

Judges 9A

- Gideon is behind us now and a new character will now take center stage for a while
 - How do we summarize Gideon's time as judge?
 - Daniel Block summarized him this way

"Gideon personifies the typical Israelite in the period of the judges. He is more than half Canaanite in his outlook. He does not know how to relate to God. He does not want to get involved in the Lord's work. He is not beyond using his position for personal gain and influence.

". . . recognizing the deficiencies in the man thrusts into sharper relief the contrasting patience and mercy of God . . .

"Gideon is a man God used in spite of himself. He is a rough vessel if ever there was one. But God is determined to get His work done. In the absence of genuinely qualified leadership, He will use surprising vessels."

- So let's not venerate Gideon not overlook his accomplishments in service to God
- Most every judge in this book is revealed as a flawed character because that's the nature of the times
- This is a period when God's people are living in the flesh, unwilling and unable to bow to the authority of God in Heaven
- So the pattern of Judges begins again following Gideon's death, reminding us the solution to our sin and wandering can't be found on Earth
 - Let's back up to Gideon's death and the start of the next cycle
 - What follows his death is actually a continuation of Gideon's story in that it shows his legacy
 - The next man, Abimelech is not actually a judge at all
 - He is an usurper and opportunist
 - And therefore he's a footnote in the story of Gideon

[Judg. 8:33](#) Then it came about, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the sons of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals, and made Baal-berith their god.

[Judg. 8:34](#) Thus the sons of Israel did not remember the LORD their God, who had delivered them from the hands of all their enemies on every side;

[Judg. 8:35](#) nor did they show kindness to the household of Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) in accord with all the good that he had done to Israel.

[Judg. 9:1](#) And Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem to his mother's relatives, and spoke to them and to the whole clan of the household of his mother's father, saying,

[Judg. 9:2](#) "Speak, now, in the hearing of all the leaders of Shechem, 'Which is better for you, that seventy men, all the sons of Jerubbaal, rule over you, or that one man rule over you?' Also, remember that I am your bone and your flesh."

[Judg. 9:3](#) And his mother's relatives spoke all these words on his behalf in the hearing of all the leaders of Shechem; and they were inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, "He is our relative."

[Judg. 9:4](#) They gave him seventy pieces of silver from the house of Baal-berith with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless fellows, and they followed him.

- Gideon's death inaugurates the next cycle of sin and rebellion
 - And as we've noted before, each cycle gets a little worse than before
 - Here we see the people going astray once again
 - They play the harlot with Baal, the Canaanite god, again
 - They even declare that this pagan idol is their god
 - So once more, we know the Lord will respond to their apostasy
 - Obviously, these are not the very same people who rebelled in the last cycle
 - That generation of Israel is long gone by now
 - This is a new generation
 - And yet they repeat the mistakes of their forefathers
 - Here's a clear example of the way sin is inherited
 - The sin that began with Adam is passed down in the nature of each person

- So that the sins of the early generations are repeated in the next because apart from the grace of God, every person's heart is desperately wicked
- And we cannot please God nor even follow Him unless we are given a new spirit
- So once again the Lord will intervene to correct a new generation
- You remember that after Gideon's victory over the Midianites that the elders offered to set up a Jewish dynasty with Gideon as king
 - Gideon refused to accept that title, nevertheless, he acted as a king in the way he used his position for personal gain
 - He took many concubines and fathering 70 sons
 - And like a monarch, Gideon assumed his sons would assume power as judges following his death
 - And the people assumed the same
 - But the people did not show kindness to Gideon's household we're told
 - Notice how Samuel continues to use Gideon's new name, Jerubbaal in this account
 - That name was given after Gideon tore down the altars to Baal in the town near his home
 - The name means one who contends with Baal
 - But Gideon contention with Baal has been less than successful
 - And so Samuel uses this name in an ironic sense in this chapter, because Baal is prevailing against Israel
- One of Gideon's sons born to a concubine decides after his father's death that he likes the life of royalty
 - Even though his father rejected the title of king, Gideon lived like one and his sons enjoyed the privileges of princes
 - So Abimelech decides to make a move to consolidate power and establish himself as king

- He begins his quest in Shechem, a Canaanite city
- This is the home of Abimelech's mother, the concubine who lived in Gideon's harem in Shechem
- We can imagine that Abimelech felt his hometown crowd would be more receptive to his ambitions
- In Shechem Abimelech speaks with the clan of Gideon living in that city, which were the other offspring of Gideon's concubines
 - The children of slave women were considered lesser members of the family than the children of free women
 - So perhaps Abimelech was feeling the need to take authority for himself
 - For he feared he would be excluded by his brothers
 - In reality, Abimelech is simply projecting his own feelings of paranoia onto his brothers as excuse for his selfish desires
- So Abimelech's pitch to his family is what's better for you?
 - Is it better that you take your bets with 70 sons of Gideon?
 - In other words, do you want to wait and see which one of these men rules over you?
 - Or do you want one man, Abimelech to rule over you?
 - And remember that I am one of you?
 - So in other words, the devil you know is better than the one you don't
- In v.3 we see that Abimelech's logic is compelling
 - They say, "Well, he IS our relative, after all."
 - They assume that having a king from the family will give them an advantage in the long run
 - After all, any man who would be king is going to be a threat to anyone not in his favor
 - So let's get a king who will be on our side

- Of course, what Abimelech needs from these men is support, primarily financial support
 - It's like a candidate running for office today...money makes the wheels go 'round
 - And Abimelech needs money to hire an army of mercenaries
- With seventy piece of silver, the man is able to purchase a band of worthless and reckless fellows
 - The Hebrew word for worthless means empty literally
 - So these men are empty of character and integrity
 - And they are reckless in the sense that they do not consider the consequences of their choices and actions
- In the next two verses, we see Abimelech's terrible plan play out

Judg. 9:5 Then he went to his father's house at Ophrah and killed his brothers the sons of Jerubbaal, seventy men, on one stone. But Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, for he hid himself.

Judg. 9:6 All the men of Shechem and all Beth-millo assembled together, and they went and made Abimelech king, by the oak of the pillar which was in Shechem.

- Abimelech takes these worthless men and travel to Gideon's home in Ophrah
 - They attack his brothers and kill all but one of the seventy brothers
 - Samuel says they were killed on one stone which suggests a mass execution by beheading
 - Yet somehow, one of Gideon's sons, his youngest Jotham, escapes the attack
- This wasn't war...this was a coup
 - The place Beth-millo was a military fortress inside the city of Shechem
 - So both the people and the army of Shechem pledge their support to Abimelech

- Once the news arrives back in Shechem of Abimelech's successful coup, the men of the Canaanite city anoint Abimelech king of the city
 - Meanwhile, the son who escaped decides begins to consider how he will survive against a king who will not rest until all of Gideon's descendants are gone

Judg. 9:7 Now when they told Jotham, he went and stood on the top of Mount Gerizim, and lifted his voice and called out. Thus he said to them, "Listen to me, O men of Shechem, that God may listen to you.

Judg. 9:8 "Once the trees went forth to anoint a king over them, and they said to the olive tree, 'Reign over us!'

Judg. 9:9 "But the olive tree said to them, 'Shall I leave my fatness with which God and men are honored, and go to wave over the trees?'

Judg. 9:10 "Then the trees said to the fig tree, 'You come, reign over us!'

Judg. 9:11 "But the fig tree said to them, 'Shall I leave my sweetness and my good fruit, and go to wave over the trees?'

Judg. 9:12 "Then the trees said to the vine, 'You come, reign over us!'

Judg. 9:13 "But the vine said to them, 'Shall I leave my new wine, which cheers God and men, and go to wave over the trees?'

Judg. 9:14 "Finally all the trees said to the bramble, 'You come, reign over us!'

Judg. 9:15 "The bramble said to the trees, 'If in truth you are anointing me as king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, may fire come out from the bramble and consume the cedars of Lebanon.'

- This scene might be familiar to you
 - It mirrors a moment in the book of Joshua
 - In chapter 24 Israel is nearing the end of Joshua's times as captain of the people
 - Joshua gathers all the leaders of Israel at Shechem where he spells out the covenant of Law once more
 - And he commands the people to choose who they will follow, whether the gods of the Canaanites or the God Who saved them
 - And the people all declared in unison that they would put away idols and follow the Lord in obedience
 - Now here again we have a leader of Israel standing on Mt Gerezim, the mountain next to Shechem

- Jotham calls out to the people of Shechem to reconsider their actions
- He gives them a parable, the first parable recorded in the Bible
- The parable uses plants in place of people to explain the folly of the men of Shechem
 - There parable has plants that represent the produce of Israel
 - In fact, the olive, fig and grape are all symbols of Israel at various times in the Bible
 - Each plant is offered the chance to be king by the trees of the forest
 - But each turns down the offer
 - They refuse the role because they already possess a fruitful existence
 - Each is valued for obedience to their God-given purpose
 - The olive trees produce the oil that serves the people
 - The figs produce the fruit that please men
 - And the grape vines produce the wine that brings gladness to God and men
 - To seek for a different role, one that simply serves ego and pride, would require abandoning a better purpose assigned by the Lord
 - This is a timeless truth regulating our relationship with the Lord
 - We have a specific purpose in our existence, one determined by the Creator
 - We were born and we were saved for a purpose the Lord of Heaven determined before we were born
 - And God's people will be happiest and most fulfilled when we are living in the counsel of His will
 - When we are guided by His word
 - And serving in the capacity His intended
 - Then we will know joy and satisfaction that nothing else can equal

- And more importantly, we are living in the Lord's will, where blessing will be found in abundance
- But not everyone will be content to rest in God's authority and serve the purpose the Lord intended
 - Some will chase after their flesh's desire, living in pride or fear or lusts
 - They are like the bramble in the parable
 - The bramble receives an offer that enflames the pride
 - And so the bramble, which has no business giving shade to tall trees, begins to imagine himself in the role
 - In other words, this person has not been designated for this role, but he decides to pursue it for selfish reasons
 - When the Lord has appointed someone in a role of service, that appointed will become evident to more than just the person himself
 - The Lord's hand will be evident in the confirmation of a spouse
 - And the laying on of hands by elders or other leaders in the church
 - And the circumstances of a person's life will come together in such a way that the person will see confirmation of God's will
 - But there can be times when a person desires for a role, usually one of status or authority, which is beyond their station
 - Their search is not Spirit-led, which means it's driven by the flesh
 - And in that sense, it's sin
- In v.15 the bramble incentivizes the trees to accept his rule by inviting them to take refuge in the bramble's shade
 - This is a comical way offer
 - Imagine the ridiculous situation of a tall tree seeking refuge in the shade of a dry, spiny tumbleweed
 - The offer is empty, illustrating how this leader offers nothing of value
 - And this relationship brings an implicit threat to the trees who dare to consider the bramble to be a suitable king

- A bramble is an exceedingly dry piece of kindle
- In the Palestinian desert, the heat and sun can be so intense that brambles will spontaneously combust
- And that makes them especially dangerous to larger trees, since a bramble can start a forest fire
- So bringing the bramble close threatens the trees with destruction by fire
- They are taking a great risk in making this deal
- So then Jotham applies the lesson of his parable to the people of Shechem

Judg. 9:16 “Now therefore, if you have dealt in truth and integrity in making Abimelech king, and if you have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have dealt with him as he deserved –

Judg. 9:17 for my father fought for you and risked his life and delivered you from the hand of Midian;

Judg. 9:18 but you have risen against my father’s house today and have killed his sons, seventy men, on one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his maidservant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your relative –

Judg. 9:19 if then you have dealt in truth and integrity with Jerubbaal and his house this day, rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you.

Judg. 9:20 “But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech and consume the men of Shechem and Beth-millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem and from Beth-millo, and consume Abimelech.”

Judg. 9:21 Then Jotham escaped and fled, and went to Beer and remained there because of Abimelech his brother.

- He says in v.16 that if indeed their selection of Abimelech is based on God’s leading of the people in integrity, then rejoice in him (v.19)
 - If this anointing of a king is according to God’s will and plan, then Jotham couldn’t stand in God’s way
 - In fact, no man will stand in God’s way
 - So all men can rejoice knowing this is God’s purpose for the people
- But then Jotham reminds the men of Shechem that Abimelech’s rise to power doesn’t follow the patten of God working among His people

- First, Jotham questions whether these men have dealt with Gideon's household in a godly way
- Gideon risked his life for the men of Shechem
- And Gideon successfully freed the city from the oppression of the Midianites
- But the men of the city have not repaid that faithfulness with respect for Gideon's family
 - They have contributed to the murder of the 69 brothers
 - And they have select Abimelech not because he was anointed by the Lord as judge much less king
 - But because he was their relative
- So in summary, Jotham insinuates that these people are operating without sanction from the Lord and not according to obedience
 - And if this is true, then they can be sure they are taking a great risk
 - Fire will come forth from Abimelech and consume the people of Shechem
 - Jotham is predicting that when the Lord moves against Abimelech's sin, the men of Shechem will suffer collateral damage
 - Furthermore, Jotham calls for the Lord to use the men of Shechem to destroy Abimelech's reign
 - Then Jotham retreats to hiding to avoid Abimelech
 - He goes to a town called Beer, which is unknown
 - The word means well, so perhaps this was no town at all
 - Perhaps Jotham hid in a well for a time to avoid Abimelech
- As for Abimelech, he didn't rule for very long or over much territory
 - And his rule is marked by treachery and bloodshed

[Judg. 9:22](#) Now Abimelech ruled over Israel three years.

[Judg. 9:23](#) Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech,

[Judg. 9:24](#) so that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood might be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers.

- Abimelech has ruled Shechem and the surrounding areas of Israel for three years when his rule began to unravel
 - The Lord sends an evil spirit to disrupt the trust between Abimelech and Shechem
 - This is one of several places in the Bible where we're told the Lord "sends" an evil spirit to do His bidding
 - An evil spirit is a reference to a fallen angel or demon
 - These spirits are not inclined to cooperate with the Lord's will
 - In fact, they are "evil" in the sense that they have rebelled against the Lord and aligned with Satan
 - Revelation tells us that a third of the angelic realm joined Satan in rebelling against the Lord
 - These fallen angels are the demons we see throughout scripture and hear about in the Gospels
 - Clearly, they are not interested in serving the Lord
 - So how are they "sent" by God to accomplish any work He prefers?
- This is perhaps the best example of Romans 8:28 in all scripture, that is the way the Lord can direct the actions of even His enemies
 - As Paul says

[Rom. 8:28](#) And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

- The world is filled with violence and hatred for God's people
 - The source for all that evil is Satan and all that he has created through the fall of man

- But even those who oppose God will be brought into conformance with the Lord's will
- Which is why the Bible assures us that nothing can separate us from the love of God
- In this case, the Lord desires to stir up animosity between Abimelech and the men of Shechem ultimately to bring down Abimelech's sinful rule
 - The Lord can't sin Himself nor become the author of sin
 - But He can direct the desires of sinful creatures so that they serve His purpose in yielding righteous and good for those who love the Lord
 - You remember in the Gospels when the Lord says He choose the 12 apostles including one man who was "a devil"
 - Then later that one was indwelt by Satan leading to Christ's crucifixion
 - That is another example of the Lord using evil to accomplish good things
- We can imagine that the evil spirit brought certain ideas to mind, placed temptations in these men's hearts and created the motivation to act out
 - That's the way the enemy works
 - He naturally desires to move us away from God's will and toward self destruction
 - So when the Lord sends a spirit, He knows the spirit will do what comes naturally
 - And in that way, God's purposes will be met
- In v.24 the scripture tells us that the Lord intends for this evil spirit to visit the same violence and treachery on Abimelech and on Shechem that they brought upon Gideon's home
 - There's a term in popular culture that tries to explain a similar connection
 - The word is "karma" and it's an eastern pagan concept

- It states that the sum of our actions taken in this life will determine our fate in a future existence
- It's a works-based philosophy like all pagan views
- And though karma is a false concept, it is somewhat reflective of how the Lord works at times
- The Lord may chose to visit the sins of a person upon himself
 - Certainly, the consequences of sin for all unbelievers comes to rest upon them in eternity
 - But on occasion, the Lord gives them a downpayment while in this life
 - And men have long taken note of this tendency, that bad things will eventually happen to bad people
- Sometimes, it's merely the natural consequence of risky and reckless behavior
 - If you sin in sexual promiscuity, you can expect to suffer any number of consequences
 - If you sin in theft or murder or other crimes, you will likely end up in prison
 - If you treat people in unkind ways, you won't have many friends in your time of need, etc.
- And then sometimes, the Lord steps in to bring negative consequences for sin in supernatural ways, as we see happening here to Abimelech and the men of Shechem
 - This isn't karma
 - This is the Lord sovereignly acting to make a point to them and all men who hear of this story
 - This is why Paul tells believers not to take vengeance into our own hands

[Rom. 12:17](#) Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men.

[Rom. 12:18](#) If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

[Rom. 12:19](#) Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord.

[Rom. 12:20](#) "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD."

- We treat our enemies with kindness and dare them to respond in kind
 - But if they don't, we know the Lord has the capacity to work on our behalf
 - Perhaps the Lord will decide He doesn't want to bring consequences upon them now, preferring to wait for their final judgment
 - If this is the Lord's will, then who are we to rush that timetable by trying to exact revenge early?
- On the other hand, perhaps the Lord will decide to bring consequences in this life
 - Perhaps He will disrupt the life of our enemies, bringing them calamity in one way or another
 - If that be the Lord's will, do you really want to get in the way of that judgment?
 - Can you do better than the Lord?
 - Leave room for Him to do what He will and trust Him that there will be justice in the end