

Judges 9B

- Can there be anything better on a Sunday morning at church than to hear a story of treachery, murder, cursing and jealousy?
 - Well, that's what we have before us today on the pages of scripture
 - And it's this way because this is what Gideon's legacy left the people of Israel and us
 - His death gave way to a civil war of sorts
 - His seventy heirs have been reduced to a single son hiding for his life in wells
 - And Abimelech, the son of a slave wife, attempting to rule Israel as a king
 - Abimelech is an ungodly man, not a judge much less a king, and he's determined to hold on to power through any means necessary
 - But like an despot, he has enemies, which we see this morning

[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.

[Judg. 9:25](#) The men of Shechem set men in ambush against him on the tops of the mountains, and they robbed all who might pass by them along the road; and it was told to Abimelech.

[Judg. 9:26](#) Now Gaal the son of Ebed came with his relatives, and crossed over into Shechem; and the men of Shechem put their trust in him.

[Judg. 9:27](#) They went out into the field and gathered the grapes of their vineyards and trod them, and held a festival; and they went into the house of their god, and ate and drank and cursed Abimelech.

[Judg. 9:28](#) 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 is Zebul not his lieutenant? Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem; but why should we serve him?"

[Judg. 9:29](#) "Would, therefore, that this people were under my authority! Then I would remove Abimelech." And he said to Abimelech, "Increase your army and come out."

[Judg. 9:30](#) When Zebul the ruler of the city heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger burned.

[Judg. 9:31](#) He sent messengers to Abimelech deceitfully, saying, "Behold, Gaal the son of Ebed and his relatives have come to Shechem; and behold, they are stirring up the city against you.

[Judg. 9:32](#) "Now therefore, arise by night, you and the people who are with you, and lie in wait in the field.

[Judg. 9:33](#) "In the morning, as soon as the sun is up, you shall rise early and rush upon the city; and behold, when he and the people who are with him come out against you, you shall do to them whatever you can."

- Abimelech settles into a limited form of ruling
 - He rules a limited section of Canaan in and around Shechem
 - And after three years, it becomes evident to everyone that this man isn't going to rise to significant power
 - Instead of a vast empire, this man has only managed to become a ruler over a city the surrounding countryside
 - Abimelech resides in Arumah as we see a little later and his vassals are required to send him payments
 - And he uses this power to rob the people of their wealth
 - Naturally, this treatment breeds resentment with the people
 - Ironically, they wanted Abimelech as king because they were afraid of bad treatment at the hands of Gideon's sons
 - And yet after only three years, they have exactly the situation they were trying to avoid
 - Because they selected an evil man contrary to the Lord's will
 - More importantly, the Lord Himself takes steps to ensure this false leader can't remain in power for long
 - As we saw last time, the Lord sends an evil spirit to stir up discontent between Abimelech and those he rules
 - That discontent boils over into civil war
 - Until the sins of Abimelech come back to rest on his own head as the terrible things he did to Gideon's sons are done to him

- It starts with the men of Shechem sitting in ambush for those who travel down the road leading into the city
 - There is a road that passes between Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal on its way into the city
 - Anyone coming into Shechem would travel through this pass making them vulnerable to an ambush from above
 - Abimelech required that the surrounding villages under his control pay him tributes and taxes
 - And these payments came by way of this road
 - So when the men of the city decide they have had enough of this man's rule, they take it upon themselves to steal his tributes
 - They ambush travelers taking their possessions in a highway robbery
 - And eventually the news reaches Abimelech that his tribute was being taken
 - And more importantly, his authority and rule were being challenged
 - Even more troubling for Abimelech, another man arrives on the scene to challenge his authority
 - A man named Gaal, a Canaanite who was opposed to Gideon's family, Yahweh and any who were associated with the Lord
 - Since Abimelech was a son of Gideon, Gaal was set against him
 - He decides to enter in Shechem and wins over some of the men of the city against Abimelech
 - To cement their new alliance, they take grapes from the fields belong to Abimelech and make a quick wine for a festival
 - This was a worship act intended to formalize their relationship and establish a new god over them
 - They cursed Abimelech, which means they entered into a conspiracy against him
- In the course of that feast, Gaal declares who is this man Abimelech that the city should serve him

- He is the man of an enemy but instead the city ought to serve the Canaanite descendants of Hamor who founded the city
 - And in a phrase similar to the one Abimelech himself used to justify his reign, Gaal says wouldn't it be better to be ruled by me
 - And Gaal issues a challenge to Abimelech to gather his army and defend himself in battle
- Gaal said this knowing that Abimelech had his spies in the city who would report back what Gaal said
 - And sure enough, the ruler of the city, Zebul, Abimelech's lieutenant, hears these boasts and goes into a rage
 - He sends messengers to Abimelech and informs the would-be king that Gaal has challenged his authority
 - And he calls upon Abimelech to come back by night when he can attack Gaal at dawn in the city

Judg. 9:34 So Abimelech and all the people who were with him arose by night and lay in wait against Shechem in four companies.

Judg. 9:35 Now Gaal the son of Ebed went out and stood in the entrance of the city gate; and Abimelech and the people who were with him arose from the ambush.

Judg. 9:36 When Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, "Look, people are coming down from the tops of the mountains." But Zebul said to him, "You are seeing the shadow of the mountains as if they were men."

Judg. 9:37 Gaal spoke again and said, "Behold, people are coming down from the highest part of the land, and one company comes by the way of the diviners' oak."

Judg. 9:38 Then Zebul said to him, "Where is your boasting now with which you said, 'Who is Abimelech that we should serve him?' Is this not the people whom you despised? Go out now and fight with them!"

Judg. 9:39 So Gaal went out before the leaders of Shechem and fought with Abimelech.

Judg. 9:40 Abimelech chased him, and he fled before him; and many fell wounded up to the entrance of the gate.

Judg. 9:41 Then Abimelech remained at Arumah, but Zebul drove out Gaal and his relatives so that they could not remain in Shechem.

Judg. 9:42 Now it came about the next day, that the people went out to the field, and it was told to Abimelech.

Judg. 9:43 So he took his people and divided them into three companies, and lay in wait in the field; when he looked and saw the people coming out from the city, he arose against them and slew them.

[Judg. 9:44](#) Then Abimelech and the company who was with him dashed forward and stood in the entrance of the city gate; the other two companies then dashed against all who were in the field and slew them.

[Judg. 9:45](#) Abimelech fought against the city all that day, and he captured the city and killed the people who were in it; then he razed the city and sowed it with salt.

- Abimelech executes the plan of Zebul
 - He comes to the fields near Shechem and sits in wait in four companies
 - Then in the early morning light, Gaal goes to the city gate to watch for an expected attack
 - When he sees Abimelech's army rising up from the fields and hillsides surrounding the city, he realizes he is under attack
 - His plan must have been to remain in the city walls and defend the city from attack
 - But the Zebul realizing that Gaal wasn't so easily fooled tries to convince the man that this isn't an attack at all
 - He comes up with a feeble explanation that these were just shadows in the early light
 - But Gaal isn't fooled, and he sees that Abimelech's army has been divided into camps that approach from various directions
 - Realizing that his deception isn't working, Zebul comes clean in v.38 telling Gaal be a man and fight the battle you asked for
 - So in v.39 Gaal lead the leaders of the city into battle against Abimelech
 - The city leaders have aligned with Gaal, so everyone knows this is a battle to the death for either side
 - In this battle, Abimelech's forces are victorious in killing the soldiers who come out of the city for battle
 - But the city itself is still defended behind its walls
- While Abimelech's forces have succeeded in defeating Gaal's forces, Zebul begins to fight within the city against those who rebelled against Abimelech
 - In v.42 we're told that Zebul drives Gaal and his forces out of the city

- Abimelech is told that his enemies have been driven out of the city and are vulnerable hiding in the fields outside the city
- So he takes his army back to Shechem and split his army into three companies
- Once company had the task of guarding the entrance gate of the city so that it couldn't be retaken or closed
- This ensured that Abimelech's army could enter the city without opposition
- The rest of his army defeated the people of the city who were in the field
 - And then they fought in the city
 - Until they had defeated the entire city in retribution for giving safe harbor to Abimelech's enemy
 - To make sure the city would never oppose him again, Abimelech salted the earth
 - He probably didn't apply salt to the entire area but only a portion
 - In any case, it was a symbolic act indicating that the city would never rise again to challenge him
- But the rebellion isn't over yet

Judg. 9:46 When all the leaders of the tower of Shechem heard of it, they entered the inner chamber of the temple of El-berith.

Judg. 9:47 It was told Abimelech that all the leaders of the tower of Shechem were gathered together.

Judg. 9:48 So Abimelech went up to Mount Zalmon, he and all the people who were with him; and Abimelech took an axe in his hand and cut down a branch from the trees, and lifted it and laid it on his shoulder. Then he said to the people who were with him, "What you have seen me do, hurry and do likewise."

Judg. 9:49 All the people also cut down each one his branch and followed Abimelech, and put them on the inner chamber and set the inner chamber on fire over those inside, so that all the men of the tower of Shechem also died, about a thousand men and women.

- After the destruction of Shechem, Abimelech learns that some of the city's inhabitants had escaped and were held up in the nearby military fortress

- So Abimelech's not satisfied that anyone survived his retribution
 - He calls upon those in his army to each cut down a limb from a tree
 - And then the crowd piled the wood up at the base of the tower where the people were held up
 - And they proceeded to burn the wood and killed everyone inside by smoke and burning
 - We're told a thousand men and women died in the fire
- At this point, the tyrant is out of control and operating in pure rage and bloodlust
 - He isn't content with simply destroying one city
 - He now attacks a nearby city probably out of suspicion that they too are aligned against him

Judg. 9:50 Then Abimelech went to Thebez, and he camped against Thebez and captured it.

Judg. 9:51 But there was a strong tower in the center of the city, and all the men and women with all the leaders of the city fled there and shut themselves in; and they went up on the roof of the tower.

Judg. 9:52 So Abimelech came to the tower and fought against it, and approached the entrance of the tower to burn it with fire.

Judg. 9:53 But a certain woman threw an upper millstone on Abimelech's head, crushing his skull.

Judg. 9:54 Then he called quickly to the young man, his armor bearer, and said to him, "Draw your sword and kill me, so that it will not be said of me, 'A woman slew him.'" So the young man pierced him through, and he died.

Judg. 9:55 When the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, each departed to his home.

Judg. 9:56 Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father in killing his seventy brothers.

Judg. 9:57 Also God returned all the wickedness of the men of Shechem on their heads, and the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal came upon them.

- Thebez is probably the modern city of Tubas which is northeast of Shechem
 - We have no reason in scripture for his attack, which is why we suppose he was operating in pure rage at this point

- This city had a strong tower in the center of the city where the people retreated for safety
- Abimelech intends to siege this tower too with fire
- But before he can get far with his plan, a woman threw a large millstone down on his head
 - We can suppose that the stone knocked him unconscious at least at first
 - Whatever the initial result, the impact damaged his head to the point that he expected to die in the end
 - But rather than die from this injury, Abimelech asked a member of his own army to kill him
 - Remember we said back in the story of Deborah that it was a dishonor for a soldier to be killed by a woman
 - So Abimelech wants to avoid this outcome
- After Abimelech dies, the men in his army lose all interest in pursuing any further bloodshed
 - Samuel says in v.56 that this is how the Lord repaid this man for his wickedness to Gideon's family
 - We are to understand that all that transpired happened under God's hand
 - He sent the evil spirit
 - He orchestrated certain events and outcomes
 - So that Abimelech would know the full outcome of his own treachery
 - To include ensuring Abimelech's death would dishonor him in the eyes of the people
 - Samuel says that the men of Shechem likewise experienced judgment for the wickedness they displayed in working with Abimelech against Gideon's family
 - Notice Samuel adds that these things happened because of the prophetic curse spoken by Gideon's only surviving son

- We can only marvel at the power of God to turn people and events precisely so they accomplish all His desires
- Notice that Abimelech was able to defeat the city of Shechem, which appeared to be a victory for the bad guys
- Except that now we see the Lord simply used Abimelech to punish the men of Shechem for killing Gideon's sons
- And then once the people of Shechem had paid the price, the Lord turned His attention back to Abimelech
 - And the Lord used a woman in a tower to kill him
 - No army was necessary
- Does this story broaden your understanding of how the Lord works to accomplish His will?
 - He allows Abimelech to rise to power as a means of demonstrating the evil in the people's hearts
 - He allows Abimelech to kill Gideon's sons to illustrate how Gideon's actions to keep slave wives and to produce sons were in error
 - The Lord spares one son so that son can be used by God to pronounce a curse on the leader
 - And he allowed the king to rule harshly over the people for three years to demonstrate the foolishness of their desires
 - After three years, the Lord proceeded to judge Abimelech for his sin in killing Gideon's family
 - He brings an evil spirit and an opponent into the situation to bring down Abimelech
 - But not before He used Abimelech to judge those who partnered with him in Shechem
 - The entire episode is a sad lesson in how far the depravity and sin of the human heart can take us when it's left unchecked
 - But even more, this story is a tour de force of the Lord's sovereignty

- We simply can't overlook or explain away how the Lord orchestrated every detail in this situation to suit His eternal purposes
- He never caused anyone to sin nor tempted them to do so
- He used evil to accomplish good and He did everything with perfect justice for all involved
- This is a low point in Israel's time since Joshua
 - They are rudderless, not because the Lord has stopped ruling His people but because His people are no longer listening
 - Gideon ruled for many decades, but his heart wandered severely
 - And as a result, he left the people in a state of rebellion
 - From there it was as short step into civil war
 - This is the first time in Israel's history that Jews had fought other Jews in all-out warfare
 - And it begins a new pattern
 - From the time of Gideon onward, it's common for judge's death to result in civil war among the people
 - The decline of Jewish society is all the more evident in this cycle
- But then between these moments, we still find periods of peace in the land
 - After Abimelech is gone, the Lord reasserts His control over the nation for 45 years with two judges described at the beginning of chapter 10

Judg. 10:1 Now after Abimelech died, Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar, arose to save Israel; and he lived in Shamir in the hill country of Ephraim.

Judg. 10:2 He judged Israel twenty-three years. Then he died and was buried in Shamir.

Judg. 10:3 After him, Jair the Gileadite arose and judged Israel twenty-two years.

Judg. 10:4 He had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys, and they had thirty cities in the land of Gilead that are called Havvoth-jair to this day.

Judg. 10:5 And Jair died and was buried in Kamon.

- These two judges preside over a relatively peaceful period in the land
 - There isn't much to be said about these men except perhaps the second judge Jair
 - His rule seems to have arrived at a similar end to Gideon
 - He has 30 cities and much wealth
 - His sons road around on donkeys in a time before Israel had horses
 - So it seems they took upon themselves a life of privilege again
 - Also, the man had thirty sons which must mean he had multiple wives as Gideon did
 - It would seem that Samuel elected not to say much more about these two men because the main point is obvious
 - We can see the Israel's tendency to return to the same sins again and again
 - And even though a judge had ruled them without incident for 23 years didn't stop the decline of the people again
- And because of the excesses of Jair, the people are set up for a new round of sin, punishment and civil war

Judg. 10:6 Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the sons of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; thus they forsook the LORD and did not serve Him.

Judg. 10:7 The anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the sons of Ammon.

Judg. 10:8 They afflicted and crushed the sons of Israel that year; for eighteen years they afflicted all the sons of Israel who were beyond the Jordan in Gilead in the land of the Amorites.

Judg. 10:9 The sons of Ammon crossed the Jordan to fight also against Judah, Benjamin, and the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was greatly distressed.

- Once more, idolatry enters into daily practice among the people
 - They turned away from the Lord as if He was just another pagan god that could be traded for any other

- And the Lord did as He must
- He disciplined the people with oppressors from both the east and west
- For 18 years the people were afflicted by their own sins
 - That's the way we must view the Lord's response here
 - Like a vice, He squeezed the people
 - But the people themselves were the ones turning the screws by sinning against the word of the Lord
 - Until Israel was greatly distressed we're told
- I'm speeding through this story because you've heard it before and Samuel knows it
 - There's no reasons to dwell on the details beyond what's obvious
 - Fallen hearts are wandering hearts
 - Sinful people seek for sinful relationships, beginning with a desire to forsake the Lord for earthly attachments
- Israel is doing it once more here
 - And it started after leader charted the course of sin in his own excesses and abuses
 - Leaders are the cause of our sin
 - But sinful leaders among God's people are a cancer for godliness
- And if we persist in sin and repeat these cycles in our own walk, we dare the Lord to respond
 - As we learned in Hebrews, the Lord may choose to stop rescuing us some day
 - He may decide to leave us in our sin as a final act of judgment
 - So that our lives become a negative testimony to the world
 - And this generation of Israel appears to be in danger of that result

[Judg. 10:10](#) Then the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD, saying, "We have sinned against You, for indeed, we have forsaken our God and served the Baals."

[Judg. 10:11](#) The LORD said to the sons of Israel, "Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians, the Amorites, the sons of Ammon, and the Philistines?"

[Judg. 10:12](#) "Also when the Sidonians, the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you, you cried out to Me, and I delivered you from their hands.

[Judg. 10:13](#) "Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods; therefore I will no longer deliver you.

[Judg. 10:14](#) "Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your distress."

- Let's learn a lesson from the story of Judges this morning, the lesson that second chances from God deserve a different response from us
 - When we have been rescued from our sins by God's grace, let's not squander His act of mercy
 - Take that mercy and use it to recommit to walking in obedience
 - Seek for help, in His word and in prayer and in fellowship among His people
 - Don't take His mercy for granted
 - Even though we know we have been saved for eternity, we still concern ourselves with the result of service to Him
 - And we cannot forget that our willful sin is fundamentally different than a momentary weakness or absentmindedness
 - Everyone sins from time to time
 - But not everyone sins with intention and desire to oppose the Lord
 - The Lord has sufficient grace to cover all sin by the blood of Christ
 - But to go on sinning intentionally is risking the discipline of the Lord, which none of us can withstand
 - Let's learn from this terrible pattern of judges by seeking for a better testimony
 - Rather than hearing the Lord declaring to us "I will no longer deliver you"