

Abimelech Spirit in the church.

He was admitted to the university but there was no support. The money he saved ran out very early. There were no school fees. Because he resumed school very late, he could not get hostel accommodation. It was a travail until he met James, a very talented, kind and self-sponsoring person, in class in late 1980. James invited him to live with him in the boy's quarter of an Indian doctor, who worked as anesthesiologist at the teaching hospital, adjoining the university. James is a staunch and faithful catholic. He joined in the routine morning prayers, and other christian activities. That brought some light, which did not last. The Indian doctor was not kind and had his own ideas which were at variance with reality. James parted ways with him and he also had to go! The full story is reserved for another day. After youth service, he worked for about one year in Ondo state, as a teacher. The government of the state terminated the appointment of all non-indigenes in 1986 and he had to return home, jobless. He met a man, and old course mate, who was a pastor with one of the local Pentecostal churches. This kind hearted and very zealous pastor preached to him again and he gave his life to Christ and started going to church in March 1987. That was the turning point.

He became Sunday school teacher within short time and filled so many roles in the church. Prayers and fasting was compulsory. Evangelism was compulsory. Counseling was compulsory. It was all for Christ and nothing else. Then the church headquarters, without notice decided to close the branch, that they had labored for so long to build and were still building and merged it with another. The branch was growing attendance, very strong in commitment, but weak in money collection. The closure did not settle well with the members of the branch, so they broke away and formed a new church! Members mostly young and committed. They prayed for many things. Anointing, Power, membership that was rich and many more. Once a rich person joined, the person was locked down with a post in church so that he would not leave. Definition of a rich person? One who had a car! Two of the leaders, who were professionally trained as pastors were eyeing the top. Strife and war of attrition begun.

The growing division became evident following the annual thanksgiving, in which people brought their substances to thank God. The distribution to the church leadership was skewed. Some felt cheated. He overheard the mother of the Pastor saying that the church belonged to the son, so had the liberty to do as he willed! As the head of Sunday school, church secretary, secretary to "great Fishers group, head of men's group, etc., he was only interested in serving God. He stayed away from the power play that was growing the divide in the small church. He left in 1990, when he had contact with the new vision. Within six years, all the founding members of that "church", which today is a "mega church" and very rich, had all left, voluntarily or by force. Competition with the pastor ceased.

Within the same period, there was a big televangelist, known all over the world in whose church there was a shootout in one of the branches because a pastor of the branch was no longer loyal to headquarters and wanted to break away. The man was shot dead! When the Bishop died many years later, his wife was installed as the new head and the son ordained to follow. The other bishops may not have been happy. What could they do? The bishop of another mega church died. It was noised that the wife told other leaders of the church that there was no vacancy at the top. She took over the mantle of leadership. There are many of such in churches all over the land. Some have gone to court to settle leadership tussle. Many, who could no longer wait to partake of the booty, break away to form their own churches. This is the spirit of Abimelech, the son of Gideon. Gideon, nicknamed Jeru Baal, contended with Baal and destroyed it, with the help of God.

The people told Gideon, “Rule over us – you, your son, your grandchildren – because you have saved us from the hand of Midian” (Judges 8:22). He refused. Gideon, by the spirit of the Lord had done what was unimaginable. He delivered Israel from the Midianites and Amalekites. Men of God ought to abide this spirit: refuse, when church membership is goading you to take the place of God in their lives, which becomes a terrible trap and waterloo for spiritual vitality in the church. The land of Israel was free from oppression for forty years (Judges 8) while Gideon was alive. Gideon had seventy sons from many wives and concubines. He had a concubine from Shechem, who gave birth to a son, named Abimelech (Judges 9:1, 10:1 and II Sam 11:21). When Gideon died, the people prostituted themselves to the gods of the land and made Baalberith, their god. They forgot Gideon, inspite of all the good things he had done to restore Israel. They locked God out of their hearts and mingled with the people of the land, against God’s counsel (Deut 7:1-7) and Moses’ warning and prediction that they would fall away.

Abimelech murdered his brothers, with the connivance of the people of Shechem, where his mother came from. The only one who could escape was the youngest of Gideon’s children, Jotham. Abimelech installed himself ruler and ruled from Ophrah. The people of Shechem gave him 70 shekels of silver from the temple of Baalberith to execute the evil. Money made in unclean way, whether it comes in offering or tithes, does not matter, is from the temple of Baalberith. We have heard of church members who desire to be rich, sowing seed with money stolen from their employers. The church accepts the money without asking. If a brother whose salary is N100k a month donates a million to the church, questions should be asked. If the source is not clean, he should be encouraged to return it. Some have stolen from their banks to give to their pastors because they want to tap the anointing for wealth. That is money from the temple of Baalberith. The “good” it can do is to murder souls and not to save them. Ichabod!

Abimelech murdered his brothers because he did not want God to rule over him. He wanted to be the ruler instead. He accomplished it by aligning himself with the god, Baalberith, a variant of the god of the land, which his father contended with and destroyed with the help of the Lord. The money used to hire his “vain and light persons”, which the NIV called scoundrels, came from that temple of that god. You cannot reap grapes from brambles.

The leadership that God ordained for his church is plural, not the championship of one man and his family. Gideon was wise enough to reject such aberration, that puts man in place of God. This his son, would not have it God’s way. He ended up being killed by a woman, while fighting to keep his hold on power. The Abimelech spirit fuels leadership crisis in the church. Those who desire the “good things”, power money, wealth and cannot get them, get “called” to set up their own ministries and repeat the same error again and again. We thus have millions of churches and denominations calling themselves by the name of Christ (Isa 4:1), but God is not there. He departed from them. It is Ichabod! God will yet wash away this filth of his house and purge the blood of Jerusalem by the spirit of judgement and burning (v4-5). His house is ordained to be a house of prayers. Wicked men have turned it into a den of thieves who go far as steal the souls of men and imprison them. We must therefore pray for purging and cleaning of the Augean stable, to restore spiritual power and vitality to the church.