

Judges 9

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[0 : 00] Take your Bibles and go into the book of Judges, Judges chapter 9, Judges chapter 9 is where we are at. Judges 9 is the longest chapter in the book.

We have just completed our study of the individual that's given the most verses attributed to him, that is Gideon, also known as Jerubbabel. And at the end of the 8th chapter, Gideon dies.

And now we come into the 9th chapter and we see a stark contrast, not just in what has just transpired in the life of Gideon, but really what has been taking place throughout the book of Judges.

And in this chapter we have the longest chapter in the book. We will look at it in its entirety because I think it's given to us that we may see just one great picture.

And that we will see the issue that is at hand. And it's really right here in the center of the book of Judges that we see that. It is a reminder that while we are studying a book of God's interaction with man, at this point in history, or at this point in his story, man seems to be taking the lead.

[1 : 17] Judges is a book of man's grand problems. It shows us that man is not getting better and better and better. Really contrary to that, man is on a spiral, degenerative course.

They are getting worse. Through the book of Judges, we meet the ideal judge at the beginning. And by the time we get to the end, things have gotten so far out of hand, it seems as if there is no hope.

That we know that God really takes the greatest stage. The time when it appears that there is no hope and he does the most unexpected thing.

Because right there on the heels of the book of Judges is when we get a woman who was childless and crying out in the temple and Samuel comes into the world.

But yet, in the book of Judges, we see that man doing what is right in his own eyes when he has no king and he is living as he so determines. When he is not living under the authority of another, but rather is seeking to be his own authority, that man really does the unthinkable.

[2 : 27] The ninth chapter is one of those such chapters. And it shows us, really, the grand problem that is contained in the entire book. But it's not a problem that is confined to just the book of Judges.

If you remember, this is more than an account of something that happened at a period in history in the nation of Israel spanning about 400 years.

This is more than that. This is the account of what's transpiring among humanity. That is, the further we get from the Garden of Eden, the worse we are. And we're going to continue to get worse and worse and worse and worse and worse until the day of redemption and all things are made new.

Man is not progressing, we're digressing. We're not moving forward. While we may be moving forward in technological advances, we may be moving forward in what it is that we can do and the fact that we can communicate and talk with people all over the world and we may be moving forward in all of those areas.

By nature, man is not getting better. We hear of atrocities and things going on in today's times, things that seem so hard to wrap our mind around.

[3 : 42] The slaughtering of innocent children in a daycare that happened in Thailand just a couple of days ago. The massacre of a number of individuals. No matter where you're at in the world and these things, while atrocious and really catch us off guard and we have no answer to them, it is one thing to look back in history and see them taking place.

It's a whole other thing to look in your own day and time and to see them still taking place. And it is because man is spiraling down. We know that in our own nation, and I know this is a long introduction, but I think it is very fitting.

In our own nation, we live in what we call a post-truth era. That is, we live among people, a majority of people, who no longer believe in absolute truth.

Not only are we in a post-Christian era, we are in a post-truth era. Truth now is relevance. That is, your truth and my truth, and there is no such thing as absolute truth.

And there seems to be this swaying back and forth of being tossed to and fro, as the Bible says in the book of James, an unstable mind. It is something that has really taken the world captive.

[4 : 57] And it is because of the very thing that is described for us in Judges 9. I know there's just a few of us here tonight, but it's such a great truth.

And we find in Judges 9, man's pursuit of a position. Man's pursuit of a position, that is, to put himself somewhere where he maybe has no place to be.

To make himself something when God has not called him to that. To put himself in a place of authority or to put himself in a position of pride. It is man's pursuit of a position.

In our day and time, we tell our children, you can be anything you want to. That we try to inspire them to push higher and to push higher and to push higher and to push higher.

And we try to inspire them. And we set before them models that are almost impossible to attain. And very, very, very seldom are we teaching and preaching, even from the pulpits.

[6 : 00] And most definitely from the pews. Humility, humbleness, meekness, and service. It is no wonder that there are less men being called from the pews into the ministry than at any other time in history.

Because this idea of sacrificial service for something else seems so foreign to our society. Service within the body seems so foreign to our society.

And almost unashamedly, it's foreign even in our churches. Because we are always pursuing a position rather than being called to a service.

Judges chapter 9 is a long chapter, but if you will join with me, we will read it in its entirety. We won't stand on Sunday nights or Wednesday nights, so we can cover a little bit more length of scripture.

If you will bear with me, we will read it. Judges 9 says, Now wait a minute, let's stop right here.

[7 : 05] Jerubbabel means what? Let Baal contend with him. Remember that? When he tore down the altar of Baal and he burned the Asher of Pol. He tore down that altar of Baal that was on his father's property.

And he burned the Asher all the way back when Gideon was first called. And the people of the town gave him a new name. And that new name was Jerubbabel, which means let Baal contend with him.

It was because his dad said, Well, if Baal is a god, let Baal stand up for himself. We don't have to kill him. So let Baal contend with him. Well, unfortunately, what we're going to see here is the god Baal, with a lowercase g, will be contending with his family.

You'll see it very quickly. And you'll see the lack of a spiritual legacy left behind by Gideon, which leads to the degeneration of his family. But more than that, we'll see that those of his family are pursuing.

And while we're on names, Abimelech means what? My dad is king. Remember, they wanted to make Gideon king. So it matters what we're reading here. They wanted to make Gideon king. Gideon said, Oh, I don't want to be a king.

[8 : 06] The Lord your God is king. But then he goes out and he has 70 sons. And then with a servant girl, we'll see that in just a moment, from Shechem, who is a servant in his father's house, he also has another son. And he names that son from his concubine Abimelech.

And Abimelech means my father is king. So while he didn't want to attain the position, he wouldn't accept the position, he sure lived like he was king. And even to the point that he named his son, my father is king.

So this is Abimelech. Be careful what we call things. Be careful of the legacy we leave behind. Because it says, And Abimelech, the son of Jerubbabel, went to Shechem to his mother's relatives and spoke to them and to the whole clan of the household of his mother's father, saying, Speak now in the hearing of all the leaders of Shechem.

Which is better for you, that 70 men, all the sons of Jerubbabel rule over you, or that one man rule over you? Also remember that I am your bone and your flesh. And his mother's relatives spoke all these words on his behalf in the hearing of all the leaders of Shechem.

And they were inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, He is our relative. Before I read on, I want you to get a little grasp of this. I know this is a long text, and we'll lose it if I don't explain it. He went to his mother's relatives because his mother was not of Jewish descent.

[9 : 20] His mother was from Shechem. Shechem was co-inhabited here by Jews and some of the remaining remnant of the Canaanites. And the reason he went to his mother's relatives is because he was appealing to them to be keen because he was of their flesh, which means he was not fully Jewish.

Gideon was Jewish. So he went to those. This is why he's speaking to these people, the ones that they allowed to leave. Remember how when we started the book of Judges, and there's just so much in this text, maybe we shouldn't look at the whole chapter, but remember how we said the very first danger is when we compromise and we leave something behind?

Well, as long as the Canaanites were allowed to live in Shechem, now all of a sudden we have an avenue for Abimelech to go to. If they weren't there, then he wouldn't have been able to be there either. But he did. They, that is the elders of Shechem, gave him 70 pieces of silver from the house of Baal-Bareth, that is the god Baal, with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless fellows, and they followed him.

Then he went to his father's house at Orphari and killed his brothers, the sons of Jerubbabel, 70 men on one stone. But Jotham, the youngest of Jerubbabel, was left, for he hid himself.

And all the men of Shechem and all Beth Milo assembled together, and they went and made Abimelech king by the oak of the pillar which was in Shechem. Now when they told Jotham, he went and stood on the top of Mount Gerizim and lifted his voice and called out.

[10 : 45] Thus he said to them, Listen to me, O men of Shechem, that God may listen to you. Once the trees 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, Shall I leave my fatness with which God and men are honored, and go to wave over the trees?

Then the tree said to the fig tree, You come rain over us. But the fig tree said to them, Shall I leave my sweetness and my good fruit, and go and wave over the trees? Then the tree said to the vine, You come rain over us.

But the vine said to them, Shall I leave my new wine which shears God and men, and go to wave over the trees? Finally all the trees said to the bramble, You come rain over us.

The bramble said to the trees, If in truth you are anointing me as king over you, then come and take refuge in my shade. But if not, may fire come out from the bramble and consume the cedars of Lebanon.

Now therefore, if you have dealt in truth and integrity in making Abimelech king, and if you have dealt well with Jerubabu and in his house, and have dealt well with him as he deserved, for my father fought for you, and risked his life, and delivered you from the hand of Midian.

[11 : 50] But you have risen against my father's house today, and have killed his sons, seventy men on one stone, and have made Abimelech the son of his maidservant king over the men of Shechem, because he is your relative.

If then you have dealt in truth and integrity with Jeruboam and his house this day, rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you. But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech and consume the men of Shechem and Bethmilo, and let fire come out from the men of Shechem and from Bethmilo, and consume Abimelech.

Then Jotham escaped and fled and went to Beer and remained there because of Abimelech his brother. Now, Abimelech ruled over Israel three years. Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem, and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech, so that violence, so that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jeruboam might come, and their blood might be laid on Abimelech, their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers.

The men of Shechem set men in ambush against him on the tops of the mountains, and they robbed all who might pass by them along the road, and it was told to Abimelech.

Now, Gel, the son of Ebed, came with his relatives and crossed over into Shechem, and the men of Shechem put their trust in him. They went out into the field and gathered the grapes of their vineyards and tried them and held a festival, and they went into the house of their god and ate and drank and cursed Abimelech.

[13 : 18] Then Gel, the son of Ebed, said, Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem that we should serve him? Is he not the son of Jeruboam, and is Zebel not his lieutenant? Serve the men of Hamor, the father of Shechem.

But why should we serve him? Would, therefore, that this people were under my authority, then I would remove Abimelech. And he said to Abimelech, Increase your army and come out.

Now, when Zebel, the ruler of the city, heard the words of Gel, the son of Ebed, his anger burned. He sent messengers to Abimelech, deceitfully saying, Behold, Gel, the son of Ebed, and his relatives have come to Shechem, and behold, they are stirring up the city against you.

Now, therefore, rise by night, you and the people who are with you, and lie in wait in the field. In the morning, as soon as the sun is up, you shall rise early and rush upon the city. And behold, when he and the people who are with him come out against you, you shall do to them whatever you can.

So Abimelech and all the people who were with him arose by night and lay in wait against Shechem in four companies. Now Gel, the son of Ebed, went out and stood in the entrance of the city gate. And Abimelech and the people who were with him arose from the ambush.

[14 : 25] When Gel saw the people, he said to Zebel, Look, people are coming down from the tops of the mountains. But Zebel said to him, You are seeing the shadows of the mountains as if they were men.

And Gel spoke again and said, Behold, people are coming down from the highest part of the land and one company comes by the way of the diviner's oak. Then Zebel said to him, Where is your boasting now with which you said, Who is Abimelech that we should serve him?

Is this not the people whom you despised? Go out now and fight with them. So Gel went out before the leaders of Shechem and fought with Abimelech. Abimelech chased him and he fled before him and many fell wounded up to the entrance of the gate.

Then Abimelech remained at Aruma, but Zebel drove out Gel and his relatives so that they could not remain in Shechem. We're almost done. Now it came about the next day that the people went out to the field and it was told to Abimelech.

So he took his people and divided them into three companies and lay in wait in the field. When he looked and saw the people coming out from the city, he arose against them and slew them. Then Abimelech and the company who was with him dashed forward and stood in the entrance of the city gate.

[15 : 33] The other two companies then dashed against all who were in the field and slew them. Abimelech fought against the city all that day and he captured the city and killed the people who were in it.

Then he razed the city and he sowed it with salt. When all the leaders of the tower of Shechem heard of it, they entered the inner chamber of the temple of Elbereth. It was told Abimelech that all the leaders of the tower of Shechem were gathered together.

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

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

Verse 50. Then Abimelech went to Thebes and he camped against Thebes and captured it. But there was a strong tower in the center of the city and all the men and women with all the leaders of the city fled there and shut themselves in and they went up on the roof of the tower.

[16 : 43] So Abimelech came to the tower and fought against it and approached the entrance of the tower to burn it with fire. But a certain woman threw an upper millstone on Abimelech's head crushing his skull.

Then he called quickly to the young man his armor bearer and said to him, Draw your sword and kill me so that it will not be said of me a woman slew him. So the young man pierced him through and he died. When the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead each departed to his home.

Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech which he had done to his father in killing his seventy brothers. Also God returned all the wickedness of the men of Shechem on their heads and the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbabel came upon them.

Judges chapter 9. We see here man's pursuit of a position. This is what it looks like when man decides that he wants to be something though God has not called him to that something.

We see man's desperate pursuit. This chapter stands really singular in the book of Judges in that we're not having an individual that rises up that God calls and appoints to judge and rule over the nation.

[17 : 50] We don't have here a nation that is being held captive by another nation the Midianites as in the case with Gideon and they're suppressed for a number of years and then God raises up a judge and sends them.

Rather the suppression and oppression comes from within the nation itself. It comes from one of the own sons of the nation of Israel and that is Abimelech. We have him pursuing a position he had no right to claim even though his father Gideon had given him what appears to be an excuse to claim it in giving him the name my father is king.

So what his dad would not claim Abimelech decides to claim. If his father was king and his father is now dead then now all of a sudden this is my rightful position.

The only thing that stood in the way of that rightful position was his brothers 70 of them for sure that were also of his father's bloodline but they were fully Jewish and he was not.

So we see the wickedness of man being played out in this account in the 9th chapter. And we need to pay attention to this because we see that this is not just what takes place here in Judges 9 but really what takes place in each and every one of our lives.

[18 : 58] When we begin to pursue things of our own desire and we begin to pursue things of our own choosing rather than going to the things which God has called us to here we have this reality that we must be surrendered to his leading even though his leading may not always line up with our desires.

And we notice this first thing and it is the concern that is before him. The concern that is before the man who is pursuing a position. It is very clear from the passage that Abimelech was solely concerned about what he wanted.

One thing that is absent from this is God moving God leading and God putting a weight for the nation upon his heart. We do not have here the reality that there is a need and that there is a vacuum that needs to be filled and since there is a vacuum that needs to be filled that God raises up this leader and puts him in this position.

No, we have an individual that is Abimelech who is solely concerned about personal gain and the personal gain he has in front of him is he wants to be king and he so wants to be king that he is just waiting on his dad to die and as soon as his dad dies he begins to take the opportunity that is there.

He is so concerned about it that he strategically goes to the right people. He goes to the people of Shechem realizing that he is walking into a divided city and since he is walking into a divided city he is the perfect individual that can connect with both.

[20 : 23] His father is the Jewish hero Gideon his father is the Jewish deliverer Gideon who with so few of men delivered them from the suppression of the Midianites and his mother is bone and bone with the men and the leaders of Shechem.

So he appeals to this one place that he can find support to pursue that which he wants. He goes to the one place where he can find an audience that says you know what you are the right person for that which gives us caution and warning.

Listen our enemy will always provide a place for us to find support to pursue whatever it is we want to pursue. Our enemy will always provide a place where we can get people to agree with that which concerns us.

You know what you are the right person for that. And we see that his chief concern is to have this position of authority and it really doesn't matter what he has to do to attain that position.

He is not concerned about what God says to him. He is not concerned about what the Lord is doing among the nation. He is not concerned about his fellow citizens. He is not concerned about suppression or anything that may be weighing upon the nation.

[21 : 34] He is not concerned as the other judges were about ridding the nation of an enemy. He is solely concerned about personal gain. And as long as we are concerned about personal gain we will look wherever we have to look to find support for that personal gain and we will do whatever we have to do.

So he appeals to these men and these men come to him and they finance him to do that which he is seeking to do. We understand that man gets in trouble in his pursuits when the concern before him is solely personal.

that is looks no further than ourselves. When the thing that we are pursuing completely revolves around ourself then that thing which we are pursuing most often if not always is never a God called event.

God connects us to others empowers us to others equips us to others gifts us to minister to others. sure we should be still and know that he is God.

We should draw away and be renewed in his presence but when the pursuit of our hearts and the pursuit of our mind and the pursuit of our activities is solely concerned about ourselves we are treading on very very dangerous ground.

[22 : 57] So we see the concern before him. The only thing Abimelech was concerned about was what can I get? what position can I attain?

And as long as he had that concern there was no length that he was not willing to go to pursue it. There is the concern before him. We notice also the crowd around him.

Because when man pursues a position he will often surround himself with people that will enable him to continue pursuing that. We see the people crowded around him.

When he appeals to the men of Shechem the men of Shechem says hey we agree with you you seem to be the right man. And we want to finance your campaign to be king. So to finance his campaign they go into the temple of their lowercase g god Baal and they get 70 pieces of silver from Baal's temple.

And they give it to him. So now all of a sudden we see that he is blaspheming here because he is not recognizing the Lord his God alone. He is not holding him to a higher standard. It shouldn't surprise us because what did we notice about Gideon at the end of his life?

[24 : 09] When Gideon failed to finish well one of the results of his failure to finish well was a diminished worship. And the reason there is a diminished worship is because he begins to worship the effort rather than worshiping the Lord God.

He raises up this effort this thing that is fashioned from the gold and the earrings of the Midianites and they begin to play the harlot with it it tells us at the end of the 8th chapter and he diminishes the worship of the Lord God alone.

And now his son Herabimelech is receiving money from the temple of Baal and he's given this money and it says that he goes out and he hires individuals. So he surrounds himself with these people.

He says that he goes out and hires worthless and reckless fellows. Here's the crowd around him. Worthless and reckless fellows. Which we see this application.

No matter what we're pursuing we're sure to find someone who will agree with the concerns we have but we can also find somebody who will follow along. So he has worthless and reckless fellows.

[25 : 10] Again we pay special attention to passages of scripture of what they say and what they do not say. We pay attention to what is there but we also must pay attention to what is not there. One thing that we do not see in the ninth chapter is no man or woman of God, no prophet, no word of God, no declaration of warning from God.

One thing Abimelech was sure to do was separate himself from the word of God and the people of God and put himself in the place of reckless and worthless individuals.

You say well this is the period of the judges. There were none of these people here. Well the book of Ruth was also written during the period of the judges, right? So there was always a remnant of the righteous.

Let us not be so dark and dreary and so downcast of spirit that we don't think that God never has a man. What did he tell Elijah? I have over 700 who have not bowed the knee to bell, right?

God always has his man. There's always somebody there throughout history. There's always somebody there. There's this scarlet thread of righteousness all the way through scripture.

[26 : 12] There's the seed that is consistent all throughout scripture. God always has his man. Boaz did not just all of a sudden become a righteous man and a kinsman redeemer and would be in the bloodline of Jesus and the bloodline of the father of Obed who is the father of Jesse who is the father of David, right?

Boaz and all of a sudden become this good man spontaneously. Surely he was taught that. Surely he was shown that. So there's always somebody there. But one thing we notice about Abimelech is he ensures that none of those are around him.

Because when we're doing what we want to do and we're pursuing the position we want, we're always careful about who we put around us. Because we don't put those around us who challenge us.

We don't put those around us who hold us accountable. We don't put those around us to give us a word from God that convicts us. Rather we put no matter how worthless and reckless they may be as long as they're for us, hey that's who we want around us.

Be careful. Be careful. I like being in the position and place and I try to intentionally put myself around people who do not always think like me.

[27 : 19] I'm not saying that I always agree with the people who don't think like me. And even Christian people, I like putting myself around believers who may not always see things the way I do. I intentionally read books who may not always see things the way I do.

Now I undergird that on the foundation of faith that I have. I know what I believe. I believe what I know. I've written that out. I encourage people to write that out.

I didn't do this at the first. But once that bedrock is there I will intentionally put myself in the position of listening to, reading, and ensuring because I don't want to surround myself with one class of people that always agree with me.

Because there's danger there. There's danger. I want to surround myself with people who challenge me, convict me, and sometimes disagree with me.

I want to. And I want to know if I'm right or if I'm wrong. Because no matter how good our efforts are, no matter how much that which we are pursuing may appear to be, no matter how righteous it may be, when left to ourselves we always surround ourselves with people like us.

[28 : 30] And by surrounding ourselves with people like us we surround ourselves with people who are concerned about the same thing we're concerned about. And therefore we isolate ourselves from anything which may challenge us.

And that's dangerous ground. That's dangerous ground. Just this past week where Carrie and I were at that leadership conference and I shared with some of you, I got asked. Someone asked me, said, hey, I just got to know.

Can I ask you a question? I said, yes, go ahead. That's fine. I don't mind. They said, why are you here? You know, what makes you here? You're so much different than some of us. And the teaching was solid.

I would never put myself where teaching wasn't solid. I would never put myself where the training wasn't profitable for me in the ministry. But it was not, I did not necessarily fit in.

Okay? And that's a great question to be asked. For one, because it challenges me. And number two, it's because it challenges the people that are used to seeing everybody fit in. Why are you here?

[29 : 26] You don't fit in with the rest of us. I said, maybe more than you think I do. Right? Maybe more than you think I do. Because we all have preconceived notions. We all have preconceived judgments.

And I wonder, when was the last time you were ever in a company of people that everybody asked you, why are you here? You don't fit in with the rest of us. Why are you here? We don't like that.

Right? And the reason we don't like that is because we like to have a crowd around us that's just like us. That's dangerous. It just really is. It's very, very dangerous. We do that when we're pursuing our own position.

But here we see Abimelech and the crowd around him. We notice that this crowd is even more than those he hires. They're reckless and worthless.

Even the crowd of the nation. The nation was not concerned about the things of God and you know it. Because it says that he killed his 70 brothers on one stone. That on one stone means he made a public display of their slaughtering and nobody stopped him.

[30 : 28] Nobody stopped him. I said this last week when we were looking. It was last Wednesday. Here is the detriment or the failings of the entire nation really being highlighted that someone could go publicly massacre these people at one time and nobody stops him.

Because even the crowd of the nation at this point was unconcerned about the things of God. number three we see the consequences that await him. Judges chapter 9 is a pretty powerful chapter but Judges chapter 9 also includes the very first parable ever given in scripture.

We read a parable this morning a parable of the king's wedding feast for his son where Jesus taught in parables. Christ taught in parables quite often as a matter of fact he did he quite often did not teach the multitudes without teaching them in parables.

I don't think that we have every parable that he taught recorded for us in scripture though we have a number of them. But the very first parable recorded in scripture is here in Judges chapter 9.

And it is the parable that Jotham the one son who hid himself when the slaying was taking place and escaped he went and stood on Mount Gerizim. Now pay attention to where he's at because after Abimelech does this he goes to a very very important spiritual location.

[31 : 55] He goes back to Shechem and he is there by the oak and the pillar which is in Shechem. Many believe this is the oak of memory which is there where Abraham Abram first built his altar.

Jacob builds an altar there. This is where the stones the whitewashed stones that have the declaration of the ten commandments written on them. This is a place of testimony where the mount of cursing and the mount of blessing and Mount Gerizim is the mount of blessing.

This is the place where we have this valley where they come in after the cross of Jordan River and this is where they renew this covenant. At this very location Abimelech chooses to have his coronation as king.

He's being pronounced king because this is his pursuits. God has not called him to it. God has not appointed him to it. But yet he puts himself at this very spiritual location. This spiritually significant place and has the coronation service.

And then Jotham, the one son that hid, went and stood on the mount of blessing, Mount Gerizim, and offers this parable. And this parable speaks of the consequences that await him.

[33 : 02] The man who is pursuing his own position. There's consequences. He gives the parable of the trees. And it's a very easy parable to understand because the trees are looking for someone to rule over them.

And they go to the olive tree and the olive tree says, I'm not leaving behind my production. So they go to the, you know, the date tree or the fig tree. And he says, I'm not leaving behind my fruit.

So then they go to the vine and he says, I'm not leaving behind my grapes. So they finally go to the bramble. Now, it was known at that time and even today that the bramble bush was good for nothing but fire. As a matter of fact, the bramble bush would often catch on fire and cause damage to other trees.

But here we see these trees go into the bramble. So would you rule over us? And it's almost ironic because the bramble bush has no shade. Because he says in his parable that the bramble bush says, if you want me to be king over you, then come and rest in my shade.

There is no shade to be offered by a bramble bush. So he's showing here the men of Shechem and even Abimelech the irony that they're seeking protection from one who cannot protect them.

[34 : 03] And then he makes this declaration, if they have done right and they have respected Jerubo or Gideon, if they have done right by his family and by the risk and the rewards that he had given them, if they have acted righteously, then let the bramble bush bless you.

But if not, let fire come out from it and consume you and you consume it. So here we have this declaration of the consequences that await the man that is pursuing his own position.

That is, those that he has went to, those that he has sought support from, those that he has surrounded himself, he will be a harm to them and they will be a harm to him. that it will be a mutual destruction.

And we have this great application to us. That as long as we're pursuing our own plans and purposes and we're not allowing the Lord to lead us and as long as we're pursuing, we will always find those who go along with us.

But the reality is, my friend, is quite often we will do them harm and they will do us harm. In the end, there will be mutual destruction because we do no one any good by calling them along beside us as we do our own thing.

[35 : 08] And it doesn't matter for a church or an individual. If it's a church calling people along to do their own thing, we call that a cult. And cults usually self-destruct.

The leader of the cult is destroyed by the cult followers and the cult followers are essentially destroyed by the leader of the cult. We see this mutual destruction.

So we understand here the consequences that await him. Man pursuing his own purposes or his own position. Man going after his own concern, man seeking to do that which he has decided is what he wants to do.

The consequences that lay before him is he will be a harm to himself and he will be a harm to all those he has gathered around himself. Finally, we see the conspiracy that destroys him.

God intervenes in the story because the reality is this, that while God was left out of the equation in deciding what to pursue, God is never out of control.

[36 : 11] Then while God was left out of the decision, God is never out of control. He allows man to seek and to go after and to pursue his own position to appoint.

But then it says in verse 23, then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem. That is, the disruption that occurred was a result of God's activity.

They had a pretty good alliance going for a minute. For three years, he ruled over them. For three years, everything seemed right. And God says, well, you think you got away with it, but he didn't because there's this prophecy.

There's this consequences that are awaiting him. And man has a way of pursuing and setting himself up to a place where it looks like he got away with it. And then God says, no, I'm not going to let you get away with it because even though he may tarry, God will always bring sins into judgment.

God sends this evil spirit. All of a sudden, there becomes a division between the men of Shechem, those who supported Abimelech and Abimelech, so much so that the men of Shechem begin to set up ambushes and raids. And when people are coming to pay tribute to Abimelech, they rob them on the highways.

[37 : 18] They're giving him a bad name and they're doing all this thing. And if that wasn't enough, all of a sudden, now there's another individual. And that is Gael, the son of Ebed, who is fully of the Canaanite bloodline. He is fully from the men of Shechem.

He doesn't even have half Jewish ancestry in him. And now he comes in and they had this festival of Shechem and he begins to open his mouth and to speak. And you know, the looser your lips get after a little bit of drink, you begin to say things.

You say, why are you going to let Abimelech rule over you? Why would you let him do this? Oh, I wish he was here. And God in his omniscience has someone who can get Abimelech there, right? And so now all of a sudden the table is set and the battle will be fought.

And there's just such this division. And remember the consequences that he would destroy them and they would destroy him. So now he comes in and by the end of the story, we see this conspiracy. The men of Shechem are conspiring against him.

This man, Gael, is conspiring against him. And now Abimelech comes and he's seeking to secure his throne and his right because, listen, a man attained position is a man maintained position.

[38 : 21] If you put yourself there, you have to keep yourself there. But a God appointed position is a God maintained position. That is, if he puts you there, he keeps you there.

This is why our view of salvation is so important. If we think salvation was earned by us or decided upon through us or we got it by our own efforts, if salvation is something we did, then salvation is something we keep.

Right? And to keep it, we must be perfect and none of us are perfect. But if salvation is something he did, then all of a sudden it's something he keeps.

And this is where we get when Paul writes to the church at Rome that we are secure in the hand of God. There is nothing that can pluck us out of the hand of God. The eternal security of the saints rest entirely upon the understanding that salvation is a work of God, not a work of man.

That since he did it, he secures it and he has secured it eternally. Because there is no height, no depth, no power, no principality, no sin, no failure.

[39 : 29] There is nothing, absolutely nothing that he cannot overcome and keep you in his hand. But with Abimelech, since he put himself in that position, it is now his, it is now his responsibility to keep himself in that position.

And a conspiracy arises, or a conspiracy arises and he has to fight. He goes to Shechem and he not only runs out, Gail, he now has to fight the men of Shechem. And he fights the men of Shechem and he raises the city and it says that he sows it with salt, which means to put a curse upon it.

He curses the city and he finds the men of the city and all the leaders of the city, they go to another house of God, lowercase g, and he finds them in there and he sets it on fire and he kills over a thousand men and women. So now the first part of that, the bramble bush, the fire has come out of the bramble bush and consumed the cedars of Lebanon.

Shechem has been destroyed by Abimelech because God put an evil spirit between the two of them. So the very ones who supported him have now been destroyed by him.

Now that Abimelech has destroyed Shechem, the rest of that consequence will come about. And that is that the men of Shechem would destroy Abimelech, mutual destruction.

[40 : 47] So this conspiracy has spread and evidently he has to go to the city of Thebes. We find him going to the city of Thebes there at the end of the chapter in verse 50. And it's here that after he has taken place of all of the conspiracy in the place of Shechem, he goes into Thebes and the leaders there go to a tower and he says, well, I'm going to do the same thing, right?

I burned the building over there and took care of my problem. I'm going to burn the tower over here and take care of the problem. So he goes and he starts gathering the wood, but he gets a little too close to the tower. And it says, as scripture can only say, a certain woman on the top of the house, we don't even know who she is, a certain woman on the top of the tower takes an upper millstone and throws it down and crushes his skull.

And Abimelech's laying there and he knows he's dying and he calls out to his armor bearer because it is of just utmost disgrace to die at the hands of the woman, especially to be dying not by sword, but by stone and says, strike me through so that it may never be said of me that a woman killed me in battle.

So he pierced him through, but Abimelech doesn't even get the honor of dying in that way because we find out later as David quotes to his men in battle, remember Abimelech, don't be killed by a woman throwing a stone off the wall.

He is forever known as one who is killed by the woman who threw the upper millstone off of the tower and crushed his head. And now this conspiracy which destroys him is a direct fulfillment of the consequences that were told him.

[42 : 18] He has destroyed Shechem and they have destroyed him. Because when man pursues his own position, when man makes it his ambition to attain that which God has not called him to, but rather is more concerned about his own desires, in the end, he destroys those who support him and they destroy him.

God will not be mocked. Man cannot raise himself up by his own bootstraps. Man cannot put himself in any position he so desires. What is absent from this entire chapter of Judges 9 is any God leading, God appointing, or God honoring action.

Rather, this is man pursuing his own position and seeking to be something he wants rather than something God wants. And as long as that takes place, man will always, always be destroyed.

We're going to pray and then we'll be dismissed after prayer because, as I said, we don't want to open up with a cappella singing me behind the mic and we definitely don't want to leave there in the light of that.

So before I pray, do we have anything that needs to be shared? Any words that need to be shared? Okay. Let's pray together.

[43 : 36] Lord, I thank you so much for allowing us the opportunity of gathering together and looking at your word. Lord, we pray that as we enter into this new week that you have set before us, a week of opportunity, Lord, a week of chance to grow closer to you through your word and closer to our service to you for the kingdom.

Lord, we pray that we would not pursue our own desires and our own ambitions and our own positions, but rather that our hearts would be bent towards surrender and submission to your leading.

Lord, we pray for the church. God, we pray that you continue to lead us for your glory. We pray for the members of the church, for those who are hurting, those who are sick, those who have trials in front of them, in the midst of them.

We ask that your hand of mercy would rest upon our families. We pray that you'd be with those who are caring for loved ones, that there would be a renewed strength. those who may be wrestling with illnesses and sicknesses.

God, that there would be renewed energy. Lord, we ask that we would always have our eyes, our heart, and our lives open to those you put around us.

[44 : 54] Lord, that we may be used by you as you see fit. Lord, just be glorified. God, be magnified and honored in our community through what you do through each one of us this week.

And we ask it all in Christ's name. Amen. Thank you, guys. Thank you, folks.

Thank you.