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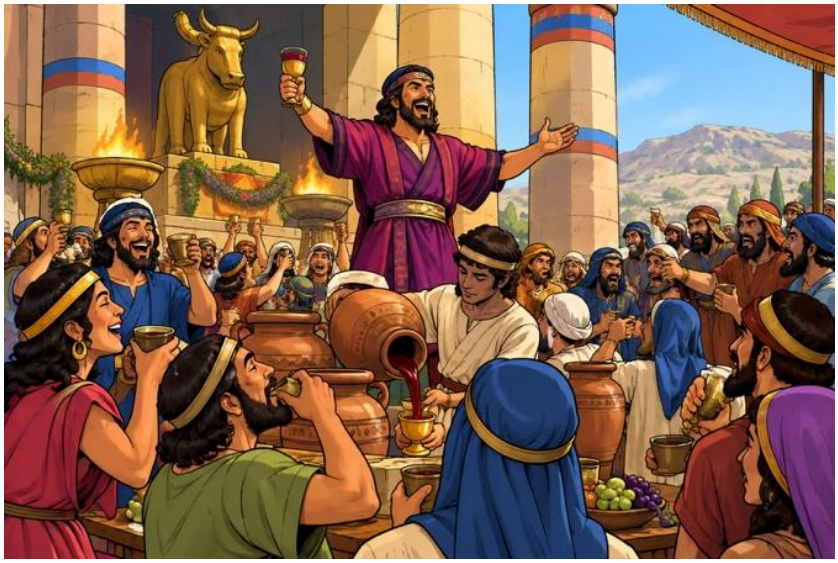
The Conspiracy of Ga’al
9: 26-41

The conspiracy of Ga’al DIG: Why did Ga’al want to fight Abimelech? Where did Abimelech live? Where did Ga’al live? Why did Ga’al emphasize Abimelech’s paternal heritage rather than his maternal heritage? What was Zebul’s plan to defeat the rebellion of Ga’al? Why didn’t Ga’al stand a chance in the battle?

REFLECT: When presented with a problem, do you wait around until action is unavoidable or are you proactive? How do you show your loyalty to YHVH? Because today’s culture doesn’t encourage loyalty to either family or to the Lord, how can you protect yourself against the wiles of the devil?

God gave the Israelites the king they deserved, and He gave Abimelech the people he deserved.

ADONAI created a rift between **Abimelech** and **the citizens of Shechem** (**to see link click Bk – The Destruction of Shechem**), so much so that **the Shechemites** began to work against **the king**. **They** began to rob the caravans that passed by **the city** on the nearby trade routes. **Abimelech** was living at **Arumah (9:41)**, and the activities of those **bandits** were robbing **him** of both money and reputation. Foreign merchants would hear about the danger and take a different trade route. But even more, the word would get out that **the king** couldn’t even control **his** subjects or protect **his** kingdom. Into this situation stepped a newcomer, **Ga’al**, a man who knew a good opportunity when **he** saw it.[238]



Day one: The Conspiracy of Ga'al (9:26-29): Abimelech appears to have taken no action against the marauding bands which were terrorizing the countryside. It was not until there was a direct challenge to **his** authority that **he** was stirred to action. **Now Ga'al,** (Hebrew: meaning *to vomit*) **son of Ebed, moved his relatives into Shechem, and its citizens put their trust in him (9:26 NIV). He** appears out of nowhere, but soon will claim to be a descendant of **Hamor**, the founder of **Shechem (Genesis 33:19** and **34:2)**. The return with **Ga'al's relatives** was ominous because **they** are bound to **him** by blood. Nothing is known of **Ga'al** apart from the information given in this chapter. **The citizens of Shechem** were apparently easily swayed and **Ga'al** gained **their** confidence by **his** guile, just as **Abimelech** had previously done (see **Bi – The Conspiracy of Abimelech**).[239]

At the time of **the grape harvest** (June-July) **the Shechemites** held a pagan religious festival comparable to, but earlier than, **the Israelite festival of Sukkot** (see the commentary on **Leviticus Eg – Hag Sukkot**) which was in September-October **(Deuteronomy 16:13-15)**. Under the Canaanite influence, **the** pagan **festival** had replaced **Sukkot** as the great summer festival until the reformations of **Hezekiah** and **Josiah (Second Kings 23:21ff** and **Second Chronicles 30:1ff** and **35:1ff**). This gave **Ga'al** and **the rulers of Shechem** the opportunity to meet and plan **their** next move under the guise of holding a religious festival. **The people went out into the fields, harvested their grapes, and held the annual festival at Shechem that was held in the temple of the local god, Ba'al-Berith (9:27a Hebrew).**[240] **Grapes** were gathered and trodden out in **the**

winepresses to produce **wine** during this season, which became a time of merry-making, over-indulgence, and immorality, hardly compatible with a holy feast. The scene of **Shechem** taken over by a mob of drunkards contrasted sharply with the picture of well-being **Abimelech** had promised **the city (9:26)**.[241]

And everyone began cursing Abimelech. At the height of the celebration **Ga'al** took the opportunity to address the crowd. **"Who is Abimelech?" Ga'al boasted. "He's not a true son of Shechem, so why should we be his servants?** Then **he** slyly traced **Abimelech's** genealogy through **his father**, not **his Shechemite mother**, saying: **he's merely the son of Gideon, and this Zebul is merely his henchman.** Next, **he** appealed to **them** to **serve the true sons of Hamor, the founder of Shechem** (see **Genesis Ib – The Rape of Dinah**)**. Why should we serve** this half-breed **Abimelech (9:27b-28 NLT)?** Finally, having undermined **their** confidence in **Abimelech** and having made **his** emotional appeal, **he** hinted how different things would be if ***he*** were made **their** leader.[242] **Ga'al** was living in **Shechem** while **Abimelech** was living in **Arumah**. **The people** could tell **Ga'al their** problems, and **he** would give **them** what **they** needed, so why would **they** go to **Arumah** for help? **He** said: **If *I* were in charge here, *I* would get rid of Abimelech. *I* would say to him, "Get some soldiers, and come out and fight" (9:29 NLT). He** was confident that **the people** would follow **him** and **he** could get rid of **Abimelech**. So with empty bravado **he** tossed out **his** challenge to the absent **king**. The tone and the methods of **Ga'al** were similar to those of **Absalom** (see **the Life of David Do – Absalom's Conspiracy**).[243]

The report to Abimelech (9:30-33): **Abimelech's** local lackey in **Shechem** was **Zebul**, **the governor of the city**, who wasted no time getting the information about **Ga'al** to **the king**. **When Zebul heard what Ga'al said, he was furious. He sent messengers to Abimelech in Arumah, telling him, "Ga'al son of Ebed and his brothers have come to live in Shechem, and now they are inciting the city against you."** This suggests that not everyone was a part of the drunken mob and **Abimelech** continued to have a measure of support. But the drift toward a civil war was brewing. Not only did **Zebul** inform **Abimelech** about the rebellion, but **he** also gave **the king** a strategy for dealing with **the boastful intruder**. **Come by night with an army and hide out in the fields. In the morning, as soon as it is daylight, attack the city.** No doubt reasoning that it would be better to take the initiative rather than to allow **Ga'al** time to consolidate **his** position.[244] **When Ga'al and those who are with him come out against you, you can do with them as you wish (9:30-33 NLT). Zebul** would be

working for **the king** within **Shechem**, and **the king** would gather **his troops** outside the city.

Day Two: The defeat of Ga'al (9:34-41): Abimelech's response was quick. **He and all his men went by night and split into four companies, stationing themselves around Shechem.** By about 3:00am, I imagine, **Abimelech** had **his four companies** of **troops** waiting in position **around Shechem**. **Zebul** played **his** role with considerable skill. **Now Ga'al was standing at the city gate just as Abimelech and his army came out of hiding (9:34-35 NLT). When Ga'al saw them, he said to Zebul, "Look, there are people coming down from the hilltops!"** But **Zebul** made a disarming comment trying to avoid the obvious: **It's just the shadows on the hills that look like men.** In a little while, **Ga'al** squinted and exclaimed: **No, those *are* men coming down from the hills. And another group is coming down the road past the Diviners' Oak. Then Zebul,** with **his** trump card ready, **turned to him and** taunted: **Where is your big mouth now? He** must have practiced that line all night. **Wasn't that what you said, "Who is Abimelech, and why should we be his servants?" The men you mocked are right outside the city,** leaving **Ga'al** no alternative but to **fight** or lose face**!**[245] **So Ga'al led the men of Shechem out to fight Abimelech,** but **they** were woefully unprepared**. Abimelech chased Ga'al, and the big mouth fled the battlefield. And many fell wounded, up to the entrance of the city gate (9:36-40 NLT).**

Abimelech settled (Hebrew: *vaiyseshev*) **in Arumah, and Zebul drove out Ga'al and his relatives, so that they couldn't live in Shechem (9:41 Hebrew).** Very few details are given about the battle itself, but the very brevity of the account is telling. It was really no contest at all. **Ga'al** realized all too late that **he** had been outmaneuvered and beat a hasty retreat, only to lose most of **his men** in the process. **Ga'al himself and his relatives** – the instigators of the rebellion in the first place – made it back to **Shechem**, but were unable to remain there or to cause any further trouble. **They** left there for parts unknown. **Zebul**, now in full control of **the city, drove them out**, reversing **their** arrival there back in **9:26** and bringing closure, apparently, to the whole **Ga'al** episode. We never hear from **Ga'al** again.

However, the statement that **Abimelech settled in Arumah** rather than **Shechem** itself is puzzling, and prevents the closure of the story from being total. **Arumah** was only five miles from **Shechem**. **Abimelech** had already left **Shechem** before the final clash with **Ga'al**, and may have even been in **Arumah**. But

Shechem was by far the most significant **city** in the area, and the place where **Abimelech** had first made **his** bid for power and made **king**. To withdraw from it temporarily for tactical reasons is understandable, but to **settle** elsewhere is odd, to say the least. It suggests that something still remained to be resolved between **Abimelech** and **the people of Shechem**. This tension sets us up for the sequel to the **Ga'al** episode that follows (see **Bm – Abimelech Destroys Shechem**).[246]

After the death of **Gideon**, **the Israelites** didn't show covenant loyalty or faithfulness to **ADONAI (8:33)**. **They** demonstrated disregard for **God's** covenant and for **Gideon and his descendants** whom **Ha'Shem** raised up on **their** behalf. Humanity's tendency is to quickly forget all the good that others (human and divine) may do for them. When **the Israelites** made **Ba'al-Berith (9:46) their god**, breaking **their** covenant with **YHVH** to enter into a covenant with a Canaanite deity, **they** became spiritually Canaanite. In such a situation, with **the enemy** being internal rather than external, **ADONAI** withdrew **His** gracious favor. **God** gave **the Israelites the king they** deserved, and **He** gave **Abimelech the people he** deserved. What characterized **the Israelites** in general characterized **their** leader, **Abimelech**, who showed no regard for **their** loyalty and certainly none for **YHVH**. Certainly the culture that we live today doesn't encourage loyalty to either family or to **the Lord**.[247]

*Dear Heavenly Father, praise **You**: **For nothing will be impossible with God (Luke 1:37). Ga'al's** followers, proud in heart, were brought low. Soon proud **Abimelech** and **his** proud followers would be brought low by **You**. They had both demonstrated disregard for **Your** covenant and for **Gideon and his descendants** whom **You** raised up. When men are proud and show no regard for **You** and **Your** covenant, they had better watch out for **You** do see and at the right time **You** will step into destroy them. **You** are a Mighty God showing love, mercy, righteousness and justice. **Then Adonai passed before him, and proclaimed, "Adonai, Adonai, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness and truth, showing mercy to a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means leaving the guilty unpunished, but bringing the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, to the third and fourth generation (Exodus 34:6-7). Father**, **You** have almighty power, including to take out the ruler of any city or country. We worship **You**. In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*