

Judges Chapter 9 Part 2
Judges Chapter 9

Judges Chapter 9 Part 2

Last week was a study on the city of Shechem. Tonight the focus will be on the text of chapter 9. It is full of stylistic humor and hidden clues.

Judges 9:1 Now Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem, to his mother's relatives, and spoke to them and to the entire family of the household of his mother's father, saying,

Went. In Hebrew this is the word for walking. Remember, this has a meaning in the physical world, walk; it also has a meaning in the spiritual world, how someone orders his life. For the Christian, "We walk by faith." (2 Corinthians 5:7). But that is not what is happening here. This is walk by sight. Or as one might infer, walk like a Canaanite.

Abimelech. This is Gideon's son by a Canaanite concubine. To be honest, the concubine is never identified. It is possible she was an Israelite and not Canaanite. Indeed, some commentators assume she is Israelite. The text is unclear. Let us do some "observation." Here is why I lean toward identifying her as Canaanite:

1. She is a concubine and not a wife. Why not marry her and add to his harem if she is an Israelite? But if she is a Canaanite he may have decided against crossing that legal barrier (Deuteronomy 7:1-6).
2. She is called a "slave woman" in Judges 9:18 (NASB). The earlier version of the NASB translates the word as "maidservant." That might not be the perfect translation since it is not the usual word for slave. It is sometimes translated as "maid." This word is used in

Judges Chapter 9 Part 2

Judges Chapter 9

Genesis chapter 21 to describe Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian maid. More to come when we get to Judges 9:18.

3. Abimelech's mother is from Shechem. The text of Judges does not identify either this city nor the affiliation of the people of Shechem with any Israelite tribe. According to Merrill Unger, "In the distribution of the land, Shechem fell to Ephraim (Josh. 20:7), but was assigned to the Levites, and became a city of refuge (21:20, 21)." Judges 1:29 says the tribe of Ephraim did not drive the Canaanites out of Gezer. It says nothing about Shechem, but it is possible that some Canaanites remained in Shechem or filtered back.
4. The leaders of Shechem are not called by the Hebrew word "sar," but by the common Semitic word "baal," which is used here as "leader." Often we associate the term baal with the Canaanite culture. More on that usage of "baal" later.
5. The Shechemites gave Abimelech 70 pieces of silver from the "house" (temple) of their god, Baal-Berith. There is no mention of Yahweh. Either the people are Israelites and have been thoroughly paganized to the point they appear to be Canaanites or they actually are Canaanites. Take your pick.
6. From Trent Butler, "Schneider is right in setting the tone for the entire narrative by noting, "It is not clear who the people of Shechem were presumed to be in this account and what their relationship was to Israel" (135)."' Also, "As Matthews (104) sees it, "It is quite possible that the people of Shechem at that time were predominately Canaanite, which lowers Abimelech's status as an ethnically mixed member of Jerubbaal's household." If not Canaanite, the people of Shechem represent an Israel that has "become spiritually Canaanites" (Younger, 233)."

Judges Chapter 9 Part 2

Judges Chapter 9

7. Since the text is ambiguous about the identify of these people, the situation may actually have been ambiguous. Some Israelites living there may have intermarried with Canaanites. Certainly, at the beginning of chapter 6, Gideon is not easily distinguished from a Canaanite. It is speculation on my part that Abimelech's mother is Canaanite. If that were the case, then they, like Abimelech, may have been racially mixed.

His name "Abimelech" means, "My Father is King." Although Gideon turned down the offer to become king, everything that followed indicated that he fancied being king from accepting tribute from his farmer army to sitting on a "throne" in his own house. The way this story is told, it assumes that one of Gideon's sons will assume the title of king, because Jerubaal was some kind of king-like ruler. Remember from the last chapter, that when Gideon was offered the rule of Israel, the word used was not based upon the word for king, but on a word that meant "rule." He may have been king in all but name.

In a culture that is ambiguous, God is absent and standards are relative. This is exactly what the author of Judges says, "everyone did what was right in his own eyes." Not God's eyes, their own eyes dominated by their own sin nature.

Jerubbaal. This was Gideon's Canaanite name referencing the god Baal. As Robbie Dean said, Jerubaal is the "bad" side of Gideon.

Shechem. We already dealt with some history of the city of Shechem. It is a place of decision. On the North is Mount Ebal, the place of cursing; On the South is Mount Gerizim, the place of blessings. At Shechem, one must decide which way to "walk."

Judges Chapter 9 Part 2

Judges Chapter 9

Mother's relatives. His mother was Gideon's concubine, possibly Canaanite. If so, then Abimelech is half Israelite and half Canaanite. This is literally "his mother's brothers."

Household of his mother's father. All the clan of his mother's father.

Let's talk about the word "house." It can mean a physical structure in which people live. But when talking about families and clans, this is not a physical structure. An easy way to approach this is from the word "church." People meet on Sunday and sometimes on other days of the week in a building that is called a "church." Sometimes a "church" refers to the people. The same is true of a "house." But in this case, it may be an extended family. Here is what Webster says in this regard, "the people who live in a house." That makes it sound like the people are tied to one physical structure.

The TDOT says, "Units that were smaller than the tribe but larger than single families were also called bayith: beth 'aharon, "house of Aaron" (Ps. 115:10, 12; 118:3); ..." Or the House of David.

Here is another description from another website talking about a "royal house."

"A royal house or royal dynasty consists of at least one, but usually more monarchs who are related to one another, as well as their non-reigning descendants and spouses. Monarchs of the same realm who are not related to one another are usually deemed to belong to different houses, and each house is designated by a name which distinguishes it from other houses." Royal house | Royalty Wiki | Fandom

There are some examples in our culture. The Queen of England is from the House of Windsor.

Judges Chapter 9 Part 2

Judges Chapter 9

Closer to home are “houses” in movies and TV shows. For instance, in the Game of Thrones, there were different royal houses, like the House of Stark and the House of Redwyne. In the Dune novels and associated movies, there were two competing powers, House Atreides and House Harkonnen.

So here in Judges chapter 9, we have two competing houses: House of Jerubbaal (Gideon) and the unnamed house of Abimelech’s mother’s father.

Judges 9:2 “Speak, now, in the hearing of all the leaders of Shechem, ‘Which is better for you: for seventy men, all the sons of Jerubbaal, to rule over you, or for one man to rule over you?’ Also, remember that I am your bone and your flesh.”

Speak. This is reminiscent of the story of Hamor and Shechem who convince the men of Shechem to be circumcised as Jacob’s sons deceitfully convinced them to do.

Genesis 34:20 So Hamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city and spoke to the people of their city, saying,...

It is an imperative followed by a particle that means “please.” Gideon used “please” when talking to God concerning the dew and the fleece in chapter 6.

Leaders. As previously hinted, this is not the Hebrew word for leader, “sar.” “*Sar*” can mean chieftain, chief, ruler, official, captain, prince.

Judges Chapter 9 Part 2
Judges Chapter 9

Judges 8:6 But the leaders (*sar*) of Succoth said, “Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hand, that we should give bread to your army?”

Judges 8:14 And he captured a youth from Succoth and questioned him. Then the youth wrote down for him the leaders (*sar*) of Succoth and its elders, seventy-seven men.

It is instead the common Semitic word “baal.” Normally, we see this used of the Canaanite god Baal. But it can be used as “lord.” So the TDOT, “The common Semitic word ba’lu means “lord,” and with the following genitive frequently “owner.” And again it says, “Thus b’l is used of a member of the city aristocracy (DISO, 40 under 2d; Jgs 9:2; 20:5; 1 S. 23:1f.; 2S. 21:12; etc.) and of a partner in a covenant...”

The author is slanting the vocabulary toward a Canaanite worldview instead of an Israelite, Mosaic Law worldview: 1) Gideon is called Jerub**baal**, 2) leaders of shechem are referred to as baal and coming up will be a reference to the House of Baal-berith.

One leader. If Gideon/Jerubbaal had many wives and demanded tribute, what would seventy times that be? A big tax burden. So the obvious choice, from a human perspective would be the one. A single tax burden.

So already, in this first verse, we have words that foreshadow what is about to happen: Jerubbaal instead of Gideon; baal (for princes) instead of the Hebrew word *sar* and an ambiguity concerning their ethnic identity. It is a world in which nothing is certain. Death and taxes. But as Christians, we know something else is certain: faith in Christ results in salvation. We will never suffer the Lake of Fire. That is certain.

Judges Chapter 9 Part 2
Judges Chapter 9

Which is better. This question assumes that someone will inherit the rulership from Gideon/Jerubaal. It is presented as a choice between many sons of Gideon/Jerubaal or one son of Gideon/Jerubaal. The choice to have no king is not given. The right answer is “God is king.”

I am your bone and your flesh. Abimelech is saying I am one of you. Yet, he is only half correct. His father was not one of “them”, only his mother was. Again, there is ambiguity here on exactly who the Shechemites were. You would think that if they were from the tribe of Ephraim or Levites, that would come out in the passage.

The first place where bone and flesh are used in the Bible is in Genesis chapter 2:

Genesis 2:23 Then the man said, “At last this is bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called ‘woman,’ Because she was taken out of man.”

Judges 9:3 So 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.”

In the hearing. Literally, in the ears. If I read the Biblehub interlinear correctly, the noun is in the “dual” form. In other words in “two ears.”

Leaders. Again, the word in Hebrew is baal for “lord” or “leaders.”

Judges Chapter 9 Part 2

Judges Chapter 9

Inclined to follow. Literally, bend their heart after him, or as the Young's Literal Translation has it, "their heart inclineth after Abimelech."

He is our relative. Literally, "He is our brother." This kind of situation occurs today. A politician that has parents of different races might claim in one situation to be of one race. In another situation that politician might claim to be of the other race. That is what Abimelech does here.

Judges 9:4 And they gave him seventy pieces of silver from the house of Baal-berith, with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless men, and they followed him.

Worthless and reckless. Dr. Robert Chisholm explains the Hebrew words, "The Hebrew text describes these men as ריקים ופְּחָזִים, literally, "empty and reckless." "Empty" is used elsewhere of a group of mercenaries/bandits (Judg. 11:3), a kind of person who would indecently expose himself (2 Sam. 6:20), and men who supported a coup against a king (2 Chron. 13:7). פְּחָזִים, "be reckless," and its derivatives are used elsewhere of turbulent water (Gen. 49:4) and prophets who abused their office (Jer. 23:32; Zeph. 3:4)." How about thugs and hit men?

And they followed him. Literally, they "walked" after him. This is the second time the word "walk" is used in this chapter. It is used a total of 16 times in this chapter. That's a whole lot of walking. Or ordering one's life according to a standard, lifestyle. In this case, a bad standard.

House of Baal-berith. If we consider "house" as people instead of a physical structure, then his house gave Abimelech money. The priesthood gave the money. This is not the Levitical priesthood. And there is another sad irony. Shechem was designated as a Levitical city.

Judges Chapter 9 Part 2
Judges Chapter 9

Joshua 21:20 Then the cities from the tribe of Ephraim were allotted to the families of the sons of Kohath, the Levites, that is, to the rest of the sons of Kohath.

Joshua 21:21 They gave them Shechem, the city of refuge for the one who commits manslaughter,

So, the Baal priesthood from the “House of Baal” gave Abimelech 70 pieces of silver instead of the Levitical priesthood that is never mentioned in this narrative.

And it is a “city of refuge for the one who commits manslaughter.” But what about someone who commits murder?

Judges 9:5 Then he went to his father’s house in Ophrah and killed his brothers the sons of Jerubbaal, seventy men, on one stone. But Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, because he hid himself.

On one stone. Robbie Dean, “That is interesting. Why did the writer include the little detail, “on one stone”? It is a ritual killing. They bring them out to a sacrificial altar, the one stone, and they chop their heads off as a sacrifice to Baal. This is a bizarre situation. The more you get away from Scripture the more bizarre are the things that happen in a culture, and it is legitimized. This was legitimized by the lords of Shechem.”

Father’s house. Interesting phrase. Jerubbaal/Gideon is dead. He doesn’t live there anymore. “One stone” localizes the killing but “house” is

Judges Chapter 9 Part 2

Judges Chapter 9

ambiguous. Is the “one stone” located at his father’s house or are we talking about the “House Jerubbaal?” Or perhaps both.

Killed. I was surprised to find that there are many Hebrew words that can be translated “to kill.” This particular word is used 12 times in chapters 8-9. This is not the word for murder. That word is used in Exodus 20:13 in the ten commandments. The King James version translated it “kill.” As a result some people picked this up and criticized the military and wars as immoral citing this passage. But the word used here should be translated “murder,” as does the NASB and NIV.

When Abimelech has his brothers “killed,” I would have used the word “murder.” But in that culture, they were not operating under the Mosaic Law. Hence, whatever was right in their own eyes. As Robbie Dean said, in that culture it had been “legitimized.”

Judges 9:6 All the leaders of Shechem and all Beth-millo assembled together, and they went and made Abimelech king, by the oak of the memorial stone which was in Shechem.

All the leaders. Again, the word baal.

What happens when they make him king? They give up some of their freedom.

Link to Cognitive Warfare paper:

https://www.innovationhub-act.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/20210122_CW%20Final.pdf