

EXPOSITION OF JUDGES

Message #14

Judges 9:26-57

I read a true story of a woman who bought an expensive coat in New York and lost a button. She went back to the shop where she bought the coat and asked if she could purchase a new button, and was told they did not have extra buttons. So the woman wrote to the company that made the coat and asked for that specific button. The company recognized that that particular button matched the button on a stolen coat. So the company contacted the police and the police contacted the woman, and the woman led the detectives to the shop that sold her the coat. Come to find out, the owner of the shop was buying stolen goods and selling them, and in due time he ended up in jail. Sometimes the wheel of justice turns slow, but you can be sure in the providential plan of God it is always turning. God is a God who does not let people get away with things forever.

There are many people, including some believers, who think their sin and rebellion is going completely unnoticed and unchecked. Some keep right on with their gossip, their hatred, their lies, their greed, and their lusts, and think there will never be any day of accountability. Yet when one reads the Bible and sees truth about coming judgment, we know that is not true. God is a gracious God and He gives His people plenty of time to make adjustments and make things right. However, if they don't deal with things, God will deal with them.

God only lets people get away with things for so long and then He tracks them down and that is what happens right here to Abimelech and the Shechemites. What we see here is that:

AFTER GOD HAS SOVEREIGNLY USED EVIL THINGS FOR HIS PURPOSES, HE SOVEREIGNLY TRACKS DOWN AND PUNISHES THOSE WHO DO EVIL.

It is amazing to me how God always sees to it that one will "reap what he sows." It may not happen instantly, but it will always happen eventually. We may recall that for three years Abimelech ruled over Israel (9:22). He got his power by ruthless murder. He killed all but one of Gideon's sons. He was supported by the people of Shechem. They funded his evil activity even though Jotham, Gideon's only son to escape, had warned them that if they didn't do right, they would pay (9:20). In spite of Jotham's warnings, the Shechemites let Abimelech continue to be king. During this time Abimelech lived in Arumah (9:41), a city located about five miles southeast of Shechem.

However, at the end of the three years, the Shechemites were beginning to see and sense his true intentions. He didn't even live in Shechem and he seemed to be interested more and more with other areas.

I just read an interesting article entitled “Eternally Jobless.” It is an article that describes the hopelessness that many Americans have of finding a job. To make matters worse, people who are nearing retirement age are working longer, which is not freeing up jobs for the younger generation. In fact, the article said that 44% of all workers are intending to work full-time or part-time after age sixty-five. What is interesting about this is that the younger people who voted in the last presidential election voted for the candidate that they thought would bring “Hope and Change.” Now many of them are totally disillusioned with the one who promised it because they have lost all hope of finding a job. One young man said he felt “worthless” (Jane Blakemore, *Eternally Jobless*, *Newsmax*, August 2011, pp. 14-17).

People are disillusioned with all the political promises that were made to them that aren’t coming true. That is exactly what was happening to the Shechemites. They were becoming totally disillusioned with Abimelech and God was the one behind all of this.

TRACK-DOWN REALITY #1 – God raises up another leader. 9:26-27

God is sovereign in everything that is happening. Things we know and can see and things we don’t know and can’t see. At the time all of this was happening in the days of the judges, God brought a Canaanite man into the picture whose name was Gaal.

We don’t know much about this guy. Gaal was the son of Ebed, and he crossed the Jordan River and he came into Shechem with his brothers. He was apparently an upbeat kind of man who had some charisma about him, and as a result the “men of Shechem” put their trust in him.

Notice there is no place in this context where we learn that people were trusting in God. The fact is they are not trusting in God; they are now trusting in a Canaanite. I do not believe there is any political leader who can straighten out the present disastrous mess that exists in the United States of America economically, morally, or spiritually. The only Person who can straighten this out is the God of the Bible. The problem we have is the same problem of the Shechemites; most don’t trust in God, they trust in some charismatic person. The men of Shechem trusted in Gaal.

Gaal’s timing couldn’t have been better. It was the time of the Shechemite grape harvest and so the people went and harvested grapes, and then threw a big party. They ate and drank and worshipped their idols, and they “cursed Abimelech.” Of course the reason why they even had the grapes is because Gideon had chased the raiding Midianites out of the land. We may recall that they annually looted Israel, but Gideon put a stop to it as he followed God. But there is no mention of God and there is no mention of Gideon. **But even though God is not mentioned, God is the one in sovereign charge of everything.**

Now Gaal is a political opportunist. He is ready to seize the moment. While he and his brothers are at this party they hear them curse Abimelech, and he takes full advantage of this situation. These people from Shechem were gullible and we already know they can be swayed by “slick talk.”

TRACK-DOWN REALITY #2 – Gaal suggests that he replace Abimelech. 9:28-29

Abimelech did not live in Shechem, but he apparently left his military leader in Shechem whose name was Zebul. Zebul was keeping track of everything. He was listening to the rhetoric and reporting to Abimelech.

Now Gaal made a proposal for a change of leadership. He said instead of serving Abimelech, who is the son of Jerubbaal (Gideon), and Zebul, his military leader, why not serve the “men of Hamor” who is the father of Shechem.

Just like the O.J. Simpson trial, Gaal is playing the “race card” to stir things up. This is the kind of political maneuvering we have come to expect in a court room or in an election year. Gaal is basically saying why should you be subject to a Jew? He emphasizes the fact that Abimelech is the son of Jerubbaal (9:28), but he does not bring up the fact that Abimelech’s mother is a Shechemite.

This is what corrupt politicians do. They twist and distort things. They spin things their way. They bring up parts of things, but they do not tell the whole truth. They sway a constituency by bringing up something, but leave out part of what they are bringing up. Their goal is to make themselves look good and make the other guy look bad so they can convince people they are right.

There is no doubt that the Shechemites did have a Canaanite background. So Gaal is saying why not turn allegiance over to me and I will remove Abimelech, and you’ll have better days. He is presenting the idea that they should serve Shechemites, not the Israelites. Gaal is making himself out to be one of them, when in fact he isn’t. He further claims in **verse 29** that if they will turn things over to him, he will rout Abimelech.

This is exactly what Abimelech had done. He verbally convinced these same people to support him as he went and killed Gideon’s sons. Now things are beginning to come full circle. Another man, Gaal, is doing the same thing in regard to him. **The track-down process of God is underway.**

There is a critical lesson to see here and learn here concerning these Shechemites. **They continue to make major wrong decisions in life because they do not take the time to investigate the facts.** These people are naive. They are emotional, they are unstable, they are gullible, and they do not take the time to investigate anything. They will listen to the rhetoric of a charismatic stranger and assume what he says is true.

I cannot help but think of some of our political and religious leaders who say things and sway crowds with things that are not true. I cannot help but think of the people who have conned others out of their money with untrue claims that are never researched. We need to realize that there are liars in this world who will twist things or claim things that are not factual or provable. We must make certain that we think biblically, not hypnotically. That is the big problem with these Shechemites. It is almost as if they are in a hypnotic daze. **But even in this bizarre situation of distortions and lies, God is still sovereignly working out His plan to track down Abimelech.**

TRACK-DOWN REALITY #3 – Zebul gets word to Abimelech about what is happening.
9:30-34

Now keep in mind that God is in the process of tracking down Abimelech to pay him back for what he did. So in all of the espionage of the story is the secret, silent hand of God.

Zebul was mad because of the potential take over of power by Gaal, so he sent word to Abimelech telling him that Gaal was stirring things up against him. He got word to Abimelech that there was an insurrection movement in the works (**9:31**).

Zebul, who apparently is a key military advisor, comes up with a strategy. He tells Abimelech to come into the area at night and lay low in the field outside of Shechem (**9:32**). He then advised them to rush the city early in the morning and take Gaal by surprise and they would have victory (**9:33**).

This is certainly not like Gideon who was directed by God to rout the Midianites. No one is even consulting God; they are just coming up with their own plan, which seems very plausible and reasonable. In fact, according to **verse 34** Abimelech listened to the plan and they bivouacked in the field that very night. This will prove to be a really bad move. God is not being consulted in any way, but God is sovereignly involved in every bit of this.

He positioned his men on the mountainside at night. They were waiting for the people to come out in the morning outside the gate (**9:44**), and their plan was to attack them there and take them by surprise. Apparently this city had a gate and walls, so as soon as the city was opened in the morning Abimelech and his forces would be there to take it by surprise.

Now from any military strategy, the plan seems good. But what Abimelech doesn't know is that this plan is actually being orchestrated by God for the purpose of destroying Abimelech.

TRACK-DOWN REALITY #4 – Gaal goes out to fight Abimelech. **9:35-41**

The next morning Gaal and Zebul went outside to look things over, and Gaal spotted Abimelech's men in the mountains and realized it was an ambush (**9:35-37**). So he got his men to go out and fight, and things didn't go well for Gaal or the men of Shechem.

Not only were things going bad for Gaal, but Zebul, who was probably standing on top of the wall or gate was saying to Gaal, where is your boasting now? You said you would fight Abimelech, well here is your chance (**9:38**). Let's see you do it.

There are many people who love to talk a good game. If you listen to them, they seem big and impressive. This is especially true when it comes to God. Many people will talk like they have real victory in their lives when in fact it is nothing but talk. There is no real spirituality. There is no prayer. There is no Bible study. It is all talk, just like Gaal.

The four companies of Abimelech attacked from four different directions and many of Gaal's troops were destroyed. In fact, Zebul drove out Gaal and all his relatives so they could not remain in Shechem (9:41).

Abimelech is an evil killer, but God had just used him to drive the Canaanites out of His land. Now when you initially look at all of the facts here, you don't see the hand of God anywhere. What you see is military conflict and a bunch of killing. But God is in this and He is working out His plan.

When I see a story like this in the Scripture, I cannot help but think of Proverbs 16:4 which says "The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil."

TRACK-DOWN REALITY #5 – Abimelech destroys Shechem. 9:42-49

God uses evil Abimelech to destroy the city that sanctioned the killing of Gideon's sons. The next day, Abimelech took his men and they fought the Shechemites all day (9:45). They killed the people and then in total defiance of the land, they put salt on it to destroy the productivity possibility of the grape harvest (9:45). They even trapped people in their idolatrous temple and cut down some trees and hauled them to the temple and lit them on fire and burned them to death (9:46-49).

Now you look at this and ask, what in the world is God doing here? He is permitting a ruthless killer to kill more. He is allowing one thousand people to burn to death. Why? He is paying back the Shechemites for supporting the killing of Gideon's sons (9:57).

Years before, these Shechemites supported Abimelech in killing Gideon's sons. God did not forget this. For several years, these Shechemites lived the good life. They had their grape festivals and life seemed to move along just fine. But they were on a collision course with the justice of God. God does not forget evil done years ago and it was time for them to pay.

God is in this whole thing and He is directing every bit of it.

TRACK-DOWN REALITY #6 – Abimelech is destroyed by God. 9:50-57

Abimelech once again seemed to be on top of the political world. He goes to another town, Thebez, which is located about ten miles NE of Shechem. He camped there and he captured the city (9:50). But right in the middle of the city was a tower and all the men and women and leaders went into that tower and locked themselves in and then they climbed up on the roof (9:51). Abimelech decided to do what he did in Shechem; he would burn them out and he was going to lead this charge, probably figuring these people are so scared, they can't do a thing (9:52).

As Abimelech approached the tower to set it on fire, a woman, whose name we don't even know tossed a millstone off the top of the tower and it hit Abimelech in the head and crushed his skull (9:53). There were different size millstones and one that was used by hand was about ten to fourteen inches long, two to four inches wide, and weighed about five pounds or more.

When the stone hit Abimelech's head it did not instantly kill him, and he could still speak. He knew he was dying. So he called his armor bearer to kill him because he didn't want to be known as the man who was killed by a woman (9:54). This is so ironic because this is exactly what he is known for. God used a woman to toss a stone off a roof and he caused that stone to hit and kill Abimelech.

When that happened, notice **verse 55**; the men of Israel just went home. It was all over. Now do not over look the final two verses of chapter 9:

Reality #1 - This was a pay back from God on Abimelech. **9:56**

Reality #2 - This was a pay back from God on the wickedness of the Shechemites. **9:57a**

Reality #3 - This was a fulfillment of the Word of God and the curse of Jotham. **9:57b**

Do not miss this point. God's Word promises one will reap what one sows. What this practically means is that God tracks people down and He pays them back. One may appear to get away with evil, but one will never get away with evil. God is not absent from crime and evil. He sees it all and He will repay it all.

Now you may be here tonight and you flat out know that you are living in sin and to this point nothing really bad has happened to you. You have a good life and things seem to be flowing along just fine. You need to take serious note of this text. There will be a track down.

If you have never placed your faith in Jesus Christ, you need to know that every sin you have ever committed is on file before God and He will track you down and punish you in everlasting fire. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved.

If you are a believer, keep in mind there is a Bema Seat Judgment coming for every one of us. Our relationship with God must always be based on truth. When we fail and sin we need to confess it and be cleansed.

When it comes to sin, God will always track it down.