

• *Abimelech's injustice and savagery*

• *Atrocities of the ancient pagan nations*

• *Atrocities are remembered by people and by God*

1. Leadership of God's people taken without God's call lacks God's blessing

• *Gideon – though imperfect was God's chosen man and was vindicated by God*

• *An 'evil spirit' from the Lord.*

2. One deception was followed by another

• *The rise of Gaal – a repetition of Abimelech!*

3. God's vengeance on the people

It was a terrible piece of injustice and savagery when Abimelech killed the seventy sons of Gideon who were his half-brothers. We follow the story with an eagerness to know whether God will do anything to honour Gideon who in his early days had been a man of faith?

It often happens in the story of the nations that a terrible injustice is committed. Maybe there is great savagery in the treatment of an enemy, as in the denunciations of Amos against the atrocities of the ancient pagan nations ^{☞1}. In Abimelech's day the crime was Abimelech's multiple murder of his own half-brothers.

Without repentance, there is no way anything good can come out of Abimelech's murders. All things work together for bad to those who do not love God. God's purpose works against them, not for them. Atrocities are remembered by people and by God.

1. Leadership of God's people taken without God's call lacks God's blessing. Abimelech's stolen rule did not last long ^{☞1}. Eventually the people of Shechem became bitterly disillusioned with the ruler they had chosen for themselves. The ones who were dissatisfied with Gideon's sons become dissatisfied with Abimelech. They acted treacherously in making Abimelech king ^{☞2}. Now they act treacherously against Abimelech himself ^{☞3}. Abimelech received back upon himself the very injustice that he had inflicted upon Gideon's sons. An 'evil spirit' arose between Gideon and the people of Shechem ^{☞4}. 'Evil spirit' here refers to the bitter attitudes that were to be found between Abimelech and the people. We must not read the phrase as if we were reading one of the four gospels.

What happened was entirely within the will of God. God planned that His servant Gideon might be vindicated. Gideon was not perfect but he was God's man for delivering Israel from the Midianites. God had chosen him, despite all of his weaknesses, and God does not like it when one of his chosen instruments is badly used. The 'evil spirit' was from the Lord! God intended that Gideon should be avenged; Abimelech and his relatives would face God's judgement for their murder of Gideon's sons ^{☞1}. Abimelech was told that the greater part of the people of Shechem no longer appreciated his rule. A large number of the men of Shechem became brigands living in the hills, robbing people who passed by and waiting for a chance to attack Abimelech himself ^{☞2}.

2. One deception was followed by another. Gaal rose to power, and the dissatisfied people of Shechem transferred their trust from Abimelech to Gaal ^{☞1}. At the time of a festival, and in the middle of a pagan worship-service ^{☞2}, Gaal asks 'Why should we serve Abimelech and his lieutenant?' ^{☞3}. He claims things will be different if he becomes ruler of the people ^{☞4} and arrogantly challenges Abimelech, 'Abimelech, collect your troops and come out and fight!' ^{☞5}. But he is only pretending to be a valiant warrior. Abimelech is not present, and Gaal is not intending that Abimelech should hear what he says.

Actually Gaal is simply Abimelech all over again. Just as Abimelech enticed the people to himself, so now Gaal entices the people to himself. He dismisses Abimelech's Shechemite ancestry. Abimelech is Gideon's (Baal-Jerub's) son and so he is identified with Gideon. He is building for himself a kingdom, says Gaal, more than he is interested in his mother's Shechemite relatives! The argument subtly undermines Abimelech. The people were deceived by Abimelech; now they are deceived by Gaal. Nothing good can come of the murder of Gideon's sons. When God decides to punish injustice towards His people, all things work together for bad to those who do not love God.

3. God's vengeance falls upon the people. Gaal had not intended that Abimelech should take his challenge seriously, but Zebul, governor of Shechem, is provoked by the humiliating way he had been mentioned ^{☞1}. He secretly tells Abimelech what is happening ^{☞2}, and arranges for Abimelech to invade the city abruptly the next day ^{☞3}. When God decides to punish sin, things go from bad to

☞1 See Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1

☞1 9:22
☞2 see 9:16
☞3 9:23
☞4 9:23

☞1 9:24
☞2 9:25

☞1 9:26
☞2 9:27
☞3 9:28a
☞4 9:30
☞5 9:28b

☞1 9:28
☞2 9:31
☞3 9:32-33

worse. And one thing that might rouse God to immediate vengeance is ill-treatment of his people. 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay' says God – and He can act swiftly if His people are badly treated.

• *On Gaal*

Abimelech's soldiers take up concealed positions ¹. Gaal and Zebul are near the city gate when they invade. 'People are coming down from the tops of the mountains', says Gaal when he sees them from afar. 'No, they are just shadows in the distance', says Zebul. By the time Gaal realizes they are soldiers it is too late to do anything. Zebul has got his revenge. 'Where is your loud-mouthed arrogance now? Go out and fight!' he says to Gaal. Soon Gaal is defeated and removed ².

¹ 9:34
² 9:35-41

• *On the farmers who had been involved in the murder of Gideon's sons*

The next day the farmers go out to work in the fields, not realizing that Abimelech (who had once claimed to be related to them) now regarded them as traitors. His soldiers attack again. The people are killed, and the city is destroyed ¹. God's vengeance has come upon all involved in the murder of Gideon's sons.

¹ 9:42-45

• *On those who had turned to pagan gods*

In 'the tower of Shechem' – apparently a nearby extension of Shechem – the people run to the stronghold of 'El-Berith', a sturdy part of the temple of a pagan god ¹. They turn to religion! But that does not help them. Abimelech and his men collect wood from a nearby hill and use the wood to turn the fortress into an oven ². The people who have taken refuge there perish in the intense heat.

¹ 9:46
² 9:47-49

4. God's vengeance on Abimelech

4. **God's vengeance falls upon Abimelech himself.** Next Abimelech goes to a town to the north of Shechem; it seems that the town had been supportive of Shechem's revolt. He captures the city ¹. Many citizens take refuge in a tower. One of them drops a millstone on Abimelech and he is mortally injured ². With the help of his armour-bearer he prematurely ends his own life ³.

¹ 9:50
² 9:51-53
³ 9:54

• *All thing work for bad when God's vengeance falls but for good to those who love Him*

It has been a terrible story. All things work together for bad when God decides a time for vengeance has come.

But 'God works all things together for good to those who love him'. There is one way to turn a situation round and that is to seek God in repentance, and put right what can be put right. Only then will God overrule the sins of the past. The past is cleansed by present repentance. Would God do anything to honour Gideon and avenge the murder of his sons? We have our answer. Those who sow seeds of injustice reap a harvest of disaster.

5. Disaster was followed by a fresh opportunity

5. **Disaster was followed by fresh opportunity.** The first few verses of Judges, chapter 10, belong with chapter 9. They let us know that despite the terrible chaos brought into Israel by Abimelech, God still did not abandon them. Tola was raised up to deliver the nation ¹. Jair came a little later ². His riding on an ass is a picture of peace and humility. His family's doing the same thing suggests that he mobilized them in the interests of supervising the nation in the ways of peace and prosperity. Abimelech was not the last word in the story of Israel. God avenged the death of Gideon, but His anger does not go on forever. God gave the nation a fresh chance and sent them two judges to enable the nation to recover. It will be the same for you. Injustice is washed away by extermination, by purifying judgement or by repentance, but whichever way it is God's anger does not continue forever. The pathway of repentance is best. It takes away God's anger the more speedily.

¹ 10:1-2
² 10:3-5

• *Removing God's anger – repentance is the speedier way*



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