shechem, but thought to be in the edge of the mountains.

Judges 9:42 "And it came to pass on the morrow, that the people went out into the field; and they told Abimelech."

The day after the battle.

"That the people went out into the field":

Some think to fight, and try the event of another battle, in order to be freed from Abimelech, but that seems not so likely.

Rather they went to finish their vintage, as Josephus, or to till their ground, to plough and sow.

Which quickly came on after the fighting was ended.

Find this they might do the more securely, since Abimelech had withdrawn himself and his forces to his place of habitation, and so concluded he would not soon at least return to them.

And the rather they might think he would be easier with them, since Gaal was thrust out from among them.

"And they told Abimelech":

Or it was told Abimelech, that the people came out into the field, and so an opportunity offered to him to come and cut them off, as they were at their business unarmed.

Judges 9:43 "And he took the people, and divided them into three companies, and laid wait in the field, and looked, and, behold, the people [were] come forth out of the city; and he rose up against them, and smote them."

That is, the forces he had with him at Arumah.

"And divided them into three companies":

Each having a separate leader, and the command of one of them he had himself.

"And laid wait in the field":

In the field of Shechem.

One company in one part, and one in another part of the field.

"And looked, and, behold, the people were come forth out of the city":

He watched them when they did.

"And he rose up against them, and smote them":

The companies rose up out of their ambush, in different parts, and killed them.

They thought because Abimelech had not rushed them in the city, that the war was over and forgotten.

They went about their usual activities in the field and Abimelech was waiting for them.

He attacked them in the field.

Judges 9:44 "And Abimelech, and the company that [was] with him, rushed forward, and stood in the entering of the gate of the city: and the two [other] companies ran upon all [the people] that [were] in the fields, and slew them."

Which he had the particular command of; or "the heads", for in the company with him, as Kimchi observes, were great men.

And so the Septuagint renders it, the princes that were with him.

"Rushed forward, and stood in the entering of the gate of the city":

To prevent the people that were in the field getting into it, and any from coming out of it for relief.

"And the two other companies ran upon all the people that were in the fields, and slew them":

So that by this means none escaped.

Abimelech and his men take the city gate and hold it, so the men of Shechem cannot return to the city.

Judges 9:45 "And Abimelech fought against the city all that day; and he took the city, and slew the people that [was] therein, and beat down the city, and sowed it with salt."

"Sowed it with salt":

An act polluting soil and water, as well as symbolizing a verdict of permanent barrenness (Deut. 29:23; Jer. 17:6).

Abimelech's intent finally was nullified when Jeroboam I rebuilt the city as his capital (1 Kings 12:25), ca 930 – 910 B.C.

Sowing "salt" over a city not only symbolized its desolation but would make fertile soil infertile.

Shechem would not be rebuilt for 150 years.

When they had killed all the men who had come out into the field, then Abimelech and his men went into the city and killed the people in it.

It appears he tore down buildings and everything that was standing.

The "sowing of the salt" had to be to kill whatever vegetation was growing.

Salt is used as a preservative many times, but that is not the use here.

Judges 9:46 "And when all the men of the tower of Shechem heard [that], they entered into a hold of the house of the god Berith."

When the city of Shechem was taken, the inhabitants of it slain, the city beaten down, and sowed with salt.

By which it appears that this tower was not within the city, for then the men of it would have seen what was done, and not be said only to hear it.

Though it was not far from it, and possessed by Shechemites, and where some of the principal inhabitants had now fled for safety.

Perhaps it is the same with the house of Millo, and so that part of Jotham's curse, which respected that, had now its accomplishment, otherwise no account is given of it.

"They entered into a hold of the house of the god Berith":

Not thinking themselves safe enough in the tower, they took themselves to the temple of Baal-berith their god (see Judges 9:4).

Which was a strong fortified place, as temples often were.

Or however had a strong hold belonging to it, and here they fled.

Either because of the greater strength of the place, or because of the sanctity of it, and imagining Abimelech would not destroy it on that account.

And the rather, because of the supply he had from it, which enabled him to raise himself to the government of Israel.

This was a lookout post probably.

It seems the wealth of the city was here.

It is somehow associated with the worship of Baal.

The god of "Berith" is the same as Baal.

Judges 9:47 "And it was told Abimelech, that all the men of the tower of Shechem were gathered together."

Who had his spies about, and particularly to observe the motions of the men in this tower.

"That all the men of the tower of Shechem were gathered together":

In the hold of the temple of Baal-berith.

They have hidden in this place, presuming they are safe from Abimelech.

He finds out where they are and in the next verses, we find out what he does about it.

Judges 9:48 "And Abimelech gat him up to mount Zalmon, he and all the people that [were] with him; and Abimelech took an axe in his hand, and cut down a bough from the trees, and took it, and laid [it] on his shoulder, and said unto the people that [were] with him, What ye have seen me do, make haste, [and] do as I [have done]."

A mountain near Shechem, and thought to be the same with Salmon in (Psalm 68:14).

Which seems to have had its name from the shade of the trees which grew upon it.

"He and all the people that were with him":

His whole army.

"And Abimelech took an axe in his hand, and cut down a bough from the trees":

Which grew upon Mount Zalmon.

"And took it, and laid it on his shoulder":

And carried it along with him.

"And said unto the people that were with him, What ye have seen me do, make haste, and do as I have done":

Take an axe, and every man cut down a bough with all possible haste, and lay it on his shoulder.

Mount Zalmon was a heavily wooded area very near Shechem.

Abimelech had to be strong physically.

He cuts a tree and puts it on his shoulder to carry to this place where the tower is.

He tells all of his men to do the same thing.

I guess each man cut a tree he knew he could carry.

Judges 9:49 "And all the people likewise cut down every man his bough, and followed Abimelech, and put [them] to the hold, and set the hold on fire upon them; so that all the men of the tower of Shechem died also, about a thousand men and women."

With their boughs on their shoulders, so that they were men that seemed to be as trees walking.

"And put them to the hold, and set the hold on fire upon them":

Upon the men in it, or with them, the boughs of trees.

It is probable the hold was made of wood, and so could the more easily be set on fire.

Jarchi says it was a wood or forest, where they bent the trees, and divided them round about, and made a fence of them.

But they would scarcely have left the tower for such a shelter.

"So that all the men of the tower of Shechem died also":

Fire being put to the hold, and they burnt in it. The

Vulgate Latin version adds, with fire and smoke; for they being boughs of trees just cut down, with which they set fire to the hold, they would not burn easily and clearly, but make a prodigious smoke, with which many might be suffocated, as others burnt with fire.

And it is unaccountable that Josephus should say that bits of dry wood were taken, and with them fire set to the hold, when the text is so express for it that they were boughs of green trees just cut off.

"About a thousand men and women":

But the above historian makes them to be many more.

He says the men were about 1500, and the rest a great multitude.

This literally fulfilled Jotham's curse.

This pile of trees they cut, were brought to the hiding place of the people of the tower.

They set it on fire, and burned them all up.

There were 1,000 men and women in the hold who died.

This fulfills the curse Jotham had spoken on these people earlier.

Judges 9:50 "Then went Abimelech to Thebez, and encamped against Thebez, and took it."

Which, according to Ben Gersom, had rebelled against him; it was near to Shechem.

Andrichomius says, the ruins, where he thinks stood the city of Thebez, were but one furlong from Neapolis or Shechem.

Where, to the left of Jacob's well, are seen ruins of a large town, marble stones, whole pillars, and other signs of large palaces, and the soil wonderfully fruitful.

And Jerome says that in his time there was a village called Thebes, on the borders of Neapolis or Shechem, as you go to Scythopolis, thirteen miles from it.

It must be near Shechem, inhabited by Shechemites, to fulfil Jotham's curse (Judges 9:20).

"And encamped against Thebez, and took it":

It seems not to have held out long, being deserted by its inhabitants, who fled to the tower, as follows.

Thebez is about 13 miles out of Shechem.

It seemed Abimelech took them, and the ones he did not kill ran to the tower.

Judges 9:51 "But there was a strong tower within the city, and thither fled all the men and women, and all they of the city, and shut [it] to them, and gat them up to the top of the tower."

The tower of Shechem was without the city, but this within, as towers generally are.

"And hither fled all the men and women, and all they of the city":

Men, women, and children, man and maid servants, all the inhabitants of the city.

The tower being a large place, having not only many rooms in it, but perhaps a large area in the midst of it, as well as it had battlements on the top of it.

"And shut it to them":

The gates of it, and which no doubt they strongly barred and bolted, to keep out the enemy.

"And gat them up to the top of the tower":

To observe the motions of Abimelech, and annoy him as much as they could with what they carried with them, as stones, and the like.

They ran to this tower to avoid capture and death from Abimelech.

Judges 9:52 "And Abimelech came unto the tower, and fought against it, and went hard unto the door of the tower to burn it with fire."

With his army to besiege it.

"And fought against it":

Using all the methods he could to oblige those in it to surrender.

"And went hard unto the door of the tower to burn it with fire":

In order to get entrance into it; and perhaps the tower was built of stone, so that no other part could be set fire to.

And to do this he drew near to the door himself, for nothing more is meant by the phrase, "went hard", than drawing near in his own person to the door.

Hazarding his life in the enterprise, being so bent upon it, thinking to do by this tower what he had done to the hold of the temple of Baal-berith.

They were trying to break a hole in the bottom of the tower, so they could set it on fire.

Verses 53-55

To be killed by a "woman", a non-warrior, and by ambush rather than in battle was considered a disgrace.

To add to Abimelech's dishonor, the instrument of death ("a piece of millstone") was part of a hand mill which was used in daily food preparation – a household implement.

Even though Abimelech tried to protect his image by having his servant finish him off, the author's report exposes the truth.

Judges 9:53 "And a certain woman cast a piece of a millstone upon Abimelech's head, and all to brake his skull."

Of the upper millstone, as the word signifies, which is observed by Jarchi and other Jewish commentators.

This with other stones being carried up to the top of the tower, to do what execution they could with them.

And a woman observing Abimelech making up to the door of the tower, took up this piece of millstone, and threw it down.

"Upon Abimelech's head, and all to brake his skull":

She did it with that view, though it may as well be rendered, or "she", or "it broke his skull".

It made a fracture in it, which was mortal.

Abendana observes, and so others, that that was measure for measure, a righteous retaliation, that as he had slain seventy of his brethren on one stone, he should die by means of a stone.

It appears, this unknown woman picks up this heavy millstone, and throws it over the side on Abimelech's head.

She was attempting to kill him so the burning of the tower would stop.

Judges 9:54 "Then he called hastily unto the young man his armor-bearer, and said unto him, Draw thy sword, and slay me, that men say not of me, A woman slew him. And his young man thrust him through, and he died."

Perceiving it was a mortal blow that was given him, and he should soon expire.

And that the cast of the stone was by the hand of a woman, and therefore he was in haste to have the young man come to him.

"And said unto him, draw thy sword and slay me, that men say not of me, a woman slew him":

It being reckoned very embarrassing and unmanly to die by the hand of a woman, and especially any great personage, as a king or general of an army.

To avoid this, he chose rather to be guilty of suicide, or of what cannot well be excused from it, and so died by suicide.

Which, added to all his other sins, he seemed to have no sense of, or repentance for; and the method he took to conceal the shame of his death served the more to spread it.

For this circumstance of his death could not be given without the reason of it, and which was remembered and related punctually near two hundred years afterwards (2 Sam. 11:21).

He thought it shame to be killed by a woman.

His armor-bearer killed him with his sword so the men would not think him a weakling killed by a woman.

Judges 9:55 "And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they departed every man unto his place."

That is, those that were with him, the men of his army, who were all Israelites.

"They departed every man unto his place":

Disbanded themselves, and went everyone to their own home.

And so the inhabitants of Thebez escaped the vengeance of Abimelech.

This stopped the battle and everyone went home.

Judges 9:56 "Thus God rendered the wickedness of Abimelech, which he did unto his father, in slaying his seventy brethren:"

To the disgrace of his father's character, and to the hurt of his father's family.

"In slaying his seventy brethren":

Excepting one, which was a piece of unheard of wickedness, attended with most sad aggravations.

The shedding such blood required blood to be shed again, and it was righteous judgment God rendered to him.

This, and the following verse contain the remarks made upon this history by the writer of it, who, as we have seen, in all probability, was the Prophet Samuel.

This unusual death was punishment from God on Abimelech for killing his 70 brothers, except Jotham.

Judges 9:57 "And all the evil of the men of Shechem did God render upon their heads: and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal."

In aiding Abimelech to slay his brethren, and in making him king after so foul a fact committed.

"Did God render upon their heads":

By suffering Abimelech to beat down their city, and destroy the inhabitants of it, and by burning the hold in which the men of the tower of Shechem were, and them in it.

"And upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal":

Both upon Abimelech, and the men of Shechem.

They being destroyed by one another, as Jotham imprecated they might, and foretold they would (see Judges 9:20).

The destruction of the men of Shechem was in answer to the curse Jotham spoke upon them for following Abimelech.

Notice the destruction of the men of Shechem was by the hand of Abimelech, but was really because of a judgement of God against them.

Judges Chapter 9 Continued Questions

1. At what time, did God send an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem?
2. Who had stood over the city of Shechem, and spoken a curse on the city and on Abimelech?
3. Who had helped Abimelech kill his brothers?
4. Who does Shechem want to be accountable for the murder of Abimelech's brothers?
5. What did they do, to try to lure Abimelech to them?
6. Who is Gaal?
7. Who did the men of Shechem put their trust in?
8. What did the men of Shechem do in celebration of their new leader?
9. Gaal is puffed up with _____.
10. How does he try to turn people against Abimelech?
11. What bragging remark did Gaal make in verse 29?
12. Who was Zebul?
13. What did Zebul do to help Abimelech?
14. What suggestion did he make to Abimelech?
15. Did Abimelech take his advice?
16. How did Gaal realize that Abimelech was coming?
17. What does Gaal see pertaining to Abimelech's army?

18. What does Zebul talk Gaal into doing?
19. When Abimelech attacked them, what did those alive do?
20. Where was Arumah?
21. What did the people do, when they thought the war was over?
22. What happened to them?
23. When Abimelech beat down the city, why did he cover it with salt?
24. Where did the people hide from Abimelech?
25. This false god "Berith" is the same as _____.
26. What did Abimelech do, when he found the people from the tower were hiding in a hold under the place of the false worship?
27. How many trees did they bring, and pile around the hiding place?
28. How many died in this place?
29. Where did Abimelech go next?
30. Where did the people flee for safety from Abimelech?
31. What was Abimelech trying to do to the tower?
32. What did this woman on the tower do to Abimelech?
33. Why did he ask his armourbearer to kill him?
34. When Abimelech was killed, what did all the people do?
35. What really caused this unusual death of Abimelech?