

Judges 9

November 10, 2011

The cynical journalist Ambrose Bierce defined politics as a "*strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principles; the conduct of public affairs for private advantage.*"

Tragically we will see that tonight in our study, here in Judges chapter 9, it's the longest chapter in Judges, it might also be the saddest.

I. SEEKING THE KINGDOM (1-21)

V. 1-2

Here we see Abimelech - **exalting himself**, pulling some strings, going to the city of Shechem, to his uncles, the house of his grandfather, asking them, "would you rather have 70 men ruling over you, or 1 man rule over you,...and keep in mind that that 1, is 1 of you, a fellow Shechemite."

Now - if you read 8:30, you'll notice that there is one thing different about Abimelech (read).

Abimelech was the son of Gideon (also known as Jerubbaal), but not from 1 of his wives...from his concubine...and in the end this would cause the death of 69 out of Gideon's 70 sons, who were born through his wives.

Now, we're going to see the wickedness and pain that this guy Abimelech causes, but one can't help but wonder, if it wasn't tied to the pain Abimelech had growing up...I wonder what kind of dad, Gideon was?

(With 70 sons, and this 1 son from a concubine in Shechem, he probably joins the ranks of Jacob, Eli, and David who apparently were not the best of dads)

And just as a quick side note, as we look at the life of this guy Abimelech, keep in mind that this type of thing so easily happens to those boys whose father has abandoned them.

Proverbs 29:15 "The rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother."

(**Hurt** people...have a tendency to do what? To hurt people)

He ends up, exalting Himself, and it's not about the kingdom of Israel, it becomes the kingdom of Abimelech.

God help us to beware of this, keeping in mind that great prayer of Alan Redpath, "Thy kingdom come, my kingdom go."

V. 3-6

The uncles relay the words and ask the men of the city, what do you think, Abimelech wants to be king of Israel, keep in mind, he's one of us, don't you think it will work to our advantage...and we read in v. 3 that they followed their hearts (...not a good thing to do).

Jeremiah 17:9 ""The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked..."

They should have followed the Lord instead..

They ended up giving Abimelech a lot of money from the temple of their god, with which he hired wicked mercenaries who went up to Ophrah and killed 69 of his 70 brothers - 1 of them hid and got away.

Then they gather together at Beth Millo and there beside the oak tree, they make Abimelech king.

How we need to beware of Selfish Ambition...something we see not only in the heart of Abimelech, but also in the hearts of the men of Shechem.

Abimelech wanted to be king, and these men wanted to get the hook-up from the king; bottom line is, they were all in it for themselves.

And that's one of the primary differences between the kingdom of God, and the kingdom of men, between fine leaders and false leaders...it's essentially the difference between heaven and hell, 1 **takes** authority to serve self, the other **receives** authority to serve others.

This selfish ambition led to the very first fall of all, the fall of Satan (Isa. 14; Ezekiel 28)

The Bible teaches us to be not selfish, but selfless:

Philippians 2:3 "Let **nothing** be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself."

Jeremiah 45:5 "And do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek *them*..."

So, in the middle of the celebration of this coronation, Jotham, the only other surviving son of Gideon, stands on top of Mount Gerizim with a message from the LORD:

V. 7-15

Now, from what I understand, this is the first parable in the Bible, Jotham speaks figuratively, symbolically, and he also speaks prophetically:

It's interesting to note that the Olive tree, the Fig tree, and the Vine are all symbolic of Israel. Israel was not called to rule over Israel, God was.

If Israel was to rule over herself, she would lose her anointing (the olive tree); she would lose her fruit (that's the fig tree); she would lose her joy (that's the vine). And this is a good illustration of what happens to anyone who decides to rule over his or her self.

The Olive tree, the Fig tree, and the Vine will no longer produce – to bless both God and men – if you rule over yourself, you lose your Spiritual anointing, fruit and Joy.

No, no, no, don't do it God says.

But we know how persistent we can be, how insistent we can be, so the trees, go to the bramble, which is a thorn bush of all things, and they ask the bramble to rule over them.

And so the Bramble says, if you really mean it, then come take shelter in my shade...as a matter of fact, you better do it, the bramble says, or I'll burn you.

And this is exactly the way the enemies of God work to bring people under their rule and bondage, through lures, and lies, cheers and fears.

I mean, when you think about it, does a thorn bush have any shade to offer? What a lie! Can a thorn bush devour the cedars of Lebanon?

No way! But tragically people make that tragic coronation and they crown the wrong king.

V. 16-21

Jotham (whose name means, "Yahweh is perfect") speaks bravely, sarcastically, historically and prophetically.

If all this was done with sincerity, then cool, it's time for celebration. But we all know, things were not rightly done. My father, Gideon fought bravely for this country, and how do you honor him, you go and slaughtered 69 of his sons.

So Jotham speaks prophetically in v. 20, fire will come from Abimelech and devour the men of Shechem and Beth Millo; and fire will come from these men to devour Abimelech.

This future turn of events, would be part of the way everyone would one day know it was the Lord who brought justice to pass; cause here they are in unison, in celebration; but the day would come when not only would they turn on each other, they would devour each other.

And we learn in our study today:

1st - Beware of the selfishness of man

2nd - Be aware of the justice of God

All these guys thought they got away with their sin, their slaughter, their horrific murder of 69 men - but they would not get away with it, and no one, ever does.

I. SEIZING THE KINGDOM

II. DEFENDING THE KINGDOM (V. 22-49)

V. 22-24

Everything was kinda cool, for a few years; but then it was time to, "settle the score," so to speak.

And God's the one Who, not necessarily authors the evil, but allows the evil. By God sending a spirit of ill will, He simply, in His sovereignty allowed the demon to do his thing, in this case the division and death was on its way, and they were getting what they deserved.

We read something similar in [1 Samuel 16:14](#) "But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the LORD troubled him."

It might even be interesting to note that Saul was a bad king as well.

With that division, we read:

V. 25-26

Here they go again, putting their confidence in a man...so sad to see.

It's interesting, the Hebrew word means that they put so much confidence in him, that they felt safe with him, and were therefore careless in their conduct.

[Psalm 118:8-9](#) "*It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes.*"

[Proverbs 3:26](#) "...the LORD will be your confidence, and will keep your foot from being caught."

Look where this guy Gaal, leads them:

V. 27-28

What did Jesus say about blind men, leading blind men? They'd both fall in a ditch (Luke 6:39).

They made merry, the party, the idolatry, the gluttony, the profanity...unwise words are then spoken, which inevitably lead to unwise wars.

Notice his twisted logic in v. 28.

We then see that selfish ambition exhibition again:

V. 29

When I read this, I can't help but think of the Trilogy, Lord of the Rings; a series of movies showing the quest of the creatures of God for power. The movie sends a message that essentially says, the only one able to handle that power is the one who's called to carry that burden, and he happens to be a Hobbit, the lowest of all creatures, who actually is served by destroying the ring of power, lest it fall into the wrong hands, or onto the wrong finger.

When I read these words of Gaal, I can't help but think of Absalom (2 Samuel 15:1-6).

Beware of Selfish Ambition

It turned a king into an animal (Daniel 4); it turned the most beautiful angel, into the ugliest Devil of all.

Here we see this guy Gaal, wants the power:

V. 30-33

Zebul, was the ruler of the city, he was okay with Abimelech, personally, so when he hears the words of rebellion and mutiny from the Gaal and the guys, he warns Abimelech, and even gives him some strategy for success.

Bring the soldiers, hide out in the field by night, and in the morning, come and get em.

V. 34-41

Abimelech and his men defeat Gaal and his guys, and not only does Abimelech win on the outside of the city, but Zebul drives out the men of Gaal from the inside of the city, so that these particular men would not dwell in Shechem.

But they're not done:

V. 42-45

Abimelech came back the next day, and wiped out all the men of Shechem.

We read here that he demolished the city and sowed it with salt.

"The spreading of salt over the city was a symbolic act designed to place the site under a curse, deprive it of fertility, and prevent any future habitation. The practice is referred to outside of the Bible as well. For example, one of the curses in the Aramaic Sefire treaty states concerning Arpad: May Hadad sow in them salt and weeds, and may it not be mentioned again!" – NET notes

"Deuteronomy 29:23; Jeremiah 17:6; Zephaniah 2:9 associate salt flats or salty regions with divine judgment." – NET notes

V. 46-49

This tower was probably where the aristocracy lived.

Abimelech decides he needs to wipe them out as well. So he cuts some timber and commands his men to do the same...he then burns the tower and about a 1,000 men and women died.

I almost forgot...these are all the people of God!

How can this happen?

Such selfishness, such merciless murder amongst the people of God?

The answer is always seen with a simple question, who's really king?

We learn that in our study of Judges 9, and we learn that when we exalt ourselves to be king, it is not good! Cause we see Abimelech:

I. SEIZING THE KINGDOM (1-21)

II. DEFENDING THE KINGDOM (22-49)

III. LOSING THE KINGDOM (50-57)

V. 50-57

"If it's God's wind that lifts you, and you're soaring on wings that He's given you, then fly as high as He takes you. But if you manufacture both the wind and the wings you're heading for a terrible fall." - Wiersbe

And we see in the end, that God is a God of justice

Judges 9:23-24;

Psalm 9:11-12 "Sing praises to the LORD, who dwells in Zion! Declare His deeds among the people. When He avenges blood, He remembers them; He does not forget the cry of the humble."

Psalms 89:14 "Righteousness and **justice** are the foundation of Your throne; Mercy and truth go before Your face."

Psalms 103:6 "The LORD executes righteousness and **justice** for all who are oppressed."

Galatians 6:7 "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap."

(Psalm 73)

Beware of Selfish Ambition

Be aware of the Justice of God

Jotham (Yahweh is perfect) (the Cross is perfect justice)

Let Jesus be King – and nobody else!

Things became so bad economically that one of George Washington's colonels wrote Washington a secret letter, urging him to use his army to make himself king. To the colonel this was the only way to get the affairs of the young nation under control. Washington rejected the plan for absolute power, it was not to be a monarchy, it was to be a democracy, it was not to be a nation under George, it was to be a nation under God.

And so are we, globally, nationally, congregationally and personally.

Let Jesus be King, and nobody else.

(Jesus, triumphal entry---may He come into our hearts)