

Judges 9:22-55– God Deals With Corrupted Leaders!

TSK, Poole, HebrewLexicon, Trapp, Geneva, JFB, Barnes, Delitzsch, Henry, Gill, Pulpit, Handfuls, Expositor?

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ: Corrupted leadership hurts the church. It hurts very much. In North America we are in such a state where we see the hurt that has come as leadership has become more corrupted. Many leaders lead out of a desire to get rich and compromise the Gospel (福音), rather than advancing Christ's cause. They tickle(使开心) people's ears and sell a lot of books. They advance their own image and advantage instead of Christ's. With a watered down Gospel, the weakness of the church has become apparent. And the church is in a self-destructing mode. (This past week the leaders of the Presbyterian Church USA decided that Bible supports homosexual marriages.) You will see today how God deals with such wicked leaders.

Our headings are:

The Corrupted King lost his power

The Corrupted King lost his people

The Corrupted King lost his pride

Our goals are: **That you will be comforted that God's church will never be destroyed, though there may be corruption in the head and body, and that you will invest time to make sure that the church is led by competent men.**

The Corrupted King Lost his power

22 After Abimelech had reigned over Israel three years, 23 **God sent a spirit of ill will between Abimelech and the men of Shechem**; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously (以诡诈) with Abimelech, 24 that the crime done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might be settled and their blood be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who aided him in the killing of his brothers.

1. Abimelech was a threat to God's kingdom so God worked against him and caused him to decline in influence and power! He had killed his 70 brothers and made himself king of Israel for 3 years. God decided he had tolerated Abimelech's wickedness long enough and allowed an evil spirit to create a rift (分裂) between Abimelech and his family who had crowned him.

Is it really possible that God could do send an evil spirit? Yes. God gives all men common grace so they are not as wicked as they would want to be. But sometimes God removes restrictions (common grace) to some degree and leaves men subjected to the wiles (欺骗, 诱惑) of the Devil. The Devil, seizing that opportunity, then works his evil, in and through those evil men.

Romans 1:28 And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, **God gave them over to a debased mind**, to do those things which are not fitting; 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness... (28 他们既然故意不认识神, 神就任凭他们存邪僻的心, 行那些不合理的事; 29 装满了各样不义、邪恶、贪婪、恶毒; ...)

So even though Abimelech felt secure in his position, as the wicked often are, he was on slippery ground (Psalm 73). Remember: "Take heed how you stand, lest you fall." No leader should be complacent(得意的, 掉以轻心的) and think he is outside the reach of God's justice. No cruel father will be forgotten. No lax elder would be exempted from punishment.

25 And the men of Shechem **set men in ambush against him** on the tops of the mountains, and they **robbed all who passed by** them along that way; and it was told Abimelech.

2. How specifically did this demon work? The Demon lured the Shechemites to become robbers and set an ambush to capture and kill Abimelech. They had expected the king would have protected them in their dastardly deeds. For the Shechemites, it was time for the king to "pay the fiddler."(承担后果, 付代价) They "called in their chips." But the king apparently rebuffed(断然拒绝, 阻止) them. So while this was God's plan, God was not the cause of their sin. Abimelech and Shechem committed their own sins. The fact is, however, God sovereignly works to bring low the work of the wicked and preserve his church. This church was purchased with the blood of his Son (Acts 20:28) and he truly cherishes it.

26 Now Gaal the son of Ebed came with his brothers and went over to Shechem; and the men of Shechem put their confidence in him. 27 So they went out into the fields, and gathered grapes from their vineyards and trod them, and made merry. And they went into the house of their god, and ate and drank, and cursed Abimelech. 28 Then Gaal the son of Ebed said, "**Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should serve him?** Is he not the **son of Jerubbaal**, and is not **Zebul his officer?** **Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem**; but why should we serve him? 29 "**If only this people were under my authority!**" Then I would remove Abimelech." So he said to Abimelech, "Increase your army and come out!"

3. The Shechemites abandonment of Abimelech sealed his decline and embarrassed him. He wanted to project a certain dignity, but it was gone. His power and wealth threatened. His friends were thugs and robbers... with no respect for his law and order. And to rub salt into Abimelech's wound, the Shechemites **turned to Gaal, son of Ebed, son of a slave, to be their next leader.** (One bramble 荆棘 was fighting against another bramble. Abimelech was son of a concubine 妾.) Gaal was a native Canaanite. Gaal then urged the men to reject "useless" Abimelech because Shechemites were far too good for him. He then led the Shechemites to **indulge in alcohol and worship pagan gods** (外邦人的神). ("Make merry" wasn't a party, but a religious service to their pagan god.) (What a leader!) Then **they cursed Abimelech.** They mocked his father Gideon. They ridiculed Abimelech's deputy. And Gaal argued that it was better to serve Shechem, which was built by Hamor during the days of Jacob, rather than serve Abimelech. And note **Gaal's arrogance to Abimelech:** Increase your army and come!

Foolish church leaders have thought that they would maintain influence over the people by compromising and giving people what they want – simple song, shorter sermons-innovative doctrines - but they are wrong. And they hope to maintain their influence over

the people by giving them what they want. This is a slippery slope. This is true for families also. Father compromise and let their children do what they want or dress how they want from fear of “losing their children” and their influence over them. These leaders will lose twice. They will lose their influence with those under them and with God. God loves his church – a church which he purchased with the blood of his Son. He will not let the gates of hell to prevail against it.

The Corrupted King Lost his People

30 When Zebul, the ruler of the city, heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was aroused. 31 And he sent messengers to Abimelech secretly, saying, "Take note! **Gaal the son of Ebed and his brothers have come to Shechem**; and here they are, fortifying the city against you. 32 "Now therefore, get up by night, you and the people who are with you, and lie in wait in the field. 33 "And it shall be, as soon as the sun is up in the morning, that you shall rise early and rush upon the city; and when he and the people who are with him come out against you, you may then do to them as you find opportunity."

1. Zebul, Abimelech's deputy, a resident of Shechem, secretly reported to him the danger he was in and urged Abimelech to come immediately and lay an ambush against Shechem. Zebul, a leader, wasn't concerned about the wickedness of Israel. He wanted revenge for his loss of power. He urged Abimelech to attack early in the morning, even as the Shechemites would be suffering from their indulgence in wine. Abimelech was betrayed and Zebul was insulted, but it was their own sin on their own head. **Ironically, the very thing in which wicked leaders indulge is what the Lord used to bring them down.**

34 So Abimelech and all the people who were with him rose by night, and lay in wait against Shechem in four companies. 35 When Gaal the son of Ebed went out and stood in the entrance to the city gate, Abimelech and the people who were with him rose from lying in wait.

2. Then Abimelech, following his advisor Zebul and gathered 4 companies of soldiers that night and set the ambush.

36 And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, "Look, people are coming down from the tops of the mountains!" But Zebul said to him, "**You see the shadows of the mountains** as if they were men." 37 So Gaal spoke again and said, "See, people are coming down from the center of the land, and another **company is coming from the Diviners' Terebinth Tree.**"

3. Zebul then stymied (妨碍, 阻挠) Gaal and the rebels against Abimelech. This delayed their preparation and response. **Zebul made Gaal, the newly embraced leader of the Shechemites, to doubt his own eyes.** Zebul said to him: "You are seeing things; that is not the enemy." And note how witchcraft (巫术) was already being practiced in Israel at this time. And you don't read of anyone seeking the Lord's guidance.

38 Then Zebul said to him, "**Where indeed is your mouth now, with which you said, 'Who is Abimelech, that we should serve him?'** Are not these the people whom you despised? Go out, if you will, and fight with them now." **39 So Gaal went out,** leading the men of Shechem, and fought with Abimelech. 40 And **Abimelech chased him,** and he fled from him; and many fell wounded, to the very entrance of the gate.

4. When it became evident to Gaal that it was Abimelech coming to attack Shechem and that Zebul had lied to him, Gaal and the Shechemites were forced to go out and fight. But they were defeated and ran back to the city. Gaal had guaranteed success, but he could not deliver. He lost. He was not fighting with the help of God. God does not bless wickedness. He will not bless a mixed marriage...or overworking...or any other sin!

41 Then Abimelech dwelt at Arumah, and Zebul drove out Gaal and his brothers, so that they would not dwell in Shechem. 42 And it came about on the next day that the people went out into the field, and they told Abimelech. 43 So he took his people, divided them into three companies, and lay in wait in the field. And he looked, and there were the people, coming out of the city; and he rose against them and attacked them. 44 Then Abimelech and the company that was with him rushed forward and stood at the entrance of the gate of the city; and the other two companies rushed upon all who were in the fields and killed them. 45 So Abimelech fought against the city all that day; he took the city and killed the people who were in it; and he demolished the city and **sowed it with salt.**

5. The defeated Shechemites leaders fled Shechem but the battle was not over. The next day the remaining people went out to the fields. Abimelech came and ambushed them after locking them out of the safety of the city. And to show a total conquering of Shechem, Abimelech then spread salt all over the city. He showed the barrenness of the city. God **does not tolerate accessories to crimes;** he will punish all sinners – leaders, more, but citizens as well.

46 Now when all the men of the tower of Shechem had heard that, they entered the stronghold of the temple of the god Berith. 47 And it was told Abimelech that all the men of the tower of Shechem were gathered together. 48 Then Abimelech went up to Mount Zalmon, he and all the people who were with him. And Abimelech took an ax in his hand and cut down a bough from the trees, and took it and laid it on his shoulder; then he said to the people who were with him, "What

you have seen me do, make haste and do as I have done." 49 So each of the people likewise cut down his own bough and followed Abimelech, put them against the stronghold, and set the stronghold on fire above them, so that all the people of the tower of Shechem died, about a thousand men and women.

6. Now about 1000 Shechemites who heard of the destruction outside ran and hid in the great temple. (Can you imagine the size of this temple...a temple to a pagan god in Israel?) Then Abimelech and his men, seeing the Shechemites trapped in the tower, gathered brambles and branches and set it against the tower and killed all the men, women, and children there. They probably died from smoke inhalation (吸入). Trapp: "This was as if a man should run into a stack of straw or barrel of gunpowder, to secure himself from a raging fire." What a horrible picture! Can you see the babies who suffered because of the wickedness of their parents and national leaders? But this was necessary to preserve the church of Jesus Christ! This is evidence of true jealousy!

Ezekiel 8:3 He stretched out the form of a hand, and took me by a lock of my hair; and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven, and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the north gate of the inner court, **where the seat of the image of jealousy was**, which provokes to jealousy.

So Abimelech lost all the people. His power was gone and his people.

The Corrupted King Lost his Pride

50 Then Abimelech went to Thebez, and he encamped against Thebez and took it. 51 But there was a strong tower in the city, and all the men and women—all the people of the city—fled there and shut themselves in; then they went up to the top of the tower. 52 So Abimelech came as far as the tower and fought against it; and he drew near the door of the tower to burn it with fire. 53 But a certain woman dropped an upper millstone on Abimelech's head and crushed his skull. 54 Then he called quickly to the young man, his armorbearer, and said to him, "Draw your sword and kill me, lest men say of me, 'A woman killed him.'" So his young man thrust him through, and he died. 55 And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they departed, every man to his place.

1. Thinking he could control the rest of his people by force, like he did to the Shechemites, Abimelech tried the same thing with the Thebezites. So he put fear in them and they ran and hid themselves in the great tower there. Abimelech then came to fight against them. He could not burn down this city as its walls were made of stone. Still feeling invincible, Abimelech was careless. Now it was common to drop things on enemy soldiers to harm them, but Abimelech seemed so overwhelmed by lust that he became careless.

2. Then a woman dropped a stone on Abimelech's head and killed him. What amazing providence that she hit him on the head to kill him, just as the enemy shot an arrow at random and killed Ahab. Abimelech tried to hide the shame, but for all counting purposes, he was killed by a woman. His pride was shattered. One's wrong does fall upon one's own head. Ironic! And while he tried to conceal his death at the hands of a woman, billions of people have known that he was killed by a woman. In the end, Jotham's prophecy was fulfilled: Leader and people destroyed each other.

3. Upon the leader's death there was no mourning. Everyone went to his own home. What was sad here is that Israel continued to do nothing! And isn't it sadly true that many today are so concerned about pleasure and profit and are therefore indifferent to the corruption in leadership in the churches? They would rather live wicked lives under the protection of their leaders until they are both destroyed.

Conclusion

Corrupt leadership in Israel, along with complacent citizens, brought much hurt to Christ's church, so God had to work to preserve his church and keep the promise he made of Christ coming to save the world. God had to destroy those who stood in the way of his promise. God took Abimelech's power, his people, and his pride.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: Don't lose hope when you see a corrupted church. Christ's church can never be destroyed. He will not only preserve his church, he will also propagate (扩大) his church. Consider 3 keys for kingdom work:

1. Be good leaders under your Savior – in the home, in the church, and in the civil government.

2. Choose good leaders under your Savior – as your husband, as your elders, and as your civil leaders. The reason to choose carefully is that sometimes it is not easy to remove a weak leader...like if you were married to him, etc.

3. Work to reform or remove corrupt leaders. Don't accept weak leaders in the church, home or state.

Finally: If you are outside of Jesus's church you can expect eternal judgment. But if you call on the Lord for forgiveness, he will give it to you through his son, he will accept you as his, and he will bring you into his church and keep you there forever.