

SPEAKERS

March 5: Ken Storm,
Holy Communion

March 12: Mark Sunnarborg

March 19: Ken Storm

March 26: Nathan Ruonavaara,
Potluck Meal Following Service

CHURCH SCHEDULE

Sunday Service: 11:00 a.m.

Wednesday Bible Study:
7:00 p.m.

CONTACT

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The Bramble King

The downfall of kingdoms, nations, governments and individuals is played out over and over again in the pages of the Old Testament. It was King Solomon who observed, *“The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us. There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after”* (Ecclesiastes 1:9-11). He understood that history repeats itself because people refuse to learn from the past and, more importantly, deliberately ignore the Word of God. This article examines the short reign of Abimelech, Israel’s sixth judge, to show how violence and treachery were used to quickly overtake the leadership of an apostate Israel so that, perhaps, we might learn from it.

Chapter 9 in Judges unveils how an ungodly person, like Abimelech, took control. Gideon, a righteous judge and the father of Abimelech, had just died and *“...the children of Israel...made Baal-berith their god...Neither shewed they kindness to...Gideon”* (Judges 8:33, 35). Hence, the Israelites had not only turned their back on God but they also were openly hostile toward the house of Gideon. Abimelech, who was the son of a concubine, saw an opportunity in this social unrest and distain for God to promote himself as the next judge to replace Gideon. He plotted with his mother’s brethren, she was the concubine of Gideon, to convince the Shechemites, of which she was one, that it would be better for him, a descendant of Shechem, to rule rather than to have one of the 70 other sons of Gideon, who were not of Shechem. Being interested in no other qualification other than Abimelech was one of them, the men of Shechem *“gave him threescore and ten pieces of silver out of the house of Baal-berith, where Abimelech hired vain and light persons which followed him”* to strategize his next moves.

With his base of support fixed, Abimelech and his handlers then set their sights on eliminating his competition—the 70 sons of Gideon. He succeeded in killing all but Jotham, the youngest son, so, with no viable opposition left, *“...the men of Shechem...and the house of Millo...made Abimelech king”*. Things began to unravel when Jotham found out about the corrupt election of Abimelech. He stepped up to publicly rebuke the Shechemites’ deceit by way of a parable. His parable spoke of trees wanting to elect a new ruler: first asking an olive tree, then a fig tree, next a vine, and finally a bramble. The bramble bush, the least qualified, agreed to be king, but only if the trees gave up their freedoms *“and put your trust in my shadow”*. On the heels of delivering this parable, Jotham followed up with this prediction, *“...If ye then have dealt truly and sincerely with Jerubbaal and with his house (Gideon and his 69 sons) this day, then rejoice ye in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you: But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech, and devour 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 devour Abimelech deserving of his hands”*. Jotham then ran away, fearing for his life. But it was not until three years into Abimelech’s reign that God allowed the people of Shechem to realize the incompetence and treachery of Abimelech.

Consequently, they asked Gaal to depose Abimelech. As it turned out, Abimelech defeated Gaal and attacked Shechem, destroying it and burning down the pagan temple of Baal-Berith with 1,000 citizens inside, fulfilling part of Jotham's prediction.

The final part of Jotham's prediction occurred when Abimelech for some reason attacked Thebez and took it. During the attack all the men and women of the city fled into a strong tower for refuge. It was while Abimelech tried to set it on fire, as he did to the pagan temple at Shechem, that a woman dropped a millstone upon his head. Knowing that he was about to die, he had his armor-bearer kill him, to avoid anyone saying that "*A woman slew him*". Thus, God repaid both Abimelech and the Shechemites for their willful sins against Him and His people.

Satan still uses the same devices as those of Abimelech to control people. There is little doubt that our nation has already turned its back on God and as a result we are now witnessing the use of social unrest, disdain of God and the free-flow of money to influence our thinking. Where is God in all this, we might ask? In the case of Abimelech, God used his wickedness to test the spiritual resolve of His people—would they turn to Him or would they continue to reject Him? The good news is that God time and time again has heard the cries of His wayward children and saved them. Thus, seeing that our nation today is also being tested, we too must turn to God in fervent prayer to put away our apostasy to avoid going the way of Abimelech. The Bible teaches that to be eternally saved a guilty person must confess his sin at the door of the tabernacle which today is in front of another believer who can proclaim the gospel of forgiveness: "*Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed*" (James 5:16). Dear reader, in these latter days, pray that God would search your heart for sin that needs to be cleansed in the blood of the Lamb before it is too late.

God's Peace,
Charles Korhonen