

Judges Ch 9

So far in the book of Judges we've been seeing this sin cycle, the people begin well, fall into sin, which leads to slavery, which leads them to supplicate and pray, which brings again their salvation. And so far the pattern has been brought on by outside oppression, people and issues on the outside pressing in on them causing them to succumb to sin and buckle under the burdens of the oppressors. And many times that's exactly the way it happens for us as believers, we give our lives to Christ, we'd been in bondage and enslaved to sin, we cried out for a Savior and salvation came to us in the person of Jesus Christ. But then we get to cruising through life and we run across an old buddy or a past circumstance and at 1st we resist, but then after confrontation after confrontation after temptation and *persuasion* we give in. We find that our foundation of Rock has turned to sandstone and eroded underneath us and before we know it we're tangled up right back into the old patterns of sin and rebellion as if nothing ever changed, except this time it's worse. But we have another enemy as well, and that's the lesson of Judges ch 9, yeah many, many times people fall as a result of the oppressor from with out, the pressure from those on the outside. But there is also an oppressor from with in, and pressure that rises up from the inside of the believer that desires to be the self-serving tyrant of your life and it's called the flesh. That sin nature, you say, "but Jeff I thought that if I was in Christ I was a new creation, old things passed away and behold, all things have been made new." And I say, "amen, you're exactly right, you've been given a new life in Christ. But don't be ignorant of the sin nature that we call *the flesh* that's still very much present in your life." 1 John 1:8 says, "*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*" In other words if you try to deny the reality of the sin nature that abides in us all, then the only one you're deceiving is yourself, and I've had people try to tell me that they've come to a place where they do no wrong. (Now I would never justify the flesh) but the only person that they've deceived is themselves because the bible emphatically teaches that we will have that "war from with in" you might call it a personal "civil war" known as the battle between the flesh and the Spirit, until the day we die. Now can we have the victory over the flesh? Absolutely, do we need to be tyrannized by it? No, but don't be deceived it's very real and it's desire to rule over you is insidious, and it will not cease to seek it's dictatorship until the day we see Jesus face to face. And such is the lesson of Judges ch 9, we'll see an atrocious act of rebellion and sin on the behalf of Israel as usual in the book of Judges, but this time it's not because of an outside influence, but really one of their own, it rises up from with in and brings them down. Now you recall that ch's 6 through 8-deal with a man by the name of Gideon alias Jerubbaal because he contended with Baal. And Gideon began well, and would even one day unbeknownst to him, find his seat in the Heb ch 11 hall of faith. But he didn't finish so well, now you may be wondering how could he have messed up so much and still been acknowledged as a hero of the faith, and in the NT not one of his blunders are recorded? That's the glorious news, because in Christ our sins are washed away and remembered no more and so if God has chosen to remember them no more, then why would He record them in the new covenant record.

Now I don't know about you but that's good news to me, because if Gideon can mess up, and Ab can mess up, and Moses, and all of these hero's of faith and yet their sin be remembered no more in Christ, then that gives me hope because the bible teaches that it's the same for you and me (in Christ).

But Gideon wound up allowing the nation to spiral downward back into idolatry by making this ephod of gold out of the earrings of the Midianites that they had killed and though it was never his intention for the people to worship this thing, when they began to we don't have record of him doing anything to prevent it or remedy the situation. And in the end he took unto himself many wives and concubines, and unfortunately that would be his undoing. Because in the beginning God didn't create Adam and Eves, He didn't bring many Eves to Adam, He made them male and female. 1 woman for the 1 man and that was God's original intent and through the new covenant He restored that order, Paul talked about leaders in the church being the husband of but 1 wife and all, because that was God's desire. And anytime you find multiple wives and concubines in the scriptures, generally speaking, trouble isn't far behind. You recall that from Hagar came Ishmael, God had promised Ab a son through Sarah, but when they took matters into their own hands, it bred trouble (literally) that still suffers the ramifications to this day. And we find the stage being set for this internal uprising beginning in vs 29 of Ch 8.

Vs29-31

Now you remember that Abimelech means "my father is a king" and already we have a problem, because this lady wasn't even Gideon's wife, she was his concubine. Which means that even though he had Gideon's blood and was all of these guys ½ brother, he got none of the rights of a son because she wasn't his wife, so he stayed in his mothers household. And even if it wasn't Gideon who named him, and the mom was giving her son a name that would remind him of who's lineage he'd come from, Gideon went wrong in allowing that name based upon vs 23 and he never should have had more than 1 wife in the 1st place not to mention concubines. And so here's Abimelech just as much a son of Gideon as any of the others and yet because he was the son of a concubine he got none of the rights, so can you say "bitter party of one"? And again not to justify Abimelech by any means, the guy was a wicked and cruel man, but he never should have been here in the 1st place and had Gideon done what he was supposed to all of this could've been avoided. (Finish ch vs32-35)

Vs1-2

So let the games begin, this conspiracy is set in order. And there are a few things that should already be causing the red flags to go up in these guys' hearts and minds. Of course the 1st thing is that Israel was to be different from any of the other nations in that they weren't to have a king rule over them. God Himself was to be their ruler and Gideon had reminded them of that back in vs 23 of Ch 8. But the principal that we see at work here is in the fact that they had rejected their true King, (being God) and whenever we reject our rightful Ruler, we will be ruled by a usurper, one who takes that spot.

You see we'd like to think that we're the captain of our own destiny, but the reality is, is that everybody serves somebody, as Bob Dillon put it, it may be the devil or it may be God, but you will serve somebody. But there's a 3rd party that desires to rule over you and that's your flesh. And when you don't submit to the Lord Jesus as King, it will seize the throne of your heart, Rom 6:16 says, "*Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?*" So there you have your 2 choices, sin, or obedience, Christ, or the flesh, and if you *don't* walk in the Spirit you will walk in the flesh. If Christ doesn't rule in my life, my sinful nature will, because as a society we hate vacuums, as does nature and when there's a vacuum somewhere something will always rush to fill it. Go stand by a lake or a creek and begin to dig a crevasse there by the water and see what happens. The water will rush into it as fast as you can dig.

And now in the nation of Israel there is a void, there is a vacuum, they've rejected God, and so now they've accepted Abimelech. 2^{ndly} It doesn't take a master of discernment to see an impure motive in his approach, he's coveting the position of King, yet what does their own law state? You shall not covet; they should've immediately rebuked Abimelech for his covetousness, conceitedness, and selfish ambitions. Because those things are rooted in pride, that's what we've been learning on Sunday mornings Phil 2:3-4 "*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Each one looking out not for the things of himself, but each one for the things of others.*" Abimelech is manipulating the people, he knew that the people had wanted Gideon and his son's to rule over them and now he's going to the people in his home town and saying hey, I'm one of your own, I know your needs, the things it will take to pick things up around here. I'm Gideon's off spring, so, which would you rather, me, or someone who doesn't even know you rule over you? And the last thing you want if for all 70 of us to rule over you guys, so talk to the powers that be and lets see what we can do. He's coveting power and position wanting to ascend to the top, now when God lifts you up, that's a wonderful thing, but if you're seeking to climb the rungs through your own efforts and will, you're in for a crash, because selfish ambition destroys, "*I will ascend into heaven!*" is what turned Lucifer into Satan and the devil, remember that. "*Is not this great Babylon, that I have built.*" Turned a king into a beast, when you seek to exalt yourself, God will bring you low. And such is the case with Abimelech.

Vs3-4

So to fund his little crusade he accepts funds from the pagan temple, and in that little act he just officially renounced the God of Israel, and announced the fact that he was dedicated to Baal. So he's broken another commandment, "you shall have no other gods before Me." And you just have to wonder what part of these things the people of Israel aren't seeing, and the 1st thing he does, now that he's hired his henchmen is break another commandment.

Vs5

Let's see what's that law again, "you shall not commit murder." This is a full on massacre, fratricide at that; he's slaughtering his own brothers. One commentator says this, "This godless act should have aroused the entire nation against Abimelech. Whatever Gideon's failings, they owed him a great deal. The demands of God's law and simple humanity called for Abimelech to be put to death for his crime, but nobody raised a hand against him. Thus, in this one act, both Israel and Abimelech revealed themselves for what they were. Israel was an immoral, pagan society prepared to tolerate the most atrocious acts, while Abimelech was an utterly ruthless man, prepared to use any means to gain his desired ends." (Gary Inrig)

Now, again we're seeing a vacuum in the nation of Israel being filled by a wicked usurper, and the principal lies just as true for Christians today, if Jesus Christ isn't operating in your life as Lord. Then there's another king that will rush to fill that vacuum called the flesh and your flesh is just as vile, ruthless, sinister, and atrocious as Abimelech. And it's important that you know that, as a believer you're not schizophrenic or a person with a split personality, but there are 2 very real drives in you, and it's important that you don't underestimate the power, and the ugliness, and the sinfulness of the flesh, it's capable of incredible evil, and Abimelech serves us well as a picture of it. But here's the key, the flesh cannot rule when God is in His rightful place in your life, so the life of the believer isn't lived by me trying as hard as I can to beat down the flesh and trying in my own strength to suppress those bad habits and old nature. The critical issue is am I keeping Jesus in His rightful place, because you can't be rightly related to one aspect of the trinity and wrongly related to the others. So if Jesus is in His rightful place in your life, you'll walk in the Spirit thereby crucifying the flesh and if you're in the Spirit then your mind will be on the things of the Spirit, that's what the bible teaches.

What do you spend your time thinking about, the things of God, or the things of this world, the things of the flesh, who's on the throne of your heart? Now I'm not going to tell you that there's no discipline involved in the Christian life, but you won't overcome the flesh by incredible self-discipline, victory will come when you and I quit focusing on the flesh and stay our focus on Christ. So Jotham escaped and now that all the other brothers are dead, it's coronation time, time to officially esteem Abimelech as king.

Vs6-7

And here we have the 1st parable that's recorded for us in scripture.

Vs8-21

So he gives the parable from the top of this Mt looking down on them, and then hot tails it out of there (and wisely so). And the Parable seems to be pretty self-explanatory, every tree that was worthy to rule, rejected rulership because it meant that they would have to cease bearing fruit and doing that for which God created them to take that position. The only thing that grasped at the opportunity was a worthless thorn bush that in reality had no ability to comfort and would only wind up causing pain. Now the point is, is that Abimelech is a worthless bramble bush that's not good for anything but trouble and pain. But I want you to notice that each of the trees that were worthy to rule recognized that they themselves already had a King, who was God.

2 of the 3 of them acknowledged God and they all simply wanted to function as God had intended them to in order that they might continue to bear fruit, which is the 2nd point. They were all fruit bearing trees, and as long as they simply functioned in the capacity that God had ordained them to, they would be a blessing to both God and man and what Jotham is saying here is that the vacuum in Israel wasn't filled by fruit bearing men, who were useful to God and a blessing to man. But rather a useless, worthless and dangerous bramble named Abimelech, and to bring this back to our analogy of the flesh; it's like a bramble. And if it takes control of my life, my life will cease bearing fruit, but rather it will worthless and painful works that destroy not only myself but others around me.

Vs22-29

So here we have a drunken big mouth, and he's mouthing Abimelech and Abimelech isn't even around (real tough guy) but his mouth is going to get him into trouble. But what we're seeing here is God setting the very men who wanted to esteem Abimelech as King being set against him. Now, for 3 years things went good for him, and we think how could God let this go like this, doesn't He care? And many times people confuse the patience of God for maybe God not caring, or not noticing, or even worse in approval of our lifestyle. I've heard people say things like, "well if God doesn't want me to do these types of things why doesn't He stop me." Or because people don't see immediate ramifications to their sin, they deceive themselves into thinking it's ok. But in reality what's God doing, he's giving Abimelech a season that he might repent, and He does the same thing for us. Aren't you glad that sometime when you blew it, and maybe even for a season of life, it wasn't just a one time isolated thing, but a sinful pattern, but aren't you glad that God's heavy hand of Judgment didn't immediately fall, but that He gave you time to repent. Remember what Peter said, "*beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.*" Many people think that the Lord is being slack, but in reality they're testing the longsuffering of the Lord, Peter went on to say that it's the longsuffering of our Lord that is our salvation.

God was giving Abimelech opportunity to repent, but because he's refused we'll see judgment fall. But this Gaal fella was a big mouth, and he opened his mouth to get all these guys on his side, Absalom would do much the same thing in years to come. But Abimelech's representative there in Shechem caught wind of this guys swelling words of emptiness and got upset you might say with this guy and he narked him out.

Vs 30-36

You're just seeing things man.

Vs37-41

See ya later loser

Vs 42-49

Big tower, but now he's killing the very people who more or less elected him, they started robbing people coming through there in order to hurt Abimelech's economy and now Abimelech is killing them all. He's on a rampage, and notice how he's killing these people, with fire. What did Jotham say, that fire would come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon, meaning those leaders in the city who supported him in making him king.

Vs50-51

Ps 61:1-3 *"Hear my cry, O God; Attend to my prayer. From the end of the earth I will cry to You, When my heart is overwhelmed; Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For You have been a shelter for me, A strong tower from the enemy."* Again, Prov 18:10 *"The name of the LORD is a strong tower; The righteous run to it and are safe."*

Vs 52

In his over confidence he runs right up to the door

Vs53

You remember what Abimelech killed all of the sons of Gideon on? 1 stone, now what is that's ultimately doing him in, 1 stone, do not be deceived whatever a man sows that will he also reap, if you sow of the flesh you will of the flesh reap corruption and death, but if you sow of the Spirit you will of the Spirit reap eternal life.

Vs54-57

Remember how Abimelech approached the men of the city of Shechem, "I am your own flesh and bone." I'm the guy who'll give you true liberty, it was all empty lies, oh how the flesh does us in like manner. "Indulge me and you'll find life." Peter spoke of deceiver who promised liberty while they themselves were slaves of corruption, and what follows false promises? Disillusionment, you realize hey, Abimelech's no liberator, he's a tyrant and then they tried to break away from him but it was too late for many of them. How many times believers leave the sheepfold for a false promise of liberty, oh it seems good for a season. Abimelech had 3 good years on the surface, sin is fun for a season, but one day they wake up to the reality of destruction they've subjected themselves and so many others to only to repeat the folly of the Shechemites in trying to break away from it's vice, trying to deal with Abimelech on their own, still leaving out God, and the result is utter destruction. Abimelech turned on them in a fury and utterly destroyed them, ch 9 leaves both Abimelech and Shechem destroyed. Is there a power vacuum in your life? I encourage you to allow the Lord to search your heart, because if Jesus isn't King tonight; in word and in deed, then the bramble king of the flesh will seize control. If you're not walking in the Spirit your in the flesh, those are the only 2 alternatives of your Christian experience, and so the question we're left with tonight is which is true of you?