

EXPOSITION OF JUDGES

Message #13

Judges 9:1-25

One of the most perplexing issues that any believer of sound mind faces is that of watching people who do terrible things seem to get away with it. For a while, Nero seemed to get away with killing innocent Christians. Hitler seemed to get away with killing innocent Jews. Just recently we have seen a judicial system seem to let killers go free. People like O.J. Simpson, Robert Blake, Phil Spector and Casey Anthony are just a few of the examples of this very thing. When you see these kinds of things happening, you can't help but begin to wonder "where in the world is God." Why isn't God putting a stop to this? Is God watching this misuse of justice? Will God ever do anything about this? The answer from all of Scripture, both O.T. and N.T., is a dogmatic yes. God is watching and God will do something about it.

You and I are living in an immoral world. However, we must not ever forget that this immoral world is being monitored by the moral God. God is not mocked and God will not be mocked and even though it may appear that one who does evil seems to get away with it for a while, it isn't so. God will always track down immoral, ruthless people and He will make them pay. **If ever you want to see a biblical illustration of this reality, it is the story of Abimelech found in Judges 9.**

When God first created Adam and Eve, He put them in the Garden and told them that they were to rule over everything (Gen. 1:27-28). So by nature, humans have been created with a mindset that wants to rule over something. Most humans want to be king of their own lives or their own world. The tragedy of what happened to Adam and Eve and what happens to all of us in one way or another is that we think we can rule ourselves without depending on God. In some areas, we want to be king without submitting to the King of Kings. Probably all of us, in one way or another, have an ambition to be some sort of dominant king. Submitting ourselves to someone else's authority is spiritually right, but not the worldly norm. Certainly, we would admit that in a right sense there is nothing wrong with ambition. It is certainly better to be ambitious than lazy. But when one has ambition apart from God, it can become deadly.

There are some people who crave power and they do not care what they do or who they hurt to get it. That is the story of Abimelech, who may be biblically called "the bramble bush king" (Judges 9:15). **Abimelech was a selfish, power-crazed man who wanted to be king and he would literally lie and kill to become king.** He was a man who committed cold-blooded murder and for a while seemed to get away with it. But, as you will see, he won't get away with it because God will track him down. The lesson to learn is this:

WHEN ONE LIES AND MANIPULATES HIS WAY INTO DOMINANT POWER AND HURTS OTHERS TO GET IT, HE WILL EVENTUALLY BE DESTROYED BY GOD.

Every politician should carefully study this text. Every leader in a church should study this text. Every person who is willing to hurt others to get his or her own way should study this text. The one who does this will be tracked down by God; you have God's Word on that.

Now to set the stage for how this all happens, we need to back up to chapter eight. Israel had fallen back into idolatry and she was at another spiritual low (8:33). Gideon was dead, and for the fifth time in Judges the people turned away from God and were right back into idolatry. The only difference is that the trouble this time will not come from some oppressive enemy outside of Israel, it will come from an oppressive enemy from within.

We may remember that Abimelech came from a very troubled background. Gideon was his father and his mother was one of his concubine's, whom Gideon never married (8:31). We may recall that Gideon had seventy legitimate sons through his harem of wives (8:30), but **Abimelech was not a legal son and he was not entitled to any of the father's inheritance**. It becomes obvious that Abimelech never felt loved by his dad and his dad never taught him about the importance of a relationship with God. In fact, when Gideon died, everyone in the nation was given over to idolatry.

So in some ways Abimelech is a by product of his environment. Abimelech will manipulate his way into power. He will lie and he will kill innocent people and seem to get away with it for a time. But eventually God tracks him down and he will pay.

PART #1 – The evil manipulative actions of Abimelech. **9:1-6**

I believe Abimelech is a picture of the Antichrist who will be after dominant political power and will ritualistically kill Jewish people to get it. Abimelech is also a type of Satan, who was not content with all he had, but he wanted to dominate God. In the end, these evil, lying manipulators are crushed by God.

Observation #1 - Abimelech goes to visit his mother's family in Shechem. **9:1**

Shechem was the place where Joshua at one time had led Israel to dedicate themselves to God. However, it had become an idolatrous city given over to Baal worship. In fact, there was a temple dedicated to Baal in Shechem (**9:4**). The city had no commitment to God; it was not interested in the Word of God, and therefore it became a place of evil, sensual, godless immorality. When you have a city or nation in this condition, it is ripe to be taken over by an evil, power-crazed leader.

When the Rapture of the Church occurs, all believers will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Those who knew the Word and could proclaim the Word will be gone. This will leave the world in an idolatrous and immoral condition and it will be ripe for the Antichrist. The fact is this world, including the United States, is a lot like Shechem right now.

Observation #2 - Abimelech uses a false scare tactic to get people to follow him. **9:2**

He deceitfully suggests that the seventy sons of Gideon wanted to rule over them, which was absolutely not true. Gideon and his sons were not interested in becoming dominant kings (8:23). There is no evidence of this at all. So this is an outright lie. But ruthless people lie to get their way. They twist things to get a following.

Abimelech wants the dominant power so he lies and he presents to them the option that he could rule as one of their own flesh and blood relatives rather than having Gideon's seventy sons rule. He is scaring the people and what he presents to them seems reasonable. The people were scared.

Let us see a very important principle here for the people of God. We must always search out the truth and the facts and not just concede a point because one person is saying it. Somebody from Shechem should have gone to Ophrah and consulted with the sons to see if what Abimelech was saying is true. But they didn't even bother to check it out.

People who want to do evil will lie to do it. People who want to manipulate their way into power will put a spin on things that isn't true. We are to be wise people of God, not gullible simpletons.

Observation #3 - Abimelech's relatives decide to give Abimelech their full support . **9:3-4a**

Isn't this so ironic? When Gideon was doing a great work for God, he could not get God's people to support him (8:5-8), but when Abimelech is doing a satanic work, his satanic relatives rally around him.

Abimelech's plan worked. The reason why it worked is because they never bothered to investigate the charges. They never tracked down the truth. Had they investigated, they would have discovered that there was no desire on the part of the seventy sons of Gideon to dominate them. Abimelech's lies worked and his family thought he is our relative and we can trust him.

They gave Abimelech their allegiance and they gave him some money; seventy pieces of silver from the temple of Baal. More than likely the seventy pieces of silver represented one piece of silver for each son of Gideon. This is blood money.

When I read this, I cannot help but think of people who will actually financially support evil people who do evil things. The most recent of course is Casey Anthony. She killed her daughter and people are sending her money. One guy in Texas offered to give her a home. One reporter says she stands to make millions of dollars. For what? For doing evil.

This is Abimelech. He is lying and he is about to commit murder and the people are giving him money to do it.

Observation #4 - Abimelech hires thugs to go with him to murder Gideon's sons. **9:4b-5**

Now notice who follows Abimelech; people who are "worthless" and "reckless." The Hebrew word "worthless" (req) means that these men were wicked, poor, empty and vain (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 768). The Hebrew word "reckless" means one who is lascivious and proud and one who has loose morals (*Ibid.*, pp. 671-672).

Here are the kinds of people who will follow a satanic leader. They are typically poor and proud and they have no morals or scruples. They do not want to work for anything and they are empty of any solid character or morals. They are low-life's. Abimelech hired these godless mercenaries and they followed him right into criminal activity.

They followed Abimelech to Ophrah and there they ritualistically kill sixty-nine of Gideon's innocent sons. The text says in **verse 5** that they were all killed "on one stone." More than likely the stone was the very altar that Gideon had first built in dedication to God. So this is religious, ritualistic satanic murder that is being committed on a place that was once a very sacred place of worship. This is systematic serial killing. This is as evil as it gets. I completely agree with something Dr. Andrew Fausset said back in 1885; **false religion has no morals** (*Judges*, p. 153).

We cannot help but see a parallel to what the Antichrist will do in the Temple of Jerusalem in what is called "the Abomination of Desolation." The Antichrist will actually ritualistically kill Jews in the Temple if they do not worship him. The very place that is to be a spot of sacred worship will become a spot of satanic murder. That is what Abimelech does right here. He commits ritualistic, religious murder.

But notice the end of **verse 5**, they killed all but one. One got away and his name is Jotham. Jotham was Gideon's youngest son. He escaped the slaughter and he hid himself and he will turn out to be a very brave son.

Observation #5 - Abimelech returns to Shechem and is made king. **9:6**

Instead of there being an outcry or outrage in Shechem that Abimelech is a cold blooded killer, Abimelech returned home a hero. All the people of Shechem got together at "Beth-millo," which was some meeting spot on a hill with some sort of structure to honor him. They declare him to be their king. You cannot help but wonder where in the world is God in all of this? An evil, lying murderer who could care less about God gets himself elected to be king and you must wonder where in the world is God.

Ellie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor, said that when he watched some of his own family being hanged, he asked "Where is God now?" This past week, many wondered that as Casey Anthony arrogantly walked out of jail and there were some there to support her. You cannot help but begin to wonder, where in the world is God? I guarantee you, God is there and He will take care of things.

PART #2 – The righteous response of Jotham. **9:7-21**

Paul said to the N.T. believer that part of our job as a believer in the Grace Age is to verbally expose evil dark things (Ephesians 5:11). We are not to participate in them, but we are to expose them.

God is going to track this evil Abimelech down and destroy him and the process starts right here with Jotham, who will expose him. Jotham is the only survivor of the Ophrah massacre. **He is one man who dares to speak up for God and speak out against the evil of Abimelech.**

There are two main actions of Jotham:

Action #1 - Jotham goes to Mt. Gerizim to verbally confront the Shechemites. **9:7**

This is a bold move for Jotham to make. He is the only son of Gideon still alive and he could have said, well since Abimelech has won over the Shechemites, there is no point in me trying to do anything. But that is not what he did. **Jotham is willing to stand alone and act alone. He is willing to confront evil and defend God.**

Mt. Gerizim was located just outside of Shechem and stood about 500 yards above the people. It is said the acoustics are good here. Jotham could stand there relatively safe and shout out to the people. Jotham is a brave young man. He is not afraid to look people in the eyes and tell them the truth. There are three verbal messages he gives.

(Verbal Message #1) - Jotham requests the people listen to him. **9:7b**

If you want God to listen to you, then you listen to me. In other words, Jotham is about to speak prophetic revelatory truth that is inspired and revealed by God.

(Verbal Message #2) - Jotham tells a parable to the people. **9:8-15**

Here is the first parable that is actually recorded in the Bible. Parables were story-illustrations designed to communicate a forceful and powerful inspired point.

The specific parable Jotham tells them is a parable associated with two trees, a vine and a bramble bush. The “trees” and “vine” represent the productive people of Shechem who were men of dignity and integrity. **Now notice that the “trees” make the first move, which is not really what Abimelech did. The reason why this is brought up by God is that Israel wants a king to rule over her rather than God.** But, as Fausset said, this is a “suicidal wish” (*Ibid.*, p. 155).

Parable #1 - The trees ask the olive tree to reign over them and it declines. **9:8-9**

The olive tree declined because it was involved in producing olive oil that was used by God and by men.

Parable #2 - The trees ask the fig tree to reign over them and it declines. **9:10-11**

The fig tree declined for the same reason, it too was involved in productive work for God and men.

Parable #3 - The trees ask the grapevine to reign over them and it declines. **9:12-13**

The vine tree declined because it produces cheerful wine for God and men.

Parable #4 - The trees ask a bramble bush to reign over them and it accepts. **9:14-15**

The bramble bush or the thorn bush is invited by all of the trees to rule over them. The bramble bush is a scrubby, thorny, worthless bush that is good for nothing and contributes nothing but prickles.

Notice the bramble bush makes a false claim and invites the trees to take refuge in its shade, which is impossible and absurd because it has no shade. The stem of a bramble bush is too thin and the leaves are too few to offer any shade. It is crazy to think a big tree or vine could find anything of value in a thorn bush. Furthermore, it boldly threatens that if the trees don't make it king, it will destroy them by burning them down. This bramble bush could destroy big trees, because it is a tinder that will burn as fast as sage brush.

Jotham compliments the Shechemites by comparing them to the "cedars of Lebanon," but he is warning the Shechemites that Abimelech could easily turn on them and destroy them.

(Verbal Message #3) - Jotham applies the parables to the men of Shechem. **9:16-20**

There are two main applications Jotham makes:

Application #1 - If you have done right in this matter of Abimelech and Gideon you have nothing to fear. **9:16-19**

Jotham says if you have dealt in this matter in truth and integrity, you are clean and you have nothing to worry about. If you elected Abimelech to be king and if you treated Gideon's family properly in view of the fact that Gideon did such wonderful things for you, you have nothing to fear. In fact, you can rejoice (**9:19**).

But Jotham says here is the problem; you supported Abimelech to come to Ophrah and kill on a sacred stone sixty-nine sons of Gideon.

Application #2 - If you have not done right in this matter, then let Abimelech destroy you and let Abimelech be destroyed. **9:20**

Jotham is speaking prophetically of exactly what would happen. If you have done wrong, may God cause you to destroy each other.

Action #2 - Jotham flees the area. **9:21**

After Jotham preached his message, he got out of there quick. He fled to Beer, which was a city south of Shechem and he is never heard from again.

PART #3 – Abimelech is tracked down by God. **9:22-25**

Now notice how **verse 22** begins, “Abimelech ruled over Israel three years.” The Hebrew word “rule” is not the normal word. This particular word means “he prined” over Israel for three years. He was never really a king. But here is the point; for three years it looked like Abimelech got away with his diabolical evil. But he hadn’t gotten away with it. He could not hide from God and God was about to move. **God does things in His time and not our time. God will always punish those who do evil things, but He will do it in His time and in His way.**

According to verse 23, God sent an evil spirit between the men of Shechem and Abimelech. Now do you see this? Do you understand this? God controls Satan. God controls demons. God controls evil. He is not the source of evil, but He sovereignly uses it for His purposes. God is about to deal with Abimelech in perfect justice. He is about to track him down and destroy him and He will use evil spirits to do it.

God was going to do this because of the evil Abimelech had committed against the sons of Gideon (**9:24**). It had been about three years, but God had not forgotten.

All of a sudden, out of the clear blue the men of Shechem started to hate Abimelech and they began to set traps to ambush him (**9:25**).

Dr. Lawson Younger drew parallels between Abimelech and Adolph Hitler, which are worth noting (*Judges*, p. 234). He saw six parallels, but we will make it eight:

- 1) Both hated their father, which led to hating others.
- 2) Both hated Jesus.
- 3) Both lied about Jesus.
- 4) Both rose to power through brutal killing of rivals.
- 5) Both employed ruthless and morally bankrupt people to support them.
- 6) Both made pacts with those in power: Abimelech – leaders of Shechem, Hitler – industrialists.
- 7) Both brought total destruction to their people and land.
- 8) Both died in obscurity with a mortal wound to the head.

PRACTICAL THOUGHTS:

1. God watches every evil thing that is done and He will judge the one doing the evil in His perfect justice and in his perfect time.
2. God is in sovereign control of Satan and his demonic forces.
3. The responsibility of the believer is to look people in the face and tell them the truth of God.
4. It may appear that a person who is evil is getting away with it for a time, but he is not.
5. We have all done evil and if we do not turn to Jesus Christ by faith, we will pay eternally because God’s judgment will track us down.

