

# Judges

## Lesson 20

### (c) Insolence Against Abimelech

- Abimelech's Attack on Thebez

From the indignation against Abimelech to the insurrection against Abimelech, we now come to the insolence against Abimelech at Thebez. We see now Abimelech's attack on Thebez. Verse 50.

*"Then Abimelech went to Thebez, and he camped against Thebez and captured it. <sup>1</sup> But there was a strong tower in the center of the city, and all the men and women with all the leaders of the city fled there and shut themselves in; and they went up on the roof of the tower."* (9:50-51)

During the days of Eusebius, a church historian who lived from about 260 AD to 340 AD, a place called *Thebez* still stood between Shechem and Beth-shean. It was about thirteen miles from Shechem. Today, it is a beautiful village called *Tubas*. According to this verse, the people of Thebez must have joined in the rebellion against Abimelech. At Thebez, Abimelech successfully captured the city, but the tower in the middle of the city was a different task. The passage tells us that *"all the men and women with all the leaders of the city fled there and shut themselves in; and they went up on the roof of the tower."* "All" means all; therefore, Abimelech was able to take the city with ease, with only a little fighting, because all the people deserted the streets of the city and sought safety in the tower.

- Abimelech's Approach at Thebez

Once inside the city, Abimelech followed the people to the tower with the intent of burning it to the ground as he did at *El-berith*. Verse 52. *"So Abimelech came to the tower and fought against it, and approached the entrance of the tower to burn it with fire."* (9:52)

- Abimelech's Defeat at Thebez

- A Woman's Millstone

But at the tower, things would be different for Abimelech this time. We see Abimelech's defeat at Thebez by a woman's millstone. Verse 53. *"But a certain woman threw an upper millstone on Abimelech's head, crushing his skull."* (9:53)

What is an *upper millstone*? When women ground their grain, two stones were used. The lower stone was flat. The upper stone was round. The grain was placed on the flat lower stone, and the woman used the round upper stone to roll over the grain, grinding it into flour. This woman threw the round stone on Abimelech's head, crushing his head.

- A Young Man's Sword

The woman struck the blow to Abimelech's head, but the ancient sensitivity about the manner of death kicked in with Abimelech. He called for the young man's sword. Verse 54. *"Then he called quickly to the young man, his armor bearer, and said to him, 'Draw your sword and kill me, so that it will not be said of me, 'A woman slew him.''" So the young man pierced him through, and he died. <sup>2</sup> When the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, each departed to his home."* (9:54-55)

Abimelech was mortally wounded but still cognizant enough to know that the blow to his head was at the hands of a woman. In those ancient cultures, it was dishonorable to die at the hand of a woman. It is hard to believe, but suicide was more honorable than dying at the hands of a woman. But Abimelech did not commit suicide; his fatal blow was delivered by the hands of his faithful armor-bearer. Upon the death of Abimelech, his entire army simply disbanded and departed for their own homes. The evil rule of Abimelech was over.

## (vii) Abimelech's Conclusion

## (a) Abimelech's Wickedness repaid

The writer sums up Abimelech's conclusion. He writes of Abimelech's wickedness repaid. Verse 56. *"Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father in killing his seventy brothers."* (9:56)

Abimelech was never supposed to be Israel's first king. The LORD was to be Israel's king. All the evil of Abimelech was not forgotten by the LORD. The LORD repaid Abimelech for his evil. He was not a judge over Israel. He was part of the problem in Israel. He worshiped Baal. He worked for Baal. He was in disobedience to the LORD's covenant and commandments. He started the fifth cycle of sin in the nation of Israel by his actions and his desires. For the first three years after the death of Gideon, Abimelech led Israel down the wrong path.

## (b) Shechem's Wickedness Repaid

But Abimelech was not alone in his wickedness and disobedience to the LORD. His kin at Shechem helped start the whole sin of Israel. Verse 57. *"Also God returned all the wickedness of the men of Shechem on their heads, and the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal came upon them."* (9:57)

The three-year timeline since the death of Gideon was as follows. Gideon died. Abimelech wanted the privilege and honor bestowed on his father and half-brothers. He wanted what Gideon would not let any of them have – kingship in Israel. Abimelech enlisted his kin in Shechem and Millo, who crowned him king. God sent a spirit of ill will between the people and Abimelech. The people rejected Abimelech. The war between the two occurred. Abimelech destroyed the people in Shechem with fire. But then, Abimelech was killed down the road. His mortal wound was at the hand of a woman. His deadly wound was at the hand of his armor-bearer. It took three years, but the curse spoken by Gideon's youngest and surviving son of a proper marriage came to pass. What is the takeaway? You can never do an evil thing to acquire a good thing. The LORD will not permit it. The LORD will never bless an evil and produce a good.

## Chapter 10

## b) Enter Tola – Israel's Judge -Twenty-three Years

Still, at the beginning of cycle five of Israel's sin against the LORD, three years into that sin, the writer continues with his unusual description of Israel's sin. In the first four cycles, he did not tell us the time of Israel's sin. Yet, in this cycle, the writer has told us of the first three years, and now he tells us of the following forty-five years. Enter Tola – Israel's judge for twenty-three years. Chapter 10, verse 1. *"Now after Abimelech died, Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar, arose to save Israel; and he lived in Shamir in the hill country of Ephraim. <sup>2</sup> He judged Israel twenty-three years. Then he died and was buried in Shamir."* (10:1-2)

Nothing more is known about Tola. In this passage, we learn that Tola was of the tribe of Issachar; however, he lived in the tribal area of Ephraim. The town in Ephraim is called *Shamir*. The name means *prison*.

With this judge, we must recognize that the Israelites did not cry out to the LORD for help. The same was the case with Shamgar, if you remember. Neither was risen by the LORD to deliver Israel from oppression. No oppression had taken the nation yet. Rather, the verse tells us that he *"arose to save Israel."* In Judges 2:16, the LORD promised to raise a deliverer for Israel. In Hebrew, the word is *way-yo-wo-si-um*. It means to *liberate*. In Judges 3:9, the LORD raised Othniel to *deliver* Israel. The Hebrew word means to *liberate*. But in this verse, with the mention of Tola, the Hebrew word is *le-ho-wo-si-a*, and it can mean to *liberate*, but it is more often used to mean to *save*. But did Tola save Israel from an oppressor? No. Tola was simply one of the regular judges in the magistrate system set up

by Moses, as we have already discussed in this book. What Tola did for Israel was that he judged righteously in the area and kept the nation quiet and peaceable. For twenty-three years, he held the peace in Israel in his guidance at the prison. As for the disobedience of the LORD in the worship of Baal, we are not told whether or not he thwarted such practices.

### c) Enter Jair – Israel's Judge - Twenty-two Years

Following Tola, enter Jair, Israel's judge for twenty-two years. Verse 3. *"After him, Jair the Gileadite arose and judged Israel twenty-two years. <sup>4</sup> He had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys, and they had thirty cities in the land of Gilead that are called Havvoth-jair to this day. <sup>5</sup> And Jair died and was buried in Kamon."* (10:3-5)

Jair was a Gileadite. Being a Gileadite means that Jair was from the tribe of Manasseh. As with Shamgar and Tola, the people did not cry to the LORD to deliver them from the oppressor because the nation was not under an oppressor. Neither did the LORD raise Jair to be a deliverer.

Therefore, Jair was just another judge in the magistrate system of Israel. Yet, he must have been a strong enough judge to be prominent in the quiet and peace in Israel for twenty-two years. Tola served as a magistrate on the west side of the Jordan River in the tribal area of Ephraim. Jair served as a magistrate on the east side of the Jordan River in the tribal area of Manasseh.

Jair had thirty sons. Each son had a city. All of the thirty cities together were called *Havvoth-jair*. Havvoth-jair means the *encampments of Jair* or the *tents of Jair*.

We are at a loss at this point with these two men. Did Tola serve in the west while Jair served in the east? Or, did Jair follow after Tola, as this passage seems to state? We do not know. We must accept that the two ran one after the other. If that be the case, the total years after the end of cycle four lasted forty-seven years. Then sin came again into Israel – disobedience to the LORD. Enter the Philistine and Ammonite oppression.