

Abimelech.

Judges 9

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The Spirit of God has drawn our attention in the O.T. Scriptures to several men who are undoubted foreshadows of the coming man of sin; among these Abimelech the son of Gideon occupies a solemn place. He was of a stamp very different from his father, for Gideon was a man of faith and holds an honourable place in God's list as given in Heb. 11. He had God's glory before him as his object; and loved the people of Jehovah, and groaned over their low estate. He was, therefore, a fitting instrument for God to use, and He used him mightily to the utter discomfiture of Midian, so that they lifted up their heads no more. And the country was in quietness forty years in the days of Gideon (Judges 8: 28).

The son, alas! was moved by a different motive. No sooner was the judge, his father, dead, than he gathered together the family of his mother, and urged them to use their influence with the Shechemites on his behalf. The glory of Jehovah and the blessing of his people were not before him; he desired to exalt himself — he would be king. How painfully he reminds one of the personage in Dan. 11: 36! The Spirit of God there, after speaking to Daniel of various leagues and conflicts between the kings of Syria and Egypt (which part of the prophecy has received fulfilment), abruptly introduces the awful king of the latter days. He passes over entirely the present period of time which is never the subject of O.T. prophecy, and fixes attention upon the time of the end.

"The king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the indignation be accomplished." This is the Antichrist of 1 John 2, 4, the man of sin, the son of perdition, of 2 Thess. 2; but in Dan. 11 we get him in his local and political character, the wilful and self-exalting king in the glorious land. Now the Lord has declared that 'he that humbleth himself shall be exalted and he that exalteth himself shall be abased' the truth of which Abimelech proved, as also will the impious antitype of the future. It was by fair speeches that the son of Gideon won his way, and so with the man of Dan. 11 "The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords" (Ps. 55: 21). There will be a lamb-like air about him; but in the ears of the elect — who know not the voice of strangers — his voice is that of the dragon (Rev. 13). Antiochus who is another type of him, worked his way similarly. "And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall be corrupt by flatteries" (Dan. 11: 32). By all this the mass are deceived and led away, as the Shechemites. were; the remnant, "the people that do know their God" are preserved.

Abimelech was an apostate from the worship of Jehovah, which his father had restored, and evidently followed Baalberich (compare Judges 11: 4, 46). Here the type fails in completeness, for the coming one will do graver still. Not content with disregarding the God of his fathers, and speaking marvellous things against the God of Gods, "he sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (2 Thess. 2: 4). Here we have human iniquity reaching an awful height, not yet reached by any. It is the full development of the first departure: 'Ye shall be as God' said the tempter. It is man's privilege and glory to be dependent (have we learned this?); the man of sin rejects absolutely such a place and claims God's name and worship — only to be hurled from his usurped throne into eternal ruin.

Abimelech soon developed a thirst for blood, — sadly typical of the dark day at hand. "He went to

his father's house at Ophrah, and slew his brethren the sons of Jerubbaal, being threescore and ten persons, upon one stone." How quickly did Israel forget what they owed to Gideon! An apostate power is invariably a persecutor of God's saints. When the abomination of desolation is set up in the holy place, all must bow or die. Who are the souls under the altar in Rev. 6: 9-11? Undoubtedly those who will suffer under antichrist for the word of God and for their testimony. From oppressed hearts will the cry go up, "O Lord, how long"? and the cry is heard. "When He maketh inquisition for blood, He remembereth them; He forgetteth not the cry of the humble" (Ps. 9: 12). But all will not lose their lives in the coming day, any more than in the day of Abimelech. We read, "Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left; for he hid himself." He was enabled to bear testimony: "he went and stood in the top of mount Gerizim" (the mount of blessing; Deut. 27) and solemnly set before Israel their position with regard to the usurper. In his speech he brings forward successively the three trees which are constantly used in Scripture as emblems of the Jewish nation the olive, the fig-tree, and the vine, all of which refused the proffered dominion, finally accepted by the bramble in the person of Abimelech. Having delivered his message, eminently prophetic, the witness "fled and went to Beer, and dwelt there for fear of Abimelech his brother." He is thus a type of that part of the Jewish remnant who will be persecuted for their testimony, but who will be preserved by a faithful God through all until the end. Such are counselled by the Lord Jesus in Matt. 24.

Righteous retribution follows in due course "for it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you," and "he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword " (2 Thess. 1: 6; Rev. 13: 10). Fire came out from the men of Shechem as Jotham prophesied to devour Abimelech; Gaal the son of Ebed gained the confidence of the treacherous Shechemites and caused them to curse Abimelech, and to rebel against him. Accordingly fire comes out from the false king to devour them and the house of Millo, and he appeared at first to carry all before him. But God had decreed his destruction, and when fighting against the tower of Thebez, with the final victory all but sure, "a certain woman cast a piece of millstone upon Abimelech's head, and all to break his skull." God is not restricted to means; He Who sold Sisera into the hands of a woman could use similar instrumentality here, when all else had proved unavailing. "Thus God rendered the wickedness of Abimelech which he did unto his father, in slaying his seventy brethren: and all the evil of the men of Shechem did God render upon their heads; and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal" (Judges 9: 56, 57).

Even so shall it be with the wilful king of the future, the impious and blasphemous persecutor of God's saints; the Lord Jesus "shall consume him with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy him with the brightness of His coming" (2 Thess. 2: 8). The down-trodden remnant of God's people shall be delivered at the appearing of Jesus, Israel's true Messiah, the King after God's own heart.

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