

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Judges And Ruth: Personal Blessing Amid Group Apostasy

Part II: History Of The Era Of The Judges

B. The Record Of Specific Judges, Judges 3:7-16:31

7. Abimelech's Rule: Understanding And Wisely Responding To Abusive People (Judges 9:1-57)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

The Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 3:1-5 NIV predicted that "terrible times" would come in the latter days of Church History with the rise of very abusive people, and we can illustrate the fulfillment of this prophecy today:

(1) The Wall Street Journal November 20, 2015 lead story, "Attention Turns to Terrorist's Travels," p. A1, by Stacy Meichtry, Noemie Bisserbe and Matthew Dalton, told how "(t)he suspected architect of the Paris attacks . . . coordinated . . . brazen assaults . . . using explosives and automatic rifles to kill 129 people." Such activity fits the Apostle Paul's 2 Timothy 3:2-4 description of the rash, abusive and brutal people who would arise in the latter days.

(2) According to "the latest Pew Research center study . . . Americans regard their elected officials as intelligent but selfish and dishonest." (William A. Galston, "Thanksgiving With a Side of Public Distrust," Ibid., November 25, 2015, p. A17) This description fits the 2 Timothy 3:2 prediction of the self-centered people to arise.

(3) We face it locally: for years, and as late as last Sunday, Church members have told of abuses by professing Christians, cases fitting the 2 Timothy 3:5 description of those with a form of godliness but who deny its power.

***Need:** So we ask, "In light of the rise of very abusive people today, why are such people on the increase, and how does God want us to respond to this matter?!"*

- I. After Gideon's death, his son Abimelech abusively gained a three-year rule over Israel, Judges 9:1-6:**
 - A. Abimelech, Gideon's son by way of his concubine at Shechem (Judges 8:31), arranged for evil men in Shechem to help him by being paid from the coffers of the pagan Baal-Berith temple there to slaughter all of Gideon's other full sons in a single, public execution that he might be made ruler of Shechem, Judges 9:1-6.
 - B. The "rule" that he then set up over Israel was not that of a rightful king established by the Lord, but a forced domination: the Hebrew verb for "reigned" that describes his rule in Judges 9:22 KJV is *sarar*, and it means "to act as a prince, to govern" versus ruling as a king, H. A. W., Theol. Wrdbk. of the O. T., 1980, v. II, p. 884.
 - C. To keep control of all Israel, Abimelech lived in a nearby Hebrew town of Arumah (Jud. 9:41a) to be accepted by his Jewish kin who were related to him through his father Gideon, for Shechem had many Canaanites who had descended from Hamor the Canaanite (Jud. 9:28b with Gen. 34:25-29; The MacMillan Bible Atlas, 1968, p. 55), but Abimelech left a deputy of is, Zebul, in Shechem to keep a ruling influence there, Judges 9:28b.
- II. However, Gideon's youngest full son, Jotham survived the slaughter of his brothers by hiding himself (Jud. 9:5b), so after Abimelech became ruler at Shechem (Jud. 9:6-7a), Jotham went to Mount Gerizim south of Shechem where he could speak from a safe distance and be heard by the men of Shechem below him in the valley (Jud. 9:7b), and he called for a divine curse on the wrongdoers, Judges 9:7c-20:**
 - A. Jotham's address in Judges 9:8-15 began as a parable to teach that "only worthless people seek to lord it over others, for worthy individuals are too busy in useful tasks to seek such places of authority," B. K. C., O. T., p. 397. Jotham's parable told how the olive tree, the fig tree and the vine were too busy producing beneficial foods to rule over the other trees (Judges 9:8-13), but when the trees of the wood asked the unproductive thornbush to rule over them, the thornbush agreed only if the trees would take refuge in its shade, to be subject to it, Jud. 9:14-15a. However, if the trees refused to be subject to the thornbush, the thornbush threatened to have fire come out from it to burn down all the trees, even the lofty cedars of Lebanon, Judges 9:15b.
 - B. In application of the parable, Jotham taught that Gideon like the productive trees had been busy delivering Israel versus lording over her (Jud. 9:16-17), but Abimelech, a worthless thornbush and son of a concubine, sought to lord it over Israel by murdering Gideon's full sons with the help of wicked Shechemites, Jud. 9:18.
 - C. Accordingly, Jotham called on God to honor Abimelech and the men of Shechem if they had acted rightly, but if they had acted treacherously, that a fire would come out of the thornbush of Abimelech and out of the men of Shechem that they might destroy one another, Judges 9:19-20.
- III. Jotham then fled to the safe town of Beer, i. e. "well," for he was afraid of ruthless Abimelech, Jud. 9:21.**
- IV. In three years, God fulfilled Jotham's curse, vindicating Gideon and his murdered sons, Judges 9:22-57:**

- A. The Lord sent a demonic spirit "to fulfill Jotham's curse by arousing distrust or jealousy in the Shechemites, who set men on the hilltops to ambush and rob the caravans and other travelers on the trade routes through Shechem" that cut into Abimelech's "tributes and tolls from travelers," Judges 9:23-25; *Ibid.*, p. 398.
 - B. In addition, Gaal the son of Ebed and his brothers, descendants of the Canaanite Shechemite people's ancestor Hamor, politicked against the absent Abimelech, claiming that he was not a full-blooded and hence a true descendant of theirs, with Gaal offering himself to be Shechem's king in place of Abimelech, Judges 9:26-29.
 - C. Eventually, war broke out between Abimelech and his opponent Gaal and the men of Shechem, with Abimelech ending up destroying the people and the town of Shechem, Judges 9:30-49.
 - D. However, when Abimelech went to war with rebels against him in another nearby town of Thebez, as he approached a tower there to burn it and its people down (Judges 9:50-52), a woman in the tower threw a millstone down upon his head, cracking his skull, Judges 9:53. Abimelech asked his armourbearer to kill him with his sword lest he die in shame at the hand of a woman, so his armourbearer slew him, Judges 9:54.
 - E. Once Abimelech was dead, his followers, the men of Israel, returned to their homes, realizing he was not a king and that God had not established him to rule, Judges 9:55. God thus fulfilled Jotham's curse and punished Abimelech and the men of Shechem for their evil deed against Gideon's household, Judges 9:56-57.
- V. **Just HOW Abimelech as a son of godly Gideon could turn so abusive is clarified by the text (as follows):**
- A. Abimelech was born and raised in Shechem, a town that was heavily populated by pagan, abusive Canaanites:
 - 1. Shechem where Abimelech was born and raised was heavily populated by Canaanites, Judges 8:31; 9:28.
 - 2. These pagan people were very abusive, Jud. 4:1-3; 5:6-7; Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to Jud. 5:6.
 - B. Gideon lived in his hometown of Ophrah where he sired his other full sons, so he spent a limited amount of time with Abimelech and his mother in Shechem, and a lack of good fathering leads a child to be troubled and usually to become a troublesome adult (Ellen Makkai, "Every child needs a father," WorldNetDaily.com, 2/16/2002 in citing Rutgers University sociology professor David Popenoe, author of "Life Without Father.")
 - C. Abimelech's name, meaning "my father is king" (Z. P. E. B., v. One, p. 15), along with the abusive influence of pagan Canaanites around him, led him to be tempted to want to dominate others as a king!
 - D. Gideon's fame where he might have accepted the rule as Israel's king (Judges 8:22-23) opened the door for Abimelech as his descendant to take advantage of his father's fame in order to gain dominance over Israel.
 - E. Selfish ambition and jealousy relative to Gideon's other full sons added to this unsavory mix of other issues that led to Abimelech's abusive murder of Gideon's other full sons and his ensuing domination of Israel.

Lesson: *Abimelech was influenced to depart from God by a high number of pagan Canaanites in Shechem where he was born and raised, and this coupled with a lack of good fathering, jealousy and selfish ambition as the son of a concubine of the famous Gideon tempted him toward abusive behavior. However, Gideon's surviving full son Jotham trusted God to deal vengeance out on Abimelech for his abuse against his family, and Jotham fled from Abimelech's harmful reach until God checked the wrongdoers.*

Application: *In today's ungodly world with its increasingly abusive people, (1) May we trust in Christ to be saved, John 3:16. (2) Then, (a) may we realize that the world's departure from Scripture's God coupled with poor fathering, selfish ambition and jealousy is a rich breeding ground for producing very abusive people, (b) that we be WARY of such folk as they arise and (c) rely on God to handle them (d) while we keep a safe distance from them. (e) May godly and mature father figures arise in the Church to example upright, gracious, non-abusive living!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

While writing up this sermon, I realized that **most** of the adults I know, including most of the **Christian** adults I know, lack the heritage of having been reared by, a godly, mature, gracious Christian father. So, in accountability to the Lord, we who lead in the Church, especially we Christian men, are obliged to focus on living **stable, faithful, gracious** lives that give minors and adults alike **patterns** of **gracious** living in a very troubled world.

Ellen Makkai's article cited above in turn cited Dr. Wade Horn, assistant director of the Administration for Children and Families who claimed: "'This is my challenge to adult men. Look for opportunities to interact with fatherless children. They do very well with positive role models.'" If fatherless children do well with good father role models, think what adult believers with a lack of godly fathering could do with positive role models in the Church!

Since the world today has departed from Scripture's God and lacks godly fathering, and since this state along with selfish ambition and jealousy makes the world a rich breeding ground for very abusive people, may we believers live by faith in God while being wisely cautious of all men and exempling godly living before all.