

Judges 9:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

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.

This verse contributes to the narrative of Abimelech's tyrannical reign and judgment. The Book of Judges documents Israel's cyclical pattern of apostasy and deliverance, revealing both human depravity and divine mercy. Each cycle begins with Israel doing evil (usually Baal worship), followed by God's judgment through foreign oppression, Israel's cry for deliverance, God raising up a judge, temporary peace, then renewed apostasy after the judge dies.

Theologically, this pattern demonstrates several crucial truths:

1. Human inability to maintain covenant faithfulness apart from God's transforming grace
2. God's justice in punishing covenant violation through the curses of Deuteronomy 28
3. God's mercy in responding to repentant cries with deliverance
4. The inadequacy of repeated deliverances to produce lasting transformation, pointing to the need for the New Covenant with God's law written on hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

The judges themselves foreshadow Christ—they are divinely appointed deliverers who save Israel from enemies.

Yet their imperfections and temporary victories point to the need for the perfect Judge who would provide permanent deliverance. Jesus fulfills the judges' typology, being the ultimate "sent one" who conquers spiritual enemies definitively through His death and resurrection, providing eternal salvation rather than temporary political relief.

Historical Context

Historical Setting: The Book of Judges spans approximately 350-400 years (c. 1375-1050 BCE) during the Late Bronze Age collapse and early Iron Age. This period saw the disintegration of major empires (Hittites, Mycenaeans) and weakening of Egyptian control over Canaan, creating a power vacuum filled by emerging peoples including Philistines (Sea Peoples), Aramaeans, and regional kingdoms. The decentralized tribal structure left Israel vulnerable to external oppression and internal chaos.

Cultural Context: This passage relates to Abimelech's tyrannical reign and judgment. Canaanite religion dominated the region, centered on Baal (storm/fertility god), Asherah (mother goddess), and Anat (war goddess). Archaeological discoveries at Ugarit (Ras Shamra) have provided extensive information about Canaanite mythology and religious practices. Baal worship involved ritual prostitution, child sacrifice, and fertility rites tied to agricultural seasons. Israel's persistent attraction to these gods demonstrates the strong cultural pressure to conform to surrounding nations' religious practices.

The material culture of this period shows gradual Israelite settlement in the Canaanite hill country, with simpler pottery and architecture than coastal Canaanite cities. Iron technology was beginning to spread, giving military advantage to peoples who mastered it (note the Philistines' iron monopoly, 1 Samuel 13:19-22). The absence of centralized government during the judges period stands in stark contrast to the bureaucratic city-states of Canaan and the imperial administration of Egypt and Mesopotamia. This political structure

reflected Israel's theocratic ideal—God as king—yet the repeated cycles of apostasy showed this ideal required more than political structures; it demanded heart transformation.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does this passage about Abimelech's tyrannical reign and judgment reveal God's character in dealing with persistent human rebellion and incomplete obedience?
2. What patterns of spiritual compromise or incomplete obedience in your own life mirror Israel's failures during the judges period?
3. How does understanding the cyclical nature of sin and deliverance in Judges help you appreciate Christ's perfect and final deliverance from sin's power?

Interlinear Text

וְאֵם H518	אֵן אֵ H369	וְתֵצֵא H3318	אֵ שֵׁ H784	אֲבִימֶלֶךְ: H40	וְתֹאכֵךְ לֵ H398	אֵת H853
from the men H1167	of Shechem H7927	But if not let fire H784	Abimelech H40	and devour H398		
מִבְּעַל יֵ H1167	שָׁכֶם H7927	וְאֵת H853	וּמִבֵּית H1004	מִלּוֹ H4407	וְתֵצֵא H3318	
from the men H1167	of Shechem H7927	and from the house H1004	of Millo H4407	come out H3318		
אֵ שֵׁ H784	מִבְּעַל יֵ H1167	שָׁכֶם H7927	וּמִבֵּית H1004	מִלּוֹ H4407		
But if not let fire H784	from the men H1167	of Shechem H7927	and from the house H1004	of Millo H4407		
וְתֹאכֵךְ לֵ H398	אֵת H853	אֲבִימֶלֶךְ: H40				
and devour H398	Abimelech H40					

Additional Cross-References

Judges 9:15 (Parallel theme): And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon.