

CHAPTER 9

INTRODUCTION TO JUDGES 9

This chapter contains an account of the craft and cruelty of Abimelech, by which he got himself made king of the Shechemites, (^{<000E>}Judges 9:1-6) of the parable of Jotham, the youngest son of Gideon, concerning the trees, in which he exposes their folly in making Abimelech king, and foretells the ruin of them both, (^{<000E>}Judges 9:7-21) of the contentions which arose between Abimelech, and the men of Shechem, increased by Gaal the son of Ebed, (^{<000E>}Judges 9:22-29) who was drawn into a battle with Abimelech, and beaten and forced to fly, (^{<000E>}Judges 9:30-41) but the quarrel between Abimelech and the men of Shechem ceased not, but still continued, which issued in the entire ruin of the city and the inhabitants of it, (^{<000E>}Judges 9:42-49) and in the death of Abimelech himself, according to Jotham's curse, (^{<000E>}Judges 9:50-57).

Ver. 1. *And Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem, unto his mother's brethren,* etc.] It seems that though the mother of Abimelech lived at Shechem, he was taken and brought up in his father's house at Ophrah, where he was when he died; and from hence he came to Shechem, to pay a visit to his uncles there; whether his mother was now living, is not certain:

and communed with them; about the death of his father, the state of his family, and the government of Israel:

and with all the family of the house of his mother's father; that descended from his grandfather, the several branches of them, and of the family, the heads of them at least:

saying, as follows.

Ver. 2. *Speak, I pray you, in the ears of all the men of Shechem,* etc.] Which, though the Targum calls the inhabitants of the place, Ben Melech better interprets it the lords of Shechem, as the phrase will bear to be rendered; for it is more likely he would have this first whispered and

suggested to the principal men of the city, before the common people were acquainted with it, and indeed in order to use their influence with them:

whether is better for you, either that all the sons of Jerubbaal, [which are] seventy persons, reign over you, or that one reign over you? intimating thereby, that though Gideon his father had refused the regal government when offered him, it was but reasonable that his sons, or some one of them, should be tried, whether it would be acceptable to them; nay, he would insinuate, that the sons of Gideon, who were seventy in number, were either contending with one another about it, or contriving to divide the government among them, and therefore desired it might be moved to consideration, whether it would not be more eligible to fix upon some one person to be their ruler, than to be under the government of seventy; or, in other words, whether it was not better to have one king than seventy kings; but in reality there was no necessity for any consultation about this matter, the sons of judges never succeeded their fathers in government; nor does it appear that any of Gideon's sons had any thought about it, nor any desire to be made kings, as appears from Jotham's parable; and this was only a wicked insinuation of this man's, with an ambitious view of getting the kingdom to himself, as follows:

remember also that I am your bone and your flesh; was of the same tribe and city with them, born among them, his mother always living with them, and he having now many near relations by his mother's side that dwelt there; and therefore while they had this affair of government under consideration, he would have them think of him to be their king, which would be to their honour, and to their advantage, to have one so nearly related to them on the throne, from whom they might expect many favours.

Ver. 3. *And his mother's brethren spake of him in the ears of the men of Shechem all these words,* etc.] Got them together in some certain place, and laid before them all that Abimelech had suggested to them, and spake in his favour to them:

and their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, he is our brother; being fond of kingly government, as the Israelites generally were, it seemed most agreeable to them to have one king over them, and none more acceptable than one so nearly related to them, who they doubted not, from his alliance to them, would be ready to oblige them on all occasions.

Ver. 4. *And they gave him seventy pieces of silver out of the house of Baalbirith*, etc.] The temple of their idol; of this name (see Gill on “~~0083~~Judges 8:33”), out of the money which had been dedicated to his service by freewill offering, or out of a bank which they deposited there for greater safety, and perhaps out of a superstitious notion of its being more prosperous and successful: of what value these pieces were is not certain; by pieces of silver, commonly shekels are meant; but these are thought to be of too little value to be given to a man to raise an army with, or carry on a scheme to advance himself to the throne; and talents are judged to be too large a sum for such a city to contribute out of a temple of theirs, and that but lately built, as it must be since the death of Gideon; they are therefore thought to be pounds, as the Vulgate Latin version renders it; however, in the number of them there seems to be some reference to the number of Gideon’s sons, who were to be destroyed by bribing men with this sum, which was the scheme concerted between Abimelech and the men of Shechem;

wherewith Abimelech hired vain and light persons, which followed him; perhaps seventy of them, giving to each a piece or pound of silver; these were a base scoundrel sort of people, that lived in an idle scandalous manner, a sort of freebooters, that lived upon what they could lay hold on in a way of force and rapine; men of light heads and empty brains, and whose pockets were as light and empty as their heads, and fit to engage in any enterprise, though ever so barbarous, for the sake of a little money.

Ver. 5. *And he went to his father’s house at Ophrah*, etc.] Which, according to Bunting ^{f197}, was ten miles from Shechem:

and slew his brethren the sons of Jerubbaal, being seventy persons, upon one stone: in which he was assisted by the ruffians he had hired with seventy pieces of silver; these were laid one after another upon one and the same stone, as being convenient for the execution of them; or as serving as an altar on which they were sacrificed to Baal, out of whose temple the money was taken to hire the executioners with. They are said to be seventy that were slain, though one escaped, the round number being given, as in many other instances, as in (~~0452~~Genesis 46:27 ~~431b~~John 20:24),

notwithstanding, yet Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left; or remained alive, not out of compassion to his youth, but because he could not be found:

for he hid himself; for no doubt Abimelech, and his crew, were most forward to lay hold of the eldest, and sacrifice them first, as being most in his way; this gave Jotham the youngest not only notice of their design, but an opportunity of providing for his safety, or however his friends; for it may be rendered, as in some versions, “he was hidden”^{f198}, that is, by others.

Ver. 6. *And all the men of Shechem gathered together*, etc.] Upon the return of Abimelech, after he with his banditti had committed the execrable murder of his brethren:

and all the house of Millo; which was either the men of a place near to Shechem, or of his brother’s family, or of some grand leading family in Shechem; or it may mean the town hall, where the principal inhabitants met in full house, as Millo signifies, on this occasion:

and went and made Abimelech king; which was a most bold and daring action; being done without asking counsel of God, without which no king was to be set over Israel, and by a single city, without the knowledge, advice, and consent of the body of the people of Israel: by the plain of the pillar that was in Shechem; the place where they met together, and did this business in voting Abimelech to be king, was near a place where a pillar was set in Shechem; or by the oak of the pillar in Shechem, and so may mean the stone under an oak, which Joshua placed there as a testimony between God and the people, (^{f195}Joshua 24:25-27) and here, in the same place where Joshua convened the people of Israel, and made his last speech to them, was this business done.

Ver. 7. *And when they told it to Jotham*, etc.] Or when it was told him that Abimelech was made king in Shechem by some of his friends:

he went and stood in the top of Mount Gerizim; a mount near Shechem; it hung over the city, as Josephus says^{f199}, and so a very proper place to stand on and deliver a speech from it to the inhabitants of it; who, as the same writer says, were now keeping a festival, on what account he says not, perhaps to Baalberith their idol: over against this mountain was another, called Ebal, and between them a valley; and very likely they were assembled in this valley, where the children of Israel stood when the blessings were delivered from Gerizim, and the curses from Ebal; and if so, Jotham might be heard very well by the Shechemites:

and he lifted up his voice, and cried; that he might be heard by them:

and said unto them, hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you; which was a very solemn manner of address to them, tending to excite attention, as having somewhat of importance to say to them, and suggesting, that if they did not hearken to him, God would not hearken to them when they cried to him, and therefore it behoved them to attend: it is an adjuration of them to hearken to him, or a wish that God would not hearken to them if they were inattentive to him.

Ver. 8. *The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them,* etc.] This is an apologue or fable, and a very fine and beautiful one; it is fitly expressed to answer the design, and the most ancient of the kind, being made seven hundred years before the times of Aesop, so famous for his fables, and exceeds anything written by him. By the trees are meant the people of Israel in general, and the Shechemites in particular, who had been for some time very desirous of a king, but could not persuade any of their great and good men to accept of that office:

and they said unto the olive tree, reign thou over us; a fit emblem of a good man, endowed with excellent virtues and qualifications for good, as David king of Israel, who is compared to such a tree, (~~Psalm~~ Psalm 52:8), Jarchi applies this to Othniel the first judge; but it may be better applied to Gideon, an excellent good man, full of fruits of righteousness, and eminently useful, and to whom kingly government was offered, and was refused by him; and the men of Shechem could scarcely fail of thinking of him, and applying it to him, as Jotham was delivering his fable.

Ver. 9. *But the olive tree said unto them,* etc.] In reply to the request of the trees:

should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man; by “fatness” oil is meant, pressed out of the fruit of the olive tree, and which was much made use of both in the burning of the lamps in the tabernacle, and in many sacrifices, as the meat offerings and others, whereby God was honoured; and it was also made use of in the investiture of the greatest personages with the highest offices among men, as kings, priests, and prophets, as well as eaten with pleasure and delight by all sorts of men, and even by the greatest, and so men are honoured by it:

and go to be promoted over the trees; desert so useful a station, in which it was planted and fixed, to move to and fro, as the word signifies, and reign over trees; suggesting that it was unreasonable, at least not eligible to a

good man to desert a private station in life, to which he was called of God, and in which he acted with honour and usefulness to others, and take upon him a public office, attended with much care and trouble, and with neglect of private affairs, and with the loss of much personal peace and comfort.

Ver. 10. *And the trees said to the fig tree*, etc.] Another useful and fruit bearing tree, and to which also good men are sometimes compared, (see ~~203~~ Song of Solomon 2:13),

come thou, and reign over us: which Jarchi applies to Deborah, but may be better applied to one of Gideon's sons, who, though they had not a personal offer of kingly government themselves, yet it was made to them through their father, and refused, as for himself, so for them; and had it been offered to them, they would have rejected it, as Jotham seems to intimate by this parable.

Ver. 11. *And the fig tree said unto them*, etc.] Rejecting the offer made:

should I forsake my sweetness and my good fruit; for such the fruit of the fig tree is, sweet and good: so Julian^{f200} the emperor shows from various authors, Aristophanes, Herodotus, and Homer, that nothing is sweeter than figs, excepting honey, and that no kind of fruit is better, and, where they are, no good is wanting:

and go to be promoted over the trees? the same is designed by this as the former.

Ver. 12. *Then said the trees unto the vine*, etc.] Another emblem of good and useful men; and it may be observed, that Jotham takes no notice of any trees but fruitful ones till he comes to the bramble, and them only such as were well known, and of the greatest use, in the land of Judea, as olives, figs, and vines, (see ~~888~~ Deuteronomy 8:8 ~~887~~ Habakkuk 3:17)

come thou, and reign over us; this Jarchi applies to Gideon; but since there are three sorts of trees brought into the fable, and when the kingdom was offered to Gideon, it was proposed to him, and to his son, and his son's son, and refused, some reference may be had unto it in this apologue. Abarbinel thinks three sorts of men are intended as proper persons for rule and government, as honourable ones, such as are wealthy and rich, and also of good behaviour to God and man, as Gideon's sons were; but Abimelech was all the reverse.

Ver. 13. *And the vine said unto them*, etc.] By way of denial and refusal, as the other two:

shall I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man; which being used in the drink offerings was acceptable to God, and of a sweet savour to him, (^(~~HEB~~)Numbers 15:7) and being drank by than, revives, refreshes, and makes glad, when before sorrowful, drooping, faint, and weary, (^(~~DAIS~~)Psalm 104:15) though some by Elohim, rendered God, understand great personages, as men of quality, magistrates, etc. and by man the common people, and so in (^(~~HEB~~)Judges 9:9)

and go to be promoted over the trees? all speak the same language, being of the same sentiment.

Ver. 14. *Then said all the trees unto the bramble*, etc.] Perceiving they could not prevail upon any of the useful and fruitful trees to take the government of them, they unite in a request to a bramble, scarce to be called a tree, and however a very barren and fruitless one, yea, hurtful and distressing:

come thou, and reign over us; this respects Abimelech, and describes him as a mean person, the son of a concubine, as having no goodness in him, not any good qualifications to recommend him to government, but all the reverse, cruel, tyrannical, and oppressive; and this exposes the folly of the Shechemites, and their eagerness to have a king at any rate, though ever so mean and despicable, useless and pernicious.

Ver. 15. *And the bramble said unto the trees*, etc.] Accepting of their offer at once:

if ye in trust anoint me king over you; suspecting they were not hearty and cordial in their choice and call to the kingly authority over them:

then come and put your trust in my shadow; promising protection to them as his subjects, requiring their confidence in him, and boasting of the good they should receive from him, as is common with wicked princes at their first entering on their office; but, alas! what shadow or protection can there be in a bramble? if a man attempts: to put himself under it for shelter, he will find it will be of no use to him, but harmful, since, the nearer and closer he comes to it, the more he will be scratched and torn by it:

and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon; signifying, that if they did not heartily submit to his government, and put confidence in him, and prove faithful to him, they should smart for it, and feel his wrath and vengeance, even the greatest men among them, comparable to the cedars of Lebanon; for thorns and brambles catching fire, as they easily do, or fire being put to them, as weak as they are, and placed under the tallest and strongest cedars, will soon fetch them down to the ground; and the words of the bramble, or Abimelech, proved true to the Shechemites, he is made to speak in this parable.

Ver. 16. *Now therefore, if ye have done truly and sincerely, in that ye have made Abimelech king*, etc.] If they had done this conscientiously, and in the uprightness of their hearts, to take such a base man, and a murderer, and make him their king, which Jotham doubted, and put it in this manner to them, that they might consider of it themselves:

if ye have dealt well with Jerubbaal, and his house; if they could think so, which surely they could not, when they reflected upon the murder of his family they had consented to:

and have done unto him according to the deserving of his hands; to his memory, and to his family, according to the merit of his works which he had performed on their account, next mentioned.

Ver. 17. *For my father fought for you*, etc.] In the valley of Jezreel, and at Karkor, where with three hundred men he routed and destroyed an army of 135,000:

and adventured his life far: which, according to our version, may seem to have respect to his going over Jordan, and following the Midianites, fleeing into their country, and fighting them at Karkor, at a great distance from his native place; but the phrase in the original text is, “he cast away his life afar”^{f201}, made no account of it, exposed it to the greatest danger; or, as the Targum,

“he delivered his life as it were to destruction:”

and delivered you out of the hand of Midian; from the oppression and bondage of the Midianites, under which they had laboured seven years.

Ver. 18. *And ye are risen up against my father's house this day,* etc.] Which was an instance of great ingratitude in them, after such services done for them, and favours received by them:

and have slain his sons, seventy persons on one stone; excepting one, himself, and he was intentionally slain, their design was to cut off everyone; and all being slain but one, the round number is given, and this being so large, is the rather observed; and though Abimelech committed the fact, the men of Shechem were accessory to it, they gave him money, with which he hired men to assist him in it, (see ^{אומ}Judges 9:20") and it is very probable they were privy to his intention, and encouraged him to it; and certain it is they showed their approbation of it, by making Abimelech king after it, and therefore they are justly charged with it:

and have made Abimelech, the son of his handmaid, king over the men of Shechem; which was both to the disgrace of Gideon, and his family, and of themselves too, that a base son of his should be made their king; when it would have been more to the credit of Gideon, and his family, that he had lived in obscurity, and had not been known as a son of his; and this was to the reproach of the men of Shechem, and especially to the princes thereof; for, by the men of Shechem are meant the lords, and great men thereof, as Kimchi observes; and great contempt is cast on Abimelech himself, who is here represented as making a very poor figure, being by extraction the son of an handmaid, and king only over the men of Shechem; and who made him so for no other reason but this,

because he is your brother; not because he had any right to the kingdom, or had any qualification for it, but because his mother lived among them, and her family belonged to them, and so he was related to many of them, and they hoped on that account to have preferment and favours from him.

Ver. 19. *If ye then have dealt truly and sincerely with Jerubbaal and his house this day,* etc.] If they could in their consciences think and believe they had done well, and acted the faithful and upright part by him and his family, which he left with them to consider of:

then rejoice ye in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you; may you be happy in him as a king, and he be happy in you as his subjects, and live peaceably and comfortably together; and this he suggests as a test of their former conduct, that should this alliance between Abimelech and them be attended with happiness, which he could not believe would be the case,

then it would seem that they had done a right part by Gideon and his family; but if they should be unhappy together, as he supposed they would, then it would be clear that they had acted a base and disingenuous part by his father's family.

Ver. 20. *But if not*, etc.] If it appeared that they had not acted uprightly and sincerely in this matter:

let fire come out of Abimelech, and devour the men of Shechem, and the house of Millo; let wrath, rage, and fury, break out from Abimelech like fire, and issue in the destruction of those that made him king, both those of Shechem and of Millo:

and let fire come out from the men of Shechem, and from the house of Millo, and devour Abimelech; let them be incensed against Abimelech, and seek his ruin, and procure it: the sense is, that he wishes that strife, contention, and quarrels, might arise among them, and they mutually destroy each other; the words are imprecative of evil upon them both, and which had its exact fulfilment.

Ver. 21. *And Jotham ran away, and fled*, etc.] Having delivered his fable, and the application of it, he made his escape, having the advantage of being on the top of a mountain, at some distance from the people, and perhaps they might not be inclined to do him any harm:

and went to Beer; which some take to be the same with Baalathbeer in the tribe of Simeon, (⁶⁹⁰⁸Joshua 19:8) Jerom ^{f202} says, the village Bera, whither Jotham fled, is eight miles from Eleutheropolis to the north; but Mr. Maundrell ^{f203}, who was in those parts in 1697, gives us a better account of it; and, according to him, it is about two hours and a half's travel from Bethel to it, and three hours and one third from it to Jerusalem; Beer, he says, enjoys a very pleasant situation, on an easy declivity, fronting southward; at the bottom of the hill it has a plentiful fountain of excellent water, from which it had its name:

and dwelt there for fear of Abimelech his brother; how long he dwelt there is not certain, and we hear no more of him after this, Josephus says ^{f204} he lay hid in the mountains three years for fear of Abimelech, which perhaps he concluded from Abimelech's reigning three years, as follows.

Ver. 22. *When Abimelech had reigned three years over Israel.*] The people in general consenting to what the men of Shechem had done, at

least not opposing it, all being desirous of a king, and therefore put up with a mean person, rather than have none; though it is amazing they should, and that they had not rose up as one man against Abimelech, and avenged the blood of the sons of Gideon, who had been so useful and serviceable to them; it is indeed said that he reigned over all Israel, and his reign, such as it was, was very short, as is often the case with wicked princes.

Ver. 23. *Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem*, etc.] Permitted, yea, gave a commission to Satan, the evil spirit, to go among them, who stirred up suspicions, jealousies, hatred, and ill will to one another, and sowed the seeds of discord and contention among them; or God gave them up to their own hearts' lusts, to think ill of one another, grow jealous, and meditate revenge:

and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech; did not openly declare their minds, but secretly conspired against him, and privately consulted ways to find means to get rid of him, and shake off his government.

Ver. 24. *That the cruelty done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might come*, etc.] 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 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.

Ver. 25. *And the men of Shechem set liers in wait for him in the top of the mountains*, etc.] 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 thither 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.

Ver. 26. *And Gaal the son or Ebed came with his brethren, and went over to Shechem*, etc.] 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, 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.

Ver. 27 *And they went into the fields, and gathered their vineyards*, etc.] Before they kept within the city, and durst 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 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, (²³⁶⁰Isaiah 16:10 ²⁴⁸³Jeremiah 48:33) 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 Baalberith, (⁴⁰⁹⁵Judges 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.

Ver. 28. *And Gaal the son of Ebed said*, etc.] 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 Canaanitish 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?

Ver. 29. *And would to God this people were under my hand*, etc.] 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.

Ver. 30. *And when Zebul the ruler of the city*, etc.] Whom Abimelech had placed there under him: 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 dissembled 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.

Ver. 31. *And he sent messengers unto Abimelech privily*, etc.] In a secret manner, unknown to Gaal and the men of Shechem; or “craftily”, as Jarchi and Kimchi interpret it, still dissembling, 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, (^{<0026>}Judges 9:36) though, according to Joseph Kimchi and Ben Gerson, Thormah is the name of the place where Abimelech was, the same with Arumah, (^{<0041>}Judges 9:41) and the sense is, that he sent messengers to Abimelech at Thormah or Arumah:

saying, Gaal the son of Ebal, 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”^{f205} 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.

Ver. 32. *Now therefore up by night*, etc.] 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 fields; 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.

Ver. 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*, etc.] For being with his forces advanced near to it by a march in the night, he would be able by sunrising 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 upon a surprise can get together:

thou mayest 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.

Ver. 34. *And Abimelech rose up, and all the people that were with him, by night*, etc.] 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.

Ver. 35. *And Gaul the son or Ebed went out*, etc.] 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 any thing without, 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.

Ver. 36. *And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul*, etc.] 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 tops 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.

Ver. 37. *And Gaal spake again, and said*, etc.] Looking towards the mountains, and taking another view of what he before saw, for further satisfaction:

see, there come people down by the middle of the land; either in the valley between the two mountains; or rather those he first saw on the top of the mountains were now come down about the middle of them, called in the Hebrew text the navel, from the prominence of the mountains thereabout, or because the navel is in the middle of the body, as this part of them was the middle on which he saw them. R. Isaiah interprets it, between the two cities:

and another company come along by the plain of Meonenim; of which we read nowhere else. Montanus renders it, “the oak of Meonenim”; or of the soothsayers; oaks being had in great esteem with idolaters for their oracles and divinations; and perhaps this was a place, whether an oak or, a plain, where such persons used to meet to make their divinations.

Ver. 38. *Then said Zebul unto him,* etc.] 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? darest 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 are become of those boasts and brags, and great swelling words, what thou wouldest do if thou hadst the command of this city?

is not this the people thou hast despised? as small and insignificant, bidding Abimelech increase his army, and come out and fight:

go out, I pray thee, now, and fight with them; and show thyself to be a man of courage, and not a mere blusterer, a man that can use his sword as well as his tongue.

Ver. 39. *And Gaal went out before the men of Shechem,* etc.] At the head of them, to meet Abimelech, having gathered together as many, and put them in as good order, as he could, and the time would admit of:

and fought with Abimelech; without the city.

Ver. 40. *And Abimelech chased him, and he fled before him,* etc.] 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 many wounded” ^{f206}, 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.

Ver. 41. *And Abimelech dwelt at Arumah,* etc.] Called also Aarima as Jerom ^{f207} says, and in his time called Remphtis; it seems to be not far off from Shechem, he returned to the place where he was before, (see ~~1081~~ 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 more friendly 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 late 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 Gaul 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.

Ver. 42. *And it came to pass on the morrow*, etc.] 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 to finish their vintage, as Josephus^{f208}, or to till their ground, to plough and sow, which quickly came on after the vintage 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 more easy, with then, 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.

Ver. 43. *And he took the people*, etc.] 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.

Ver. 44. *And Abimelech, and the company that was with him*, etc.] Which he had the particular command of; or "the heads"^{f209}, 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 to their 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.

Ver. 45. *And Abimelech fought against the city all that day,* etc.] By throwing stones or arrows into it:

and he took the city; it was surrendered to him, not being able to stand out against his forces:

and slew the people that was therein; all but those that were of his own family and his friends; all that had taken up arms against him, or had shown their dislike of his government, and were his enemies:

and beat down the city; the houses in it, and walls of it, though it was his native place:

and sowed it with salt; not to make it barren, for he would rather then have sowed the field, though this would not have had any effect of that kind, for any time at least; but to show his detestation of it, because of the ill usage he had met with, and as a token of its perpetual destruction, to which he devoted it, determining that if it was in his power it should never be rebuilt; but it was hereafter, and became again a very flourishing city in Jeroboam's time. Thus the Emperor Frederic Barbarossa, in the year 1162, when he took Milan, not only ploughed it up, but sowed it with salt; and in memory of it there is a street in it, now called "la contrada della Sala"^{f210}: besides, Abimelech did this to deter other cities from rebelling against him; for if he so used his own city, more severely, if possible, would he use others.

Ver. 46. *And when all the men of the tower of Shechem heard that,* etc.] That 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 whither 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 an hold of the house of the god Berith; not thinking themselves safe enough in the tower, they betook themselves to the temple of Baalberith their god, (see ^{<000>}Judges 9:4 8:33) which was a strong fortified place, as temples often were; or however had a strong hold belonging to it, and hither 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.

Ver. 47. *And it was told Abimelech*, etc.] 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 Baalberith.

Ver. 48. *And Abimelech got him up to Mount Zalmon*, etc.] A mountain near Shechem, and thought to be the same with Salmon in (^{<0814>}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 shoulders; 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.

Ver. 49. *And all the people likewise cut down every man his bough, and followed Abimelech*, etc.] 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^{f211} should say that faggots 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.

Ver. 50. *Then went Abimelech to Thebez*, etc.] Which, according to Ben Gersom, had rebelled against him; it was near to Shechem. Adrichomius says^{f212}, 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, were to be seen ruins of a large town, marble stones, whole pillars, and other signs of large palaces, and the soil wonderfully fruitful; and Jerome says^{f213}, 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, (~~4000~~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.

Ver. 51. *But there was a strong tower within the city*, etc.] 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.

Ver. 52. *And Abimelech came unto the tower,* etc.] 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 Baalberith.

Ver. 53. *And a certain woman cast a piece of a millstone,* etc.] 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 break his skull; she did it with that view, though it may as well be rendered, or “she”, or “it broke his skull”^{f214}; 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.

Ver. 54. *Then he called hastily to the young man his armourbearer,* etc.] 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 ignominious and reproachful to die by the hand of a woman, and especially any great personage, as a king or general of an army^{f215}; 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, (~~1012~~ 2 Samuel 11:21).

Ver. 55. *And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead*, etc.] That is, those that were with him, the men of his army, who were all Israelites:

they departed every man to his place; disbanded themselves, and went everyone to their own home, and so the inhabitants of Thebez escaped the vengeance of Abimelech.

Ver. 56. *Thus God rendered the wickedness of Abimelech which he did unto his father*, etc.] 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.

Ver. 57. *And all the evil of the men of Shechem*, etc.] 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 (~~1013~~ Judges 9:20).