

Judges Chapter 9 Part 3

Context. Context. Context.

We have heard Herman say this many times.

Now, if you find a diamond in a jewelry store, you have to pay to take it home. If on the other hand, you find a diamond in the Diamond Crater State Park, then you can pocket it and take it home without paying for it. Context.

Judges 9:7-15 contains what appears to be a prophecy. It is spoken like a parable by a son of Gideon/Jerubbaal but the end of it comes true like a prophecy. In order to better appreciate this, let us go back to the beginning of the Gideon narrative. Let us acquire some context.

Before Gideon was brought into the narrative, Yahweh/God “sent (on a mission) a prophet to the sons of Israel.” Let us read the account:

Judges 6:7 Now it came about, when the sons of Israel cried out to the Lord on account of Midian,

Judges 6:8 that the Lord sent a prophet to the sons of Israel, and he said to them, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel says: ‘It was I who brought you up from Egypt, and brought you out of the house of slavery.

Judges 6:9 And I rescued you from the hands of the Egyptians, and from the hands of all your oppressors, and I drove them out from you and gave you their land,

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Judges 6:10 and I said to you, “I am the Lord your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live.” But you have not obeyed Me.’”

When I taught this passage I said:

Really? That is all He said? It is like getting to the end of a movie and it just stops without answering key questions, without tying up all the loose strings.

Isn't a prophet supposed to take people to task for being evil (forthtelling) or tell them something bad or good that is about to happen to them (foretelling). In other words, this prophet of God just tells them you “have not obeyed Me.” Literally, it says “you have not listened to Me.” So, he is not acting like a prophet but more like a priest, something that he wasn't as far as the text is concerned.

A short note for future reference. It was after Gideon was picked by God to deliver the sons of Israel from the Midianites that God sent the Holy Spirit to empower him to be successful in the mission God sent him on. Note the next time we encounter the word spirit in chapter 9.

Let's make a few observations:

1. The prophet is unnamed.
2. The prophet is in response to the people “crying out” to the Lord.
3. The prophet gives a message that would have been more appropriate if it had come from a Levitical priest during Sabbath class.
4. Apparently, the priests were not doing their jobs. We got a hint at the beginning of the narrative that Gideon's father may have been a

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leader or priest of the Baal worship, not Yahweh worship. And he was not a Levite.

5. Subsequently, the Holy Spirit is bestowed upon Gideon to empower him for success.
6. Question: So why add this incident to the narrative? Well, it does give some perspective. It is a reminder that God did everything for the sons of Israel. It also sets us up for the Jotham parable/prophecy. It becomes a contrast for a situation that is “upside down and backwards.” The prophet acts like a priest. Jotham acts like a prophet.

Before we delve into comments on this passage, let us listen to what Robbie Dean says:

“Verse 7 tells us about his little parable. This parable is not stated to come from God, not stated to be a prophecy, but it is a divine viewpoint commentary on kingship. This is almost as powerful a political statement as 1 Samuel 8 is. Jotham comes to Mount Gerezim, just to the north-west of Shechem. It is like an amphitheatre, so he can stand on the mountain and speak to the town of Shechem and all can hear him. "Listen to me, you men of Shechem, that God may listen to you." This is the first of only two times that the word "God" is used in the passage, which again emphasizes how God is removed from Israel at this point. He is not entered into their thinking, they have abandoned Him completely. He gives them a fable. Kingship in the ancient world was generally viewed as something positive, but in this parable kingship is viewed as something that is destructive and something that is harmful to the citizens. The olive tree, the fig tree, and the vine, all of which are valuable and produce something of value to society, don't want to have anything to do with politics. Doesn't that ring true for today? We are so busy doing that which is best for society that we not going to get tainted

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by being involved in something as low as politics. So there is something negative that is being portrayed here in relation to kingship. Secondly, persons of honor who are engaged in constructive activity have not time for political agendas. The olive tree, the fig tree and the vine represent people who are involved in solid productive activities for society, and they are too busy serving humanity to be caught up with politics. The third thing we see in this parable is that rulers have a tendency to desire power for the worst reasons—their own narcissistic self-interest. The fourth thing, in the words of many modern observers: people get exactly the kind of leader they deserve. They get the bramble. Too often the leaders that we get are the leaders we deserve because they accurately reflect the heartbeat of the nation that produced them.

Here is a second comment on this passage from Robbie Dean:

“It is an interesting little parable, beginning in verse 8. The trees represent people. All of this personification represents a fable, probably a well-known fable at the time but he uses it for his own ends. The trees go to the olive tree. The olive tree is productive, producing olive oil which was necessary for many things in life. But the olive tree says that if it was reigning over them then it wouldn't be able to fulfill its natural function. So what we see here is that the olive tree represents the honorable person who is productive in society and would rather operate in his niche and benefit society than get involved in politics. So they go to the second notch down, the fig tree in verse 10, and get the same result. The fig tree doesn't want to give up its natural production and benefit to society. So there is a very negative view of politics in this fable. There is the same result with the vine in verse 12, so they go to the bramble. The bramble represents Abimelech, he is just the lowest level on the social economic scale. They offer the kingship to the bramble and the bramble accepts it. The people are so out of the plan of God at this point that God is going to exercise some divine discipline through Abimelech and He is telling

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Israel to "wait a minute." They are going to go through such chaos as a result of this as part of God's discipline on them that God is going to use this to get their attention once again, to bring them back to Him. So Abimelech is the briar king, the "wait a minute" king, and he is absolutely worthless. A bramble is good for nothing. It doesn't produce anything that is beneficial to mankind."

Judges 9:7 Now when they told Jotham, he went and stood on the top of Mount Gerizim, and raised his voice and called out. And he said to them, "Listen to me, you leaders of Shechem, that God may listen to you.

Jotham. We were introduced to Jotham as the youngest son of Gideon/Jerubbaal in verse 5. His name means "God is upright" (Unger) or "God is perfect" (Strong's Concordance). This contrasts with another son of Gideon/Jerubbaal, Abimelech, "My father is king." This latter could be a double entendre: Gideon recognized that God is king:

Judges 8:23 But Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you."

Yet, as we saw last week, Gideon lived like a king after delivering Israel from the Midianites.

The Hebrew word used for "upright" or "perfect," has an interesting entry in the TDOT. It says that there were two different distinct words that came together into this root. It can mean the end of something or it can refer to the positive attribute of "uprightness." Obviously, God is perfect. He is "upright."

When I read about Abimelech addressing his Shechemite family, I got the sense that he was talking to Canaanites or at a minimum, mixed

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Canaanites and Israelites. Now, reading about Jotham, I get the sense that he was talking to Israelites. Indeed, that was apparently a problem. In opposition to what God had said, in Shechem at least, the sons of Israel and the sons of Canaan intermarried.

He went. This is the word for walk. Last week I said this Hebrew word for walk is used 16 times in this chapter. This repetition makes it a word to follow. Here Jotham physically walks to Mount Gerizim. But, he is doing so as a result of thoughts in his mind. I suspect that of all Gideon's sons, this one had the best understanding of the Law and Wisdom and history. He apparently understood something about the history of the sons of Israel and their special relationship with Yahweh/God.

And stood. This word works in tandem with the verb to walk. I have noticed this often in the book of Judges. Two verbs work together to show purpose and direction. He walked with a purpose and a direction.

This is kind of like a train. The engine gets you there, but the freight cars are the reason you went.

Once Jotham got to where he was going, he accomplished his self-imposed mission. We do not know how he came up with this plan and this parable. Robbie Dean suggested it might have been a well known fable. But, he walked with a purpose so he could stand in a specific spot. He then shouts out to the inhabitants of Shechem. This reminds me of Jehoshaphat "standing up" in the congregation and "speaking" 2 Chronicles 20:5-6.

2 Chronicles 20:5 Then Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the Lord in front of the new courtyard;

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2 Chronicles 20:6 and he said, “Lord, God of our fathers, are You not God in the heavens? And are You not ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations? Power and might are in Your hand so that no one can stand against You.

Mount Gerizim. Jotham stood on Mount Gerizim. Moses told the sons of Israel:

Deuteronomy 11:26 “See, I am placing before you today a blessing and a curse:

Deuteronomy 11:27 the blessing, if you listen to the commandments of the Lord your God, which I am commanding you today;

Deuteronomy 11:28 and the curse, if you do not listen to the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way which I am commanding you today, by following other gods which you have not known.

Deuteronomy 11:29 “And it shall come about, when the Lord your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, that you shall place the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal.

Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal were the two mountains on which the sons of Israel stood when Joshua read the law.

Joshua 8:33 And all Israel with their elders, officers, and their judges were standing on both sides of the ark before the Levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, the stranger as well as the native. Half of them stood in front of Mount Gerizim, and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded at first to bless the people of Israel.

34 Then afterward he read all the words of the Law, the blessing and the curse, according to everything that is written in the Book of the Law.

35 There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them.

He stood on top. This may not have been the tippy top but somewhere on the top part of the mount that had a good view of the valley below.

Why am I making such a big issue with the place Gerizim? Because this place was imbued with history and meaning. Blessing and cursing tied to the Law and obedience to it, by faith. Decision: which way will you go? Toward blessing through faith or to cursing by abandoning God?

Raised his voice and called out. Here is another two verbs working in tandem. The effect is to amplify what Jotham did. He didn't just call out,

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he shouted out with all his might. He had just lost his brothers to another brother of a different mother. A mother who was not even his father's wife. What was he (Gideon) thinking? Obviously, he wasn't.

Listen to me. Shades of Proverbs yet to come. Here Jotham is trying to impart a little bit of Bible sense to the people of Shechem.

Proverbs 8:1 Does not wisdom call, And understanding raise her voice?

Proverbs 8:2 On top of the heights beside the way, Where the paths meet, she takes her stand;

You leaders of Shechem. Leaders is the word *baal*. It is not the word previously used for leader, *sar*. Perhaps this is a double entendre since Baal is the god they are worshiping. He is a false god and they are his leaders, each one a little baal.

that God may listen to you. God heard them before when they cried to him. Here Jotham is crying (same word) to them. This is upside down and backwards. They should be calling to God for guidance and deliverance. Instead, Jotham is calling to them so that they will get back on the faith road and God will listen to them again. But, they first have to recognize that there is a problem.

Judges 9:8 Once the trees went to anoint a king over them, and they said to the olive tree, 'Reign over us!'

Jotham gives the leaders of Shechem a parable. They will listen to a story that doesn't name names. Nathan uses this on David when he told him the story of the little lamb butchered by the rich man.

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Once. This sounds like a fairy tale, “Once upon a time...” The translator is struggling to communicate what in Hebrew is called an infinitive absolute. It is a special infinitive plus another form of the same verb. It imbues emphasis to the action.

Went. This is our word for walk again. This is actually two words for walk. One of them is the infinitive absolute followed by another verb for walk. It is designed to get the attention of the Shechemites. These are the first words in the parable.

To anoint. Interesting play on words. They want to anoint a king over them. Anointing is done with oil, as in olive oil.

Reign over us. This is not the word “reign” used in the offer to Gideon. This word is derived from the same root as the noun, “king.”

**Judges 9:9 But the olive tree said to them,
‘Shall I give up my fatness with which God and
mankind are honored, and go to wave over the
trees?’**

The issue is that the olive tree would have to stop producing his “fatness.”

Honored. The word can mean heavy, burden, honor, glory among other words. Remember in 1st Samuel chapter 4 when the Ark of the Covenant is taken by the Philistines. A woman is giving birth and names her son Ichabod meaning “no glory.”

**1 Samuel 4:21 And she named the boy
Ichabod, saying, “The glory has departed from
Israel,” because the ark of God had been
taken and because of her father-in-law and her
husband.**

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1 Samuel 4:22 So she said, “The glory has departed from Israel, because the ark of God has been taken.”

Olive oil, being used to anoint a king, is a sign of honor, glory.

The olive trees I saw in Greece are not tall trees. So, in order for the olive tree to “wave over the trees,” either the olive tree would have to grow a lot, or the other trees would have to bow down.

In order to be anointed, the olive tree would have to be anointed with oil from his fruit.

God and man are honored. One of the uses of olive oil was for lamps in temples. For man, there are many uses for the olive and its oil.

Wave over. When I first read this, it didn’t make a whole lot of sense. I expected something related to “reign.” Here is a comment by the TDOT: “The 3 occurrences in the parable of Jotham (Jgs. 9:9, 10, 13) are not entirely clear. The trees that are offered the kingship refuse it, saying, “Shall I give up my true nature to nûa’ over the trees?” This can hardly mean something like “reign.” More likely, the word means that when the other trees wave in the wind, the king is to tower high above them. The use of nûa’ may also imply a concealed criticism of the monarchy.”

Isaiah uses this word in an interesting context:

Isaiah 24:20 The earth trembles like a heavy drinker And sways like a hut, For its wrongdoing is heavy upon it, And it will fall, never to rise again.

Indeed, based upon the supposed monarchy of Jerubbaal, it was just useless waving over the people...no value added. Now, if the king were God, things would be different.

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**Judges 9:10 Then the trees said to the fig tree,
'You, come, reign over us!'**

The trees keep looking for another tree to reign over them as king.

**Judges 9:11 But the fig tree said to them,
'Shall I give up my sweetness and my good
fruit, and go to wave over the trees?'**

This paragraph does not include mention of man and God. But the fruit is for eating. But if the fig tree were king, then it could no longer maintain its useful function.

**Judges 9:12 Then the trees said to the vine,
'You, come, reign over us!'**

Is it possible that the height of the trees is getting shorter and shorter. Certainly, the grape vines I saw in Greece were shorter than fig trees.

**Judges 9:13 But the vine said to them, 'Shall I
give up my new wine, which cheers God and
mankind, and go to wave over the trees?'**

Cheers God and mankind. Like the olive tree, the fruit of the vine is related to God and man.

Olive oil and new wine are considered signs of blessing from God.

**Deuteronomy 7:12 "Then it shall come about,
because you listen to these judgments and
keep and do them, that the Lord your God will
keep His covenant with you and His
faithfulness which He swore to your
forefathers.**

Deuteronomy 7:13 And He will love you, bless you, and make you numerous; He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain, your new wine, and your oil, the newborn of your cattle and the offspring of your flock, in the land which He swore to your forefathers to give you.

So, if the olive tree or the vine were to stop their normal function, wouldn't this imply a loss of blessing?

Judges 9:14 Then all the trees said to the bramble, 'You, come, reign over us!'

Judges 9:15 And the bramble said to the trees, 'If you really are anointing me as king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, may fire come out of the bramble and consume the cedars of Lebanon.'

If you really. This is word can be translated "really," but also faithful, faith truth and similar words. It comes from the same root as "amen." This is an interesting word to come from the bramble, which in the parable represents Abimelech.

Come and take refuge in my shade. In order for a tall tree to take refuge in the shade of the bramble, it would have to bow down. In other words, all the trees would have to serve the bramble.

Shade here means "protection." Here is what Lot said when visited by the "three men" who were there to warn him about the coming destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah:

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Genesis 19:8 “...only do not do anything to these men, because they have come under the shelter of my roof.” (The word shelter is not “shelter” but shadow or shade)

If the other trees were to come in the shade of the bramble, they would have to bow down.

May fire come out. In this context, the closest I can come to describing this is wildfire. Once it gets started, it is difficult to stop. When a nation becomes corrupt, it is difficult to keep it from destroying itself.

Fire is often associated with the result of divine judgment.

Cedars of Lebanon. Impressive, tall trees were prized in the ancient world for lumber to build temples and other things. The few remaining cedars are now carefully guarded and preserved. In that area, it should have been a contender for the “king of the trees.”

Now, if we have time, let us read the rest of the chapter to see the fulfillment of the parable/prophecy.