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Judges 8 - 9



Judges - Steve Gregg

In Judges 8-9, Gideon ends his pursuit and encounters the tribe of Ephraim who had not yet joined the battle. Gideon's ungrateful people forget his leadership quickly and soon there is no accountability. Abimelech, son of Jeruvah, made himself king and caused chaos through robbery and oppression. However, he met his fate when a woman dropped a millstone that crushed his skull. This story reinforces the importance of avoiding the pursuit of power and the consequences that come with it.

Transcript

In Judges 8, we have the conclusion of the story of Gideon. In chapters 6 and 7, he was called and given many signs, many evidences that God was with him and then asked to really put his faith in God by attacking an overwhelmingly large, oppressive, occupational force of Midianites with a very tiny group of soldiers himself, only 300. However, once God began to put the enemy in confusion and began to bring victory to Gideon in the initial attack, there were others who joined him from the other tribes, especially Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh.

His own tribe was Manasseh. And so he did have assistance beyond the 300, but he and his 300 were still doing one thing. I think the Midianites split and went in different directions.

The Manassites and the people of Asher and Naphtali pursued one group and Gideon apparently pursued with his 300 men another group. Now, apparently in the course of his pursuit, he encountered men from the tribe of Ephraim who had not gotten involved in this battle yet. And the men of Ephraim, chapter 8, said to him, Why have you done this to us by not calling us when you went to fight with the Midianites? And they reprimanded him sharply.

So he said to them, What have I done now in comparison with you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? God has delivered into your hands the princes Midian, Oriban, Zeb. And what was I to do with the grapes of Ephraim? And they reprimanded him sharply. So he said to them, What have I done now in

comparison with you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? God has delivered into your hands the princes Midian, Oriban, Zeb.

And what was I to do with the grapes of Ephraim? And they reprimanded him sharply. So he said, What have I to do in comparison with you? Then their anger toward him abated when he said that he had called upon them belatedly to capture those that were trying to seek, trying to get across the Jordan to escape. And they caught two of the Midianite leaders, Oriban, Zeb, and the Ephraimites had killed them.

But they still were upset that they hadn't been called earlier, that Gideon had launched this without informing them or bringing them into it. Well, there were a lot of tribes he didn't inform or bring into it. It wasn't really his.

It wasn't his authority that decided who was going to go. Many of the people who originally came, he sent them home. It was unreasonable for the Ephraimites to protest like this.

It's possible that it was sort of a mock protest. I mean, a sham protest, basically saying, Oh, we would have liked to have been involved and showing a little bit of maybe not real indignation. Hard to say.

Or maybe they just were really thinking, you know, you left us out of the loop here. We're your brother nation. You're of the tribe of Anasta.

We're Ephraim. You should have brought us in first. Why did Asher and Naphtali get in there ahead of us? Like they wanted the glory.

Not that the people of Ephraim ever volunteered to attack the Midianites prior to this. I mean, they wanted a piece of the action, but they never really showed any leadership. But they did get the privilege of capturing Oriban and Zeb.

And he says, basically, God has given you that glory. When he said in verse 2, is not the gleaning of grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? Of course, the gleaning is what's left over after the general collection of the harvest of the grapes. There's just a few clusters left.

He says, in Ephraim, they are so superior to his own hometown that Ephraim's gleanings are superior to the actual vintage of his town. It might be a self-deprecating remark saying, you guys are so much greater than us. You know, you've got nothing to complain about.

You're not being held down anyway. You've got more going for you than I do. But it's not really clear what his statement meant in connection with that, except he might be saying, you have actually accomplished more than I have.

That might be his way of saying it. You've captured Oriban and Zeb. God delivered them into your hands, not into mine.

And therefore, you know, be satisfied with the glory of that privilege. Anyway, verse 4, when Gideon came to the Jordan, he and the 300 men who were with him crossed over, exhausted, but still in pursuit. Then he said to the men of Succoth, please give loaves of bread to the people who follow me, for they are exhausted and I am pursuing Zeba and Zalmunah, the kings of Midian.

So, Oriban and Zeb had been removed, but these two rulers were still fleeing. And the leader of Succoth said, are the hands of Zeba and Zalmunah now in your hands that we should give bread to your army? In other words, you haven't really conquered them yet. What if they turn on you, defeat you, and know that we helped you? Then we'll be punished by them.

We don't want to take sides in this matter on your side yet, because we can't count our chickens before they hatch. We don't know yet if you're going to win this battle. So, we don't want to take the risk of taking sides with you by refreshing your troops and so forth.

And that's how they responded. And Gideon said, for this cause, when the Lord has delivered Zeba and Zalmunah into my hand, then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briars. Then he went up from there to Penuel and spoke to them in the same way.

And the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered him. So, he spoke to them of Penuel, saying, when I come back in peace, I will tear down this tower. So, these Israelites who should have been supporting the effort were either apathetic about the interests of Israel or afraid.

They didn't believe this war could end up well for Israel, and so they didn't want to take sides and incur the wrath of the Midianites. But, they, in other words, did not help out their own countrymen when they needed provision. And that was a punishable offense.

Now, Zeba and Zalmunah were at Karkor, and their armies with them, about 15,000 men, all who were left of all the army of the people of the east. For 120,000 men who drew the sword had fallen. So, he had 15,000 left.

There were 120,000 had fallen. So, there had been at least 135,000. There were perhaps still some alive in the other group that was fleeing.

So, you know, over 135,000 Midianites against 300. Then, Gideon went up by the road of those who dwell in tents on the east of Noba and Jogbeha, and he attacked the army while the camp felt secure. Apparently, Zeba and Zalmunah had felt that they had gotten safely across the Jordan and that they wouldn't be pursued there.

So, they had gotten their armor off and they were relaxing in camp and felt secure. But, they were surprised by Gideon and his 300. And Gideon, the son of Joash, returned from battle.

I guess I didn't read verse 12. Zeba and Zalmunah fled. He pursued them and he took the two kings of Midian, Zeba and Zalmunah, and routed the whole army.

Then Gideon, son of Joash, returned from battle from the ascent of Heres. And he caught a young man of the men of Sukkoth and interrogated him. And he wrote down for him the leaders of Sukkoth and its elders, 77 men.

These were the men who were going to have to be punished for not helping them now that the battle was over. He found a citizen, a young man, who was able to write. It shows that literacy was apparently fairly common at this early stage.

This young man was not said to be particularly a scribe or a scholar, just a young man of the city. And he was able to write, which we might take for granted, but many times in history whole societies were illiterate. But the Jews apparently had taught their children to read and kept them literate for the most part, because this young man knew how to write.

And that was verse 14. Then he said to the men of Sukkoth and said, He came to the men of Sukkoth and said, Here are Zeba and Zalmunah, about whom you ridiculed me, saying, Are the hands of Zeba and Zalmunah now in your hand, that we should give bread to your weary men? And he took the elders of the city and thorns of the wilders and briars, and with them he taught the men of Sukkoth. And then he tore down the tower of Penuel and killed the men of that city.

So now that he has won the victory, he has taken his wrath out on those that were really traitors. I mean, here Israel is at war with their enemies, and these people of Israel will not take sides with Israel. So they're basically fighting with the enemy.

And they're traitors against their country, and they're put to death for it. And he said to Zeba and Zalmunah, What kind of men were those that you killed at Tabor? And they answered, As you are, so were they. Each one resembled the son of a king.

Then he said, They were my brothers, the sons of my mother. As the Lord lives, if you had let them live, I would not kill you. And he said to Jether, his firstborn, Rise, kill them.

But the youth would not draw his sword, for he was afraid, because he was still a youth. So Zeba and Zalmunah said, Rise yourself and kill us, for as a man is, so is his strength. So Gideon rose and killed Zeba and Zalmunah and took the crescent ornaments that were on their camel's necks.

Now, apparently, prior to this battle, there had been some kind of a slaughter that we

had not previously been told about, that these two kings of the Midianites had participated at Tabor. Gideon had lost his brothers there. It was probably just one of those senseless raids of the Midianites that they'd come through this town and just slaughtered people randomly.

And Gideon's brothers had died there. So he wanted to make sure, before killing these two kings, that they were responsible for that. He said, Well, describe the people you killed at Tabor.

He said, Well, they looked a lot like you. He said, Well, they should. They were my brothers.

And so, if you hadn't killed them, I would give you a break, but I'm not going to. So he killed them to avenge his brother's blood. Verse 22, Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, Rule over us, both you and your son and your grandson also, for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian.

But Gideon said to them, I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you. The Lord shall rule over you. Then Gideon said to them, I would like to make a request of you, that each of you would give me the earrings from his plunder.

For they had gold earrings because they were Ishmaelites. That is, Ishmaelites, apparently a term that's a cover term for a variety of races, including Midianites. The Midianites were included among those that were Ishmaelites.

And Ishmaelites apparently all wore gold rings. So the Midianites did too. This is an important notation because in the story of Joseph in Genesis chapter 37 and in chapter 39, when he is taken and sold to Bedouin traders who take him down to Egypt and sell him as a slave.

Those traders to whom his brother sold him are sometimes called Ishmaelites and sometimes called Midianites. In fact, some have considered that's an evidence of contradiction in the scripture because the same thing that is said about. Well, let me show you this.

It's very easy to illustrate in Genesis chapter 37 and in verse 36. Genesis 37, 36 is now the Midianites had sold Joseph to Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard. So it was the Midianites who sold Joseph.

But if you look at chapter 39, verse 1, the story has been interrupted in chapter 38 and returns to the same story in chapter 39, verse 1. Now, Joseph had been taken down to Egypt and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there. So one verse says they were Midianites. Another verse says they were Ishmaelites.

Now, Midian and Ishmael were not the same guy and they weren't even of the same lineage. Both Ishmael and Midian were descended from Abraham, but through different lines. Ishmael from Hagar and Midian from Keturah, the different wives of Abraham.

And yet somewhere along the line, the term Ishmaelite had come to be a broader term, not merely a racial term, but maybe a like our modern word Arab. When we say that somebody is an Arab, we're not just saying they're from Arabia. They might be from Syria or Lebanon.

They might be from Iraq. They might be from any number of countries, Jordan. They could be Arabs, because the word Arab isn't strictly the name for one ethnicity, but of a whole group of ethnicities.

And the word Ishmaelite must have been like that. Because the Midianites were just one race, but we're told in Judges that they were also Ishmaelites. And that's why it is said that they had gold rings, because Ishmaelites all wore gold rings.

So he said, give me the gold rings from your plunder. Now the weight of the gold earrings, verse 26, that he requested was 1,700 shekels of gold. Forget how much this is.

I think it's about 50 pounds of gold. And gold is usually valued by the ounce, not by the pound. Today, gold is about \$1,500 an ounce.

So if there's 16 ounces in a pound, that would make, I can't do the math, but that's a lot of money per pound. And he had about 50 pounds of gold. So he would be a rich man.

And this would be not at the expense of any of the Israelites, but of the Midianites. The Israelites weren't giving up any of their money. This is the plunder they'd taken.

So it was not something that was going to cost them anything for him to be made rich. And he also got the crescent ornaments, pendants, and purple robes, which were on the kings of Midian. And besides the chains that were on the necks of the camels.

So he got a lot of stuff. He was enriched for his efforts. Now he refused to be made king because he knew that Israel should not have a king.

They said, rule over us, your son and your grandson, which simply meant we'll set up a hereditary monarchy with you as the dynastic head. From now on, Israel will have kings instead of judges. And the kings will be your descendants.

Now Gideon knew that that wasn't appropriate. And so he refused it. And he actually said, my son will not rule over you.

Actually, his son didn't have the same idea. Abimelech, his son, actually did use self authority and did rule over them for a while. But Gideon wouldn't accept that position.

But he did accept money. He didn't just walk away and say, I did this for free. He accepted some remuneration for the risks he took.

And it says in verse 27, then Gideon made it into an ephod. Certainly not all of this was made into an ephod, but he from the materials that were given to him, he made an ephod, which was part of the priest's vestments and set it up in his city, Ophrah. And all Israel played the harlot with it there.

And it became a snare to Gideon in his house. Now, it's not really clear how that's to be understood. I mean, all the house of Israel played the harlot means they became idolatrous toward it.

I don't know if he was wearing the ephod, proclaiming himself to be a priest and they worshipped him. Or if he just set up the ephod on display and they worshipped it, it is not explained. But it turned out to be a compromise on Gideon's part.

Not good for his house. His house actually came to a very bad end in the next chapter. Thus, Midian was subdued before the children of Israel so that they lifted their heads no more.

Midian never came back to do this again. And the country was quiet for 40 years in the days of Gideon. Then Jerubal, which remember is Gideon, the son of Joash, went and dwelt in his own house.

Gideon had 70 sons who were his own offspring, for he had many wives. And his concubine, who was in Shechem, also bore him a son whose name he called Abimelech. Now, it's not clear why he called him Abimelech, because Abimelech means father king.

And certainly Abimelech had it in his head to become a king in the nation. And I don't know if it's, you know, some scholars say this wasn't the original name, but it's the name that Abimelech assumed for himself. But it says here that Gideon called him that.

And he wasn't even one of his sons born from one of his wives, but rather from a concubine. But he must have favored him. Now, Gideon, the son of Joash, died at a good old age and was buried in the tomb of Joash, his father, in Ophrah of Abiezratz.

And it was so, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals and made Baal barith their god. Thus, the children of Israel did not remember the Lord their God, who had delivered them from the hands of all their enemies on every side, nor did they show kindness to the house of Jerubael, that is, Gideon, in accordance with the good he had done for Israel. So they forgot God and they forgot Gideon.

Very ungrateful people, very forgetful, very quick to depart as soon as there is no accountability. Once the cat is away, the mice play. And Gideon was the cat during his

lifetime, but when he died, as soon as he was dead, they departed again.

And then in chapter 9, we have the career of his son, Abimelech, and the atrocities he did. He was an awful guy. And he, actually, it's pleasant to read of him coming to an awful end after the many people he kills.

But since Gideon's family was the, you know, prominent family, Gideon was famous at this point. People played the harlot with as they worshiped the ephod that he had made in his house. And he was sort of a central figure in the country.

His son would be the natural to promote himself as the successor to Gideon, although Gideon had said he didn't want that to happen. And he believed that would be a violation of Israel's status as a theocracy to have an earthly king. Abimelech didn't care anything about that.

Abimelech, the son of Jerubael, went to Shechem, to his mother's brothers, and spoke with them and with all the family of the house of his mother's father, saying, Please speak in the hearing of all the men of Shechem. Which is better for you, that all seventy of the sons of Jerubael reign over you, or that one reign over you? Remember that I am your own flesh and bone. Now, Shechem is where the concubine was from.

We're told in chapter 8, verse 31. Abimelech's mother, the concubine, was from there. And so she had brothers and family in Shechem.

And he decided that he needed some people to back him up in his bid to rule. So he went naturally to those people who were blood relations of his. And he argued that they could make him the ruler, or they'd be stuck with the seventy sons of Gideon as the rulers.

Well, that's not a given. Why would the seventy sons of Gideon become rulers? Gideon wasn't the king, and there's no obvious reason why his seventy sons would succeed him. But apparently the sons of Gideon may have wished to succeed him, and Abimelech may not have been the only one.

And he may have been aware that the seventy sons were contriving how to become powerful in their father's absence. And he decided he'd get some people on his side to get them out of the way. So his mother's brothers spoke to all these words concerning him in the hearing of all the men of Shechem.

And their heart was inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, he is our brother. He's the only one of Gideon's sons that had a relationship to them because his mother was their relative. So the people of Shechem thought, well, he is connected to us.

If he's the king, we'll have special privileges because we're related to him. And it'd be bad for us if these other sons of Gideon who aren't related to us became kings. So they

decided to throw in their lot with him.

So they gave him seventy shekels of silver from the temple of Baal-Berith, with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless men, and they followed him. Then he went to his father's house at Orpah and killed his brothers, the seventy sons of Jerubael, on one stone. But Jotham, the youngest of Jerubael, was left because he hid himself.

So we don't know exactly how these men that he hired got mastery over these seventy sons. You know, whether he captured them all in one place or went to each of their houses individually and arrested them or what. He had seventy shekels with which to hire bad guys.

He may have hired seventy bad guys to give him a shekel each. If so, even then there was only one man per son of Gideon. It seems like Gideon's sons were to put up a fight.

Rather than just lay down their necks on the block and be beheaded. Unless they had become lazy and luxurious. I mean, Gideon was a rich man after that battle.

Maybe he raised pampered effeminate sons who didn't know how to fight, didn't know how to defend themselves, and didn't even have the spirit to do so. And so they easily went down. In any case, Abimelech did not act alone.

He had a certain number of hired brigands that went with him and he killed all of his brothers except one who managed to escape. The youngest son, whose name was Jotham. And he hid himself.

And all the men of Shechem gathered together, all of Beth Milo, which was apparently a fortress in Shechem or near there. And they went and made Abimelech the king before the Terebinth tree at the pillar that was in Shechem. Now, of course, this would not be something that all of Israel would have to honor.

This was one city saying, we're going to recognize our brother as king. And he's killed all his own brothers. So no, none of them can challenge him.

Not that any of them could legitimately have made themselves king anyway. But if he could, they could. He had as much right as they did, and they as much as he.

So he eliminated all those that might stand on the same footing of privilege as himself and got this one city to declare him king. Now, typically the nations of the tribes of Israel were kind of like lemmings. They just kind of followed.

I mean, if a deliver blew the trumpet, they showed up. You know, it's like they just they didn't even have to have a reason. Maybe life was boring and they just wanted some action or something.

So some blows the trumpet. Let's go see what's going on. Let's go fight.

And here also, one group declares this guy a king over this city. And it would seem that other tribes just honored that. They recognize that.

Or maybe not. Maybe it was just a local thing in the region. We don't know exactly how far and wide he was recognized, but he's recognized enough in that region to really be a tyrant.

And the men of Shechem apparently would stand behind him. Maybe there was no united opposition to him sufficient that would really challenge him in that area. So they made him king there.

Verse 7. Now, when they told it to Jotham, his youngest brother, he went and stood on top of Mount Gerizim and lifted his voice and cried out and said to them, Listen to me, you men of Shechem, that God may listen to you. The trees once went forth to anoint a king over them, and they said to the olive tree, Rain over us. But the olive tree said to them, Should I cease from giving my oil with which they honor God and men and go and sway over the trees? Then the tree said to the fig tree, You come and rain over us.

But the fig tree said to them, Should I cease my sweetness and my fruit giving my good fruit and go and sway over the trees? Then the tree said to the vine, You come and rain over us. But the vine said to them, Should I cease my new wine, which cheers both God and men and go and sway over the trees? Then all the trees said to the bramble, You come and rain over us. And the bramble said to the trees, If in truth you anoint me as king over you, then come and take shelter in my shade.

But if not, let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon. Now, he's going to interpret his parable as it were. This is really more like a fable than a parable.

Slight difference. Because a parable is a story that actually is true to life. For trees to talk to each other is not true to life.

It's more like Aesop's fables. A fable is a story where unnatural, unrealistic things happen. But it serves the same purpose as a parable.

It represents something else than a parable. It's illustrating a thought. The thought here is that there are trees that actually have something useful to do.

Produce grapes. Vines produce grapes. Trees produce figs and olive oil.

Those are useful things to do. Why would they want to do a useless thing? Like be king over the trees? Why would trees need a king? What do trees do that they need a ruler over them? There's absolutely no reason for trees to have a king. And so it's such a stupid suggestion.

Come and reign over us. And no one who has anything useful to do or no one who makes

a useful contribution would even give up what they're doing in order to be the king. It's a worthless position.

And by implication, being a king of Israel is an unnecessary thing. It's as unnecessary as having a king over the trees. God reigns over the trees.

And so God also reigns over Israel. He is their king. And so no one who has anything worthwhile to contribute otherwise would accept a position as king of Israel.

What he's suggesting is that the fact that Abimelech wants to be king of Israel means that he's not good for anything else. He's more like the bramble bush. It doesn't produce anything.

It's just a weed worthy to be burned. That's all it's good for. It has no useful purpose.

So it might accept a position as king over the trees. It's an unnecessary position. The trees are crazy to even want to have a king.

But the only person who would ever accept the position if it was offered was someone who didn't have anything to commend him. Because anything that a tree had to commend it would be an argument against going and becoming a king. They'd have to give up what they're already doing.

So what he is saying is Israel has a king already in God. Israel gets along fine without a king. It has always gotten along fine without a king.

Like trees get along fine without having a king over them. And yet here's a man who wants to be and is willing to be the king over the trees. It's because he's as worthless as a bramble.

He's got nothing to offer. And the bramble cannot provide any useful service to the trees as their king either. So he's saying the men of Shechem are thinking as crazy as trees would be thinking if they tried to find a king.

And you know really that's that's reflecting also on the politics of church as well in some ways. Because the Bible says in 1st John chapter 2 that you have no need that any man teach you this anointing you receive teaches you all things. Jesus said the spirit will come and lead you into all truth.

Jesus said don't call anyone master don't call anyone teacher because you have one teacher one master the Christ. You're all brothers. Jesus set things up in the church the way that the forest is set up with the trees.

Each tree has its own function independent of the others. As a forest it's a beautiful thing and there's some sense in which the combined contributions of a lot of trees in an orchard or forest are greater than the contribution of any one. But each tree individually

does its part.

It's not necessary to find someone to organize them. Someone to force them into some kind of artificial mold when they're actually already doing well just under God's direction. People who are really God's people will follow God.

As many as are led by the spirit of God they are the sons of God Paul said. So the number of people who are led by the spirit of God is the same number of their sons of God. If they're led by the spirit of God why do they need a king over them.

Why do they need a man to rise up and rule over them. Now there are times of course that God raises up leaders ad hoc leaders like he did with the judges and they do something that needs to be done and they provide a service for the nation but they don't set up a kingdom where people have to obey them and they become kings and you know replace God in that role. There are gifted people in the church too that he uses but they're not to become the rulers of the people of God.

Anyone who would want to rule over people that are already being adequately ruled over by God it must be someone who doesn't have anything better to do with his life. I remember when we first started our home fellowship in McMinnville Oregon there were about 10 families. All the men were mature Christian men and the women were mature Christian women and so forth and there just weren't any babes there.

They had children but they were all homeschooling their kids so they were taking care of that part. There just didn't need to be any leader of the group and we didn't. In fact if someone had said why don't we appoint some leaders here we'd think well who? Everyone's doing fine.

Why arbitrarily just choose two or three or four guys and say okay everyone else do what they say. What's the point of that when everyone's following God just fine? And that's how Israel was supposed to be. Now they weren't following God just fine but God was taking care of it.

When they got off the wrong way he'd raise up trouble. He'd discipline them. He'd raise up a leader, a deliverer but he would not set up a monarch.

He would not set up a dynasty. He would not set up an institutionalized governmental system and I don't think that he needs to where he is king and that's true in the kingdom of God now too I believe. Now after he's given this parable about the tree wanting a king in verse 16 he says, Now therefore if you have acted in truth and sincerity in making a Bimlach king and if you have dealt well with Zerubbabel and his house and have done to him as he deserves for my father fought for you risked his life and delivered you out of the hand of Midian but you have risen up against my father's house this day and killed his 70 sons on one stone and made a Bimlach his son the son of a maidservant king over

the men of Shechem because he's your brother.

If then you have acted in truth and sincerity with Zerubbabel and with his house this day then rejoice in a Bimlach and let him rejoice in you come under the shade of the bramble bush but if not that is if you haven't acted justly then let fire come out from a Bimlach and devour the men of Shechem and Beth Milo and let fire come from the men of Shechem and from Beth Milo and devour Bimlach and Jotham ran away and fled and he went to Be'er and dwelt there for fear of Bimlach his brother so apparently there was a region that Bimlach did not have jurisdiction that he could get out of his control and dwell safely which suggests that Bimlach didn't really have control over the whole country necessarily now after Bimlach had reigned over Israel 3 years clearly the people of Shechem did not take heed to what Jotham said the word reigned actually is not the word that used in the Hebrew for the reign of a king but lorded over is the word that used in the Hebrew after he lorded over his subjects for 3 years God sent a spirit of ill will between a Bimlach and the men of Shechem actually that's a paraphrase in the Hebrew it says he sent an evil spirit sent a spirit of ill will sounds like it may be just kind of you know a little bit of bad blood arose from him but it's actually not an evil spirit the same word that used in the New Testament uses the Greek Old Testament uses the same word evil spirit here that it uses in the New Testament to speak of the demons God sent a demonic spirit to break up this coalition of the men of Shechem with the Bimlach this friendship they had now the idea of God sending an evil spirit is difficult for some but the Bible makes it very clear that in the Old Testament he did that he sent an evil spirit against Saul he sent a lion spirit from out of Ahab's prophets the Old Testament just takes it for granted that God is sovereign over everything even the evil spirits they are not on his side neither was Judas on his side or Caiaphas but they play into his hands Joseph's brothers were not on God's side but they played into his hands and by selling Joseph into Egypt that was something God meant for good though the brothers intended evil against him so the demonic forces don't have good intentions but they are forced to do what God permits them to do only and they're prevented from doing what he prevents them to do so they have to have his permission to act and no doubt they wanted to come in and you know afflicted these people because the demons just love to afflict and do harm and God allowed them to on this occasion no doubt he denied them that on other occasions in other cases that we don't read about but this evil spirit came from God it was sent by God between a bimlek and the men of Shechem and they were his supporters and his relatives and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with a bimlek so he's beginning to have trouble in his kingdom among those that first put him in power it says they dealt treacherously with a bimlek that the crime done to the seventy sons of Jerubael might be settled and their blood be laid on a bimlek their brother who killed them and on the men of Shechem who aided him in the killing of his brothers and the men of Shechem set men in ambush against him on tops of mountains and they robbed all who passed by them along the way and it was told to a bimlek now apparently the men of Shechem decided to put assassins in the various places where

they thought he might travel in the passes of the mountains and so forth but I guess he didn't go to those places very often and so the assassins got bored waiting so they just robbed people who went by and then the news of these robberies was reported back in town and the bimeks said I guess I'll avoid those places so the guys who were hired to assassinate him they just kind of got bored or greedy and decided to just start robbing people randomly and he was warned of it so he didn't go there so that plot against him failed now Geol the son of Ebed about whom we know very little other than that he's the son of Ebed came with his brothers and went over to Shechem and the men of Shechem put their confidence in him now apparently this Ebed and his brothers were sort of a band of outlaw types and the men of Shechem kind of trusted him to bring about the end of a bimek I don't know if they were paying him to do it or giving him shelter on the promise that he would take care of bimeks but we do find that he really did have a plan to overthrow a bimek and it was probably because the people of Shechem either hired him or they just agreed with his motives and supported him in it they put their confidence in him as the one who would get rid of the bimek a bimek must have had some bodyguard or something like that because it shouldn't be hard to get rid of one man from being king if the whole city wants him dead but he must have had some army or bodyguard around him so it wasn't that easy. So it says they went out into the field and gathered grapes from the vineyards and trod them and made merry now this expression they made merry in the Hebrew the word Helolim which means praise offerings they made praise offerings now there is a law in Leviticus 19 and verse 24 that said every fourth year of the harvest that the Israelites should bring offerings to Jerusalem or not to Jerusalem but to the tabernacle and make praise offerings this very word it's this is three years he'd rule this is the fourth year it's possible that people are now keeping that law but not to Yahweh to bring these offerings to the temple of Baal instead perhaps perhaps informed by the law of how to worship Yahweh they're now applying those festivals and so forth to Baal and when it says they made merry that's not exactly right. They made praise offerings which probably is referring to the festival that was ordained in Leviticus 19 24 but instead of doing it to Yahweh they're doing it to Baal and they went into the house of their God and ate and drank and cursed Adimelech now when people drink too much their tongues get loosed when they're sober they know how to keep their tongues in their head and avoid getting into trouble but when you get too drunk you just start talking about what's been on your heart that you haven't been saying before and curses toward Adimelech began to flow because that's what how people have been feeling but not talking about it this festival became a big drink fest and wine fest and so we start having some bold talk coming up that's a little unguarded including Gael himself Gael the son of Ebed said who is Adimelech who is Shechem that we should serve him is he not the son of Jerubael and is not Zabel his officer.

Now is he not the son of Jerubael might mean that Gael was loyal or at least professing loyalty to Baal and why should we serve someone who is the son of the man who defied Baal. Jerubael and you know why we are loyal to Baal why should we serve a man whose

father overthrew Baal. Serve the men of Hamar the father of Shechem but why should we serve him.

Now Hamar the father of Shechem you remember back in the days of Jacob this was the city Shechem that got put to the sword by Simeon and Levi. And Hamar and Shechem were Hamar was the king and Shechem was the prince there. It would appear that this city although the men of the city were pretty much wiped out in the days of Jacob it had come back together and had some of the some of the descendants of that original dynasty still there apparently and Gael said we should serve the native rulers of this city rather than this guy whose ancestor overthrew Baal.

We should go back to Baal worship officially and have a king over us who has always been a Baal worshiper and his family goes back centuries to loyalty to Baal. If only this people were under my hand then I would remove Abimelech. So he said to Abimelech who was not present but he apparently is out to the sky increase your army and come out.

Now this sounds like the kind of words that Absalom uttered against David when he was trying to get himself in power in place of David. He talked to people who brought their disputes to the gate of the city of Jerusalem and you say oh you've got a good cause. I don't think my father will hear it.

I sure wish I was in charge here. I'd certainly give you justice you know and winning people over that way saying things would be better under my administration. Of course everyone who runs for office says the same thing.

Change hope everything's going to be better when I'm in charge. If only I was in charge here then we would get rid of all the problems. Then Zeebel the ruler of the city heard the words of Gael the son of David and his anger was aroused because he happened to be loyal to Abimelech and he was the ruler of that city.

So there apparently were some who are loyal and some who are not loyal to Abimelech. His anger has aroused me sent messengers to Abimelech secretly saying take note Gael the son of Ebed and his brothers have come to shake him and here they are fortifying the city against you. Now therefore get up by night you and the people who are with you and lie in wait in the field and it shall be as soon as the sun is up in the morning that you shall rise early and rush upon the city and as soon as he and the people who are with you with him come out against you.

You may then do to them as you find opportunity. So again it's a matter of a surprise attack counting on that to bring victory. There were some who were with Abimelech we don't know how many.

They were probably in his hometown of Ophrah rather than Shechem which they're

probably two towns near each other and Shechem was now kind of moving in the direction of rebellion against him. So those that were with him would come and they'd have to fight against Shechem not only Gael and his brothers but the whole city was against him and that was becoming evident from this drunken talk on this particular occasion. Verse 34 So Abimelech and all the people who were with him rose by night and lay in wait against Shechem in four companies.

Then Gael 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 line and wait but they were in the distance and Gael couldn't quite make out who it was or what it was. He didn't know he was under attack and it says and when Gael saw the people he said to Zeebel look people are coming down from the city gate and they're going to attack you. They're coming down from the tops of the mountains.

But Zeebel said to him you see the shadows of the mountains as if they were men. Apparently they're far enough away that couldn't quite make it out. Is that people coming toward us? No that's just the shadows on the mountain it's just colored that way it's not people.

Then Gael apparently as the army got closer and he could make it out he says Gael spoke to him and said no see people are coming down from the center of the land and another company is coming from the diviner's tarbeth tree. Then Zeebel said to him where indeed is your mouth now with which you said who is Abimelech that we should serve him? Are not these the people whom you despise? Go out if you will and fight with them now. So the battle was joined and Gael went out leading them into Shechem and fought with Abimelech and Abimelech chased him and he fled from him and many fell wounded even to the entrance of the gate.

Then Abimelech dwelt at Aramath and Zeebel drove out Gael and his brothers so they would not dwell in Shechem. So Gael and his brothers got out of there with their lives apparently but they were just expelled from Shechem. But the people of Shechem really did not fare so well.

It came about on the next day that the people went out into the field and they told Abimelech so he and his people divided them into three companies and lay in wait in the field and he looked and there were the people coming out of the city and he rose against them and attacked them. Then Abimelech and the company that was with him rushed forward and stood at the entrance of the gate of the city and the other two companies rushed upon all who were in the fields and killed them. So they took the gate so the people could not flee back into the city for protection and so they were stranded.

It was a little bit like how the Israelites conquered Ai. The people had gone out to fight and then the ambush party came and secured the city and set it on fire so there was not really any way the people on the battlefield could return home. It kind of takes the spirit

out of you when you say okay we do not have a home now.

We cannot get home and we are just stuck out here surrounded by these armies. You will fight but you will fight without much encouragement of winning. You are kind of a homeless person now out there in the field with armies attacking you and Abimelech and the company that was with him rushed forward and stood at the entrance of the gate.

So Abimelech fought against the city all that day. He took the city and killed the people who were in it. He demolished the city and sowed it with salt.

Sowing it with salt apparently they sowed the fields with salt which apparently ruined the soil for crops. It is a kind of a damage that is hard to undo. Once you have got salt in the soil you cannot go out and pick up the particles.

That soil is going to be fruitless for a long time to come and once in a while you read about that in the Bible of an enemy conquering a city and sowing their fields with salt. It is just a malicious thing to do to make them permanently unproductive. So each of the people likewise cut down his own bow and followed Abimelech and they put them against the stronghold and set the stronghold on fire above them.

So that all the people of the tower died about a thousand men and women. So remember Jonathan said if you have not done justly to my father then may a fire go out from Abimelech and devour Shechem and may a fire go out from Shechem and devour Abimelech. Well part of that has been fulfilled now.

A fire has gone out from Abimelech and devoured Shechem. Now something has to happen to him. Then Abimelech verse 50 went to Thebes and he camped against Thebes and took it.

Now why he did we do not know. Thebes was another city we have not read previously about it. We do not know what its alliance or allegiance was.

Apparently it was part of the territory that he claimed rulership over and it may be that they had unbeknownst to us been allies with Shechem in desiring to overthrow him. We are not told that but it is entirely possible that it was so and he knew it. Or it is possible that some of the refugees had fled from Shechem and gone to Thebes.

But in any case he was not content without conquering Thebes. He should have been content because going to Thebes ended up badly for him. And he encamped against Thebes and took it.

But there was a strong tower in the city and all the men and women all the people of the city fled there and shut themselves in. Then they went up to the top of the tower. So Abimelech came as far as the tower and fought against it and he drew near to the door of the tower to burn it with fire.

He is going to do the same thing here that he did with the tower of Shechem. That worked well. But in getting close enough to put the wood by the tower he put himself in the vertical line of fire of a woman armed with a millstone and says, but a certain woman dropped an upper millstone on Abimelech's head and crushed his skull.

Well it killed him but not instantly. He was still slightly conscious. So he quickly called the young man his armor bearer and said to him, draw your sword and kill me lest men say of me a woman killed him.

So his young man thrust him through and he died. That would be a reputation he did not want to have even though he would be dead. You know when you're dead I don't know why you care what your reputation is if you weren't a good man.

I mean it's nice to think that people think well of you when you're gone I suppose. But if they don't, dying is your escape from that shame I guess of a bad reputation. But it would be a humiliation to him he thought to die knowing that he would have the reputation of a man killed by a woman.

It makes him sound rather wimpy and so he didn't want to have that to be remembered by. Even though he wouldn't know it because he was going to be dead anyway in a moment. But he just said kill me so I don't die at the hand of a woman.

So the young man thrust him through and he died. And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead they departed every man to his own place. Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech which he had done to his father by killing his seventy sons.

And all the evil of the men of Shechem God returned on their own heads and on them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubael. So the story is about a man who sought to overthrow the order that God had set up to rule Israel of judges and make himself a king. And he did so of course by evil actions and his conspirators.

And he both came to an end because God put an evil spirit between him and them. They were confederates at first and if they had stayed that way he might have ruled for a long time over them. But God stepped in to judge the situation made the men of Shechem want to kill him and him want to kill them and he used him to kill them and them to kill him.

So it worked out real well. And now we don't have any more kings in Israel at this point. The next judge of significance that we come to is Jephthah.

But we'll wait until next time to get into his story.