



Judges 9-10

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CHAPTER 9

Chapter 8:33-35 constitute an introduction to chapter 9. And so, let's look back just as a quick review to chapter 8, verse 33-34: *"And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again, and went a whoring after Baalim, and they made Baalberith their god. And the children of Israel remembered not Jehovah their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all of their enemies on every side: and neither shewed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely, Gideon, according to all of the goodness to which he had showed to Israel."* And so, that constitutes the introduction to chapter 9 which shows, really, the treachery against the house of Gideon.

Gideon was a good man: he had a lot of admirable characteristics, but he also had a flaw; as many good men often have their places of weakness. With Gideon we read that he had seventy sons: a weakness. Because they weren't all from one wife, they were from many different women. He had many wives, but he also had concubines.

One of his concubines was a woman from Shechem who was a Canaanite. She was not really of the tribes of Israel, she was a Canaanitish woman living in Shechem. And from her he had a son whose name was Abimelech. And after the death of Gideon, Abimelech, the son of Jerubbaal, or Gideon,

Came to Shechem unto his mother's brothers,

So, this woman in Shechem, though she was a concubine to Gideon also, she had children by other men.

And so he came to his mother's family, the brethren, and communed with them, and with all of the family of the house of his mother's father, and this was his proposition, he said, I want you to speak to all of the men of Shechem, Whether it is better for you, either that all of the sons of Jerubbaal, which are seventy persons, reign over you, or that one reigns over you? and remember this: 'I am of the same stock' I am your bone and I'm your flesh. 'I'm related to you guys.'

'Now, is it better that you have a bunch of fellows ruling over you from the house of Israel? Or is it better that you have one of your own kin, one of your own family who is reigning over you?'

And so his mother's brothers spoke of him in the ears of all of the men of Shechem these words: and their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech; for they said, Well, after all, he is our brother. He is really half Canaanite, half Israelite. And so they gave him seventy pieces of silver out of the house of Baalberith, wherewith Abimelech hired vain and light persons, which followed him. So, he went out and hired a group of robbers, bandits. And they went to his father's house at Ophrah, and they killed his brothers the sons of Jerubbaal, being seventy persons, upon one stone: with the exception of the youngest son of Gideon whose name was Jotham; who escaped and hid himself. And all of the men of Shechem gathered together, and all of the house of Milo, and they went, and made Abimelech the king, by the plain of the pillar that was in Shechem.

So, here is the establishing, really, of a kingship; which is more of a Canaanitish practice. You see, Israel did not yet have a king: they were ruled by judges. But here's a group of people in Shechem, Canaanitish origin, yet they are a part of the whole territory encompassed by Israel. They kill the sons of Gideon with the exception of Jotham, the youngest son. They set up Abimelech as king.

Now when it was told to Jotham, he went and stood in the top of mount Gerizim, and he lifted up his voice, and he cried, and he said unto them, Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you.

So the one son that was left went to mount Gerizim. Now, mount Gerizim rises directly above the city of Shechem. And from the top of mount Gerizim, because of the natural kind of an amphitheater there, [mount Ebal is on the backside], you can, from mount Gerizim, yell down and the people can hear you in the valley. This is the place where when they came into the land, the men of certain tribes stood and pronounced the blessings if they would keep the law of God to the congregation that was assembled in the valley below.

Now here is the youngest son of Gideon: he's on this mount, and he's calling down to the men of Shechem who had conspired against his family, his other brothers who had slain them. And now he is giving to them a parable which actually becomes a prophecy, or a curse, upon them. The parable is this:

The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them; and the people of Shechem would be the trees in the parable, and they said to the olive tree, which would have been Gideon, Reign over us. But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honor God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? So the trees said to the fig tree, Come thou, and reign over us. But the fig tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, to go and be promoted over the trees? Then they said to the vine, Come, and reign over us. And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, to go and be promoted over the trees?

This is referring to the drink offerings that they offered unto the LORD from the fruit of the vine. They would pour out the drink offering unto God - 'Should I leave this ministry, to be promoted over the trees?'

Then said all of the trees unto the bramble, which is much like what we call a tumbleweed today. They said to this bramble: a thorny bush, the tumbleweed, Come thou, and reign over us. And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, and the bramble, of course, is Abimelech in the parable, then come and put your trust in my shadow: have you ever seen how much of a shadow a tumbleweed leaves? and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon.

The bramble bush was used mainly for kindling: it really ignites in a hurry and flames up fast. And so they used the tumbleweed, the bramble, for their kindling: 'let fire come out of the bramble, but let it consume the cedars of Lebanon.'

Now therefore, application, if you have done truly and sincerely, in that you have made Abimelech the king, and you have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have done unto him according to the deserving of his hands;

'If what you have done is really right, if it's honorable!' the dastardly deed upon the family of Gideon; [for he makes mention of him,]

(For my father fought for you, and put his own life in jeopardy for you, and delivered you out of the

hand of Midian: 'Now, if you have done right by slaying all of his sons, and all,' you have risen up against my father's house this day, you have slain his sons, seventy persons, upon one stone, you've made Abimelech, the son of his maidservant, the king over the men of Shechem, because he is your brother;') If you have dealt truly and sincerely with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, then rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you: 'have at it fellows,' but if not, let fire come out from Abimelech, and devour the men of Shechem, and the house of Milo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem, and from the house of Milo, and devour Abimelech. 'Let there be strife, let there be a problem that arises: burn each other.' And then Jotham took off running,

Now, it would take you about 20 minutes at top speed to get from the valley on up to the top of the hill where old Jotham was preaching his sermon. And so, the men of the city probably started to pursue him, but he had a 20 minute head start. And it's sort of a plain up there: you can really move; and by the time they got up to the top of the hill, he had disappeared. And he fled to a city called Beer, which means 'well.'

So Jotham ran away, and fled, went to Beer, and he dwelt there, for the fear of Abimelech his brother. Now when Abimelech had reigned for three years over Israel, then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; the problems began to develop between the people in Shechem and Abimelech, the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech: that the cruelty done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood be laid upon Abimelech their brother, who slew them; and upon the men of Shechem, which aided him in killing of his brothers. So, this problem that arose, this evil spirit: the antagonism was of God between them. And the men of Shechem set liars in wait for him in the top of the mountains, and they robbed all that came along that way by them: and it was told Abimelech.

So these guys begin to, sort of, be pirates: they would rob everybody that would come along the road towards Shechem. And it was reported to Abimelech.

And then this fellow Gaal the son of Ebed came with his brethren, and they went over to Shechem: and the men of Shechem put their confidence in him.

So, here's this fellow Gaal: he's a Shechemite, but evidently he hasn't been around. He comes with his brothers and he gains the confidence of the people who are already sort of at odds with Abimelech.

And at the time of harvest they went out into the fields, gathered their vineyards, they tread the grapes, and made merry, and went into the house of their god, and did eat and drink, and they cursed Abimelech.

They're starting to get a little tipsy: celebrating the harvest, and eating and drinking, and cursing Abimelech.

And then Gaal the son of Ebed said, Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should serve him? is he not the son of Jerubbaal? and Zebul who was the governor of the city of Shechem is just his officer? serve the men of Hamor

In other words, 'let's serve the true Shechemites. Let's go back to Hamor who was a Canaanite:' who inhabited the city of Shechem and established the city of Shechem about the time of Jacob.

For why should we serve him? And would to God that I was ruling over these people! then I would remove Abimelech. And so, here he is bragging: 'Hey, too bad that I'm not reigning because I would just remove this fellow.' And then he sent a message to Abimelech, and it said, Gather your army, and

come out and let's fight.

This he is saying within the circle: 'Where's Abimelech? Let him come out and fight me. Get his men, and come out and fight me.' Sort of: the bragger influenced by wine.

Now when Zebul who was the governor of the city appointed by Abimelech heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was kindled. He wasn't strong enough to put down the rebellion himself. So he sent messengers unto Abimelech privately, saying, Behold, Gaal the son of Ebed and his brothers are come to Shechem; and, behold, they have fortified the city against you. Therefore come by night, you and the people that are with you, and lie and wait in the field: and it shall be, that in the morning, as soon as the sun is up, you shall rise early, and set upon the city: and, behold, when he and the people that is with him come out against you, then you may do to them as you shall find occasion. So Abimelech rose up, and all the people that were with him, by night, and they laid in wait against Shechem in four companies. And Gaal the son of Ebed went out, and stood in the entering of the gate of the city: and Abimelech rose up, and the people that were with him, from lying in wait. And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, Behold, there are people coming down from the top of the mountains. And Zebul said to him, You're just seeing the shadow of the mountains.

You know - as the sun is rising, 'it looks to you like men.' And so Zebul, of course, knew what was going on but he was trying to hold Gaal back as long as possible.

And then Gaal spoke again and said, Look there are people coming down from the middle of the land, and another company is along the plain there. Then said Zebul unto him, Where is your mouth now, where you said, Who is Abimelech, that we should serve him? is not this the people that you have despised? go out now, I pray you, and fight with them.

'You big mouth, where are you now? Where's all your bragging at this point? If you're such a man, have at it, man. Go out and fight with them.'

And Gaal went out before the men of Shechem, fought with Abimelech. Abimelech chased him, and they fled before him, and many were overthrown and wounded, even as he pursued him back to the gate of the city. And Abimelech dwelt in Arumah: and Zebul thrust out Gaal and his brethren, so that they should not dwell at Shechem.

His forces being decimated by the battle, Zebul was now powerful enough to expel Gaal out of the city.

And it came to pass on the morrow, that the people went out into the field; and they told Abimelech. And he took the people, and divided them into three companies, and he laid in wait in the field, and looked, and, behold, the people were come forth out of the city; and he rose up against them, and smote them.

Now, evidently those who were still in Shechem figured, 'Well, he's got Gaal, and all: so, it's all over. There's no more problem.' And so, the next morning as the gates were open, they went out into their fields to work. You see, they would come in to the security of the city by night; but they all had their little farms outside of the city, and they would all go out and work their little fields, their plots of ground; and then at night would come back within the security of the city. So in the morning they figured, 'Well, everything is all over;' so they went on out of the city, but Abimelech attacked them. There is still the bad blood between them.

And Abimelech, and the company that was with him, rushed forward, stood at the entering of the

gate of the city: and two other companies ran upon all the people that were in the fields, and killed them. And Abimelech fought against the city all that day; and he took the city, and killed the people that were in it, and he beat down the city, and sowed it with salt.

So he conquered the city of Shechem. The sowing of salt was to destroy it so that they could not plant; and it was really just to lay waste the city.

And when the men of the tower of Shechem heard that, they entered into the fortress of the house of the god Berith. And it was told Abimelech, that the men of the tower of Shechem were gathered together. So Abimelech got to mount Zalmon, he and the people that were with him; and he took an ax in his hand, and he cut down a bough from the trees, and he took it, and laid it on his shoulder, and he said to the people, Do what you have seen me do. And so the people also cut down every man his bough, and they followed Abimelech, and put them against the fortress, and they set the fortress on fire upon them; so that all of the men in the tower of Shechem were cremated, about a thousand men and women that were in the tower. Then Abimelech decided to attack Thebez, which was about 6 miles away; and no doubt, he felt that they were involved at least in the conspiracy against him, and he encamped against Thebez, and he took it. But there was a strong tower within that city, and all of the men and women of that city, fled to that strong tower, and they shut it up, and got in to the top of the tower. And so Abimelech came to that tower, fought against it, and he went hard against the door of the tower to burn it with fire. So he thought he would try the same little strategy that worked in the tower of Shechem. But there was a certain woman who cast a piece of a millstone upon Abimelech's head, and crushed his skull.

The millstone referred to here was probably one of the hand held millstones. The millstones can weigh up to 300 - 400 pounds. No doubt it wasn't that large: the woman wouldn't be able to toss it off of the roof. But they had sort of - like the Indians with their pestles that they used to pound their ear of corns, which were usually about ten inches long or so; enough that if you tossed it from a tower it could do a lot of damage if it landed on the skull of a guy. So, here is Abimelech trying to beat down the door, and this woman heaves the rock over, hits him in the head,

And he called hastily unto his armourbearer, he was still alive but he knew that he had had it, and he said to his armourbearer, Take your sword, and kill me, I don't want men to say, That I was killed by a woman. I mean, that's pride up to the end, isn't it? It'll get you every time. And the young man thrust him through, and he died. And the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, and they departed every one to his own place. And thus God rendered the wickedness of Abimelech, which he did to his father, in the killing of his seventy brothers: and all of 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.

The 'fire' came out. Interestingly enough, "Let fire come out and devour:" and he did cremate the thousand people or so that had found refuge in the tower. So, sort of a literal fulfillment of the curse that Jotham had pronounced against Shechem and against Abimelech for their treachery.

CHAPTER 10

After Abimelech there arose to defend Israel Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar; I'm just reading you the names, I have nothing to do with them.

Except, in a sense, they're beautiful names. Languages: aren't they crazy things? What is to one in one language, is something else in another language. And 'Do do' means "loving," and 'Puah' means "splendor." So, we don't know anything else about him except that he was from the tribe of Issachar;

And he dwelt in Shamir in mount Ephraim. And he judged Israel for twenty years, and died, and was buried in his city of Shamir. And then after him there arose Jair, who was a Gileadite, that is, he was from the other side of the Jordan river: from the tribe of Gad on the opposite side of the Jordan, and he judged Israel for twenty two years. And he had thirty sons that rode on thirty ass colts, and they had thirty cities, which they called Havothjair unto this day, which are in the land of Gilead. And Jair died, and was buried in Camon. And the children of Israel and this is the sixth cycle did evil again in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, the gods of Syria, the gods of Zidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the children of Ammon, the gods of the Philistines, and they forsook Jehovah, and did not serve him.

So, again the people turned away from Jehovah God: the true and the living God. And they began to worship Baalim, Ashtaroth, and the various gods of the surrounding nations.

And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon.

So, they began to be pressed in from both sides: the Philistines from the coastal cities, and the Ammonites from the area of Moab.

And that year they vexed and oppressed the children of Israel: and eighteen years, all of the children of Israel that were on the other side of Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead. Moreover the children of Ammon passed over Jordan to fight also against Judah, and against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim; so that Israel was sore distressed.

They had conquered the two and one-half tribes on their side of the Jordan river, and then actually came on across the Jordan river to attack Judah, the tribe of Benjamin, and the tribe of Ephraim; into the middle of the country: and Israel was sore distressed because the Philistines pushing on them from one side, the Ammonites pushing on them from the other side.

And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, saying, We have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and served Baalim.

So they confessed their sin. The Bible has quite a few things to say about sin. The Bible tells us that, "you can be sure that your sin will find you out." It tells us that, "the way of the transgressor is hard." We are told that, "whatever a man sows, that he's also going to reap." These people confessed their sins. Why? Because they were reaping the result of their sins. They had forsaken the LORD, and now the LORD had forsaken them, and they were being oppressed by their enemies. And so, they first of all made the confession of sin. And they knew what they had done wrong. "We have forsaken the LORD, and we have been serving Baalim."