

Judges Chapter 9 Part 5

Let us revisit the discussion from last week concerning the New American Standard Bible. There are multiple versions of the New American Standard Bible (or version).

Here is the explanation from the Lockman Foundation (Lockman.org)

“After completion in 1971, the NASB was updated in 1977, 1995, and most recently in 2020, according to the best scholarship available at the time. The purposes of the updates have been to increase accuracy, clarity, and readability. Every aspect of vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, and meaning was carefully reviewed during each update. The result is an accurate translation that clearly communicates the Word of God in contemporary English.”

“Accuracy will always and forever be the unmovable cornerstone of our translation philosophy. Changes are never made lightly. With this in mind, to best achieve our goals, updates must consistently maintain the highest standards of formal equivalence translation that is familiar and understandable in English each time the work is done.”

This led me to look online for different translations. I found an interesting document at

http://lwelliott.com/Documents/Translations_Summary.pdf

I have a handout of that document.

It rates different translations based upon the criteria of the author of that website. There is no “about” for the website, but I do find the document interesting. That led me to focus on the evaluation of the “Holman Christian Standard Bible.” Here is how that translation translates John 3:16 (using BibleGateway.com):

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John 3:16 “For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

Here is an explanation of the translation philosophy of the Holman translation from Wikipedia:

“Holman Bible Publishers assembled an international, interdenominational team of 100 scholars and proofreaders, all of whom were committed to biblical inerrancy.[4] The translation committee sought to strike a balance between the two prevailing philosophies of Bible translation: formal equivalence (literal or word-for-word) and dynamic or functional equivalence (thought-for-thought). The translators called this balance "optimal equivalence.”

“According to the translators, the goal of an optimal-equivalence translation is "to convey a sense of the original text with as much clarity as possible". To that end, the ancient source texts were exhaustively scrutinized at multiple levels (word, phrase, clause, sentence, discourse) to determine their original meaning and intent. Afterwards, using the best language tools available, the semantic and linguistic equivalents were translated into as readable a text as possible.”

I am not going to apologize for this excursion. I found it interesting. The Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB) is another translation that may be of help to you. You should at least be aware of the Holman translation and the fact that different translations have different translation philosophies.

Although the implementation of the spiritual life is different for the Christian than for the believer in the book of Judges, the issue of faith dependence on God is the same. The Christian has the permanent

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indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the opportunity to be filled by the Holy Spirit. The operation of the Holy Spirit in the Christian's life depends upon the believer's continuing trust in God. In the Gideon narrative, we have seen the need to trust God. When the people abandoned God, He disciplined them.

If the believer rejects God's will and plan for him, as the sons of Israel repeatedly did in the book of Judges, then God provides discipline to encourage the believer to return to a faith walk and dependence on Him.

Let us start with a quote from L. S. Chafer concerning grieving the Holy Spirit. You may notice that the English language in America today is different than what it was in Chafer's day, but the truth of what he says is current.

“The Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit with the purpose in view that the divine life should dominate all his thoughts, actions, and feelings rather than sin, which is so foreign to the Holy Spirit, indeed the very opposite and that which is furthest removed from the absolute purity and sanctity of the indwelling One. The presence of sin in the believer's life grieves the Holy Spirit. This is the testimony of the Bible and it is also the abundant witness of reason. When sin is tolerated in the Christian's daily life, of necessity the Spirit must turn from the ministry *through* the Christian unto a pleading ministry *to* him.”

Now on to our lesson for tonight. Two weeks ago we studied the parable of Jotham. Last week we studied the curse of Jotham based upon the parable. This week we begin the realization of that curse and judgment by God.

Judges 9:22 (NASB 1995) Now Abimelech ruled over Israel three years.

Judges 9:22 (Holman) When Abimelech had ruled over Israel three years,

Now. Some translations have “after.” That may be an acceptable translation. But the word is the Hebrew “and.” It is not the Hebrew word “after.” This Hebrew word can be translated in many ways, so different translations may translate it differently. It serves to break the following text from what preceded while maintaining some continuity.

Ruled. Some translations have “reigned” (KJV) or other words. Ruled is probably better because this is not the word derived from “king.” Kings reign. The text is telling us that he is not really a God-anointed king. He only rules; he does not reign like David reigned. Gideon tried to act like a “king” without having that title. Abimelech wanted the title of “king” but did not “reign” but “ruled.”

Over. That is what it means, but there may be an implied irony here. This word can also mean “against.” And indeed, Abimelech was not ruling to benefit the people of Israel but to benefit himself.

Three years. Don’t get out your stopwatches and measure three calendar years. We don’t know exactly how the years of Abimelech’s rule were measured. Context. In that part of the world, in those times, there were different ways to measure a king’s or ruler’s years. The text says three years, in the context of the time of the judges. Perhaps at a later time, I will give a lesson on “time” in the Old Testament. If you were going to use only integer numbers for the years and not fractions, would you round up or round down?

Judges 9:23 (NASB 1995) Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech,

**Judges 9:23 (HCSB) God sent an evil spirit
between Abimelech and the lords of Shechem.
They treated Abimelech deceitfully,**

Then. The Hebrew word “and” again. “Then” is OK.

God. Elohim in Hebrew, not Yahweh.

Sent. This is the Hebrew word that can mean to send on a mission. This brings up the question of God’s participation in evil. God’s character does not permit God to do evil. This does not prevent Him from using evil spirits in history. Allow Robbie Dean to explain this:

“We see the beginning of this downfall in v. 22. This is another fascinating passage because it shows how God is operating behind the scenes. Ordinarily we read that at the end of the reign the length of the reign is announced, but under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit his reign is put first this time to indicate that it is short. V. 23, "God sent a spirit of ill will [NKJV], "an evil spirit" [NASB]. The Hebrew means evil, so literally "an evil spirit"—"between Abimelech and the men of Shechem." It is legitimate to translate this "spirit of ill will," but the same construction is used in another passage, 1 Kings 22, at the end of the reign of Ahab where there is a fascinating look into what takes place in the throne of God and how God sovereignly brings about judgment in the human sphere, utilizing the fallen angels. Even when God allows Satan to do something God is still in control. This is exactly the same thing that we see in Judges chapter nine. This is how God utilizes the angelic conflict to bring about discipline on mankind. So He sends out this deceiving demon in order to create this disharmony between Abimelech and the men of Shechem.”

A more familiar passage in which we see the angelic conflict is in Job chapters 1-2. Satan asks to test Job. Then God responds:

Job 1:12 Then the Lord said to Satan, “Behold, all that he (Job) has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.” So Satan departed from the presence of the Lord.

Also,

Job 2:3 The Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause.”

Job 2:4 Satan answered the Lord and said, “Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life.

Job 2:5 However, put forth Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse You to Your face.”

Job 2:6 So the Lord said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life.”

After reading the first two chapters of Job you may think God is participating in evil. No, evil is not in God’s character. Let me say a few short comments without going into an exegetical study of it.

The current angelic conflict is a result of Satan’s sin against God and subsequent revolt of many of the angels. Satan and the fallen angels have already been condemned. The Lake of Fire will be ready to receive them.

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Apparently, Satan appealed his conviction. So, God created the human race, in part at least, to solve this appeal. Satan is allowed to participate in human history when and where God allows it. From Satan's perspective, this activity answers his questions whether he wants to admit it or not. On the human side, God uses these challenges to keep believers' pride in check or to impose discipline. In the end, God blesses Job double. He learns something of the angelic conflict. His pride is kept in check. Those around him who have been in revolt against God are judged.

Look at the nation Israel. In the past, God has used some very evil kingdoms to discipline Israel when it got out of line. Of course, the evil kingdoms themselves were eventually judged.

I keep going back to this idea of *coherence* in human history. God is in charge. He has taken each person's needs and crafted a solution. He has done that for every person on the earth. Then, he knit these solutions together, along with answers to Satan's appeal so that it forms one coherent whole: history. After all unbelievers and the fallen angels and Satan are locked up in the Lake of Fire forever, we believers will be repositories of knowledge of good and evil. And, we will know how God dealt with evil in grace. We will be living evidence of God's character in action. Satan will be in the Lake of Fire. But the evidence of Satan's guilt and God's grace will continue for all eternity in believers. Wow!

Between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; The Hebrew is "between Abimelech and between the men of Shechem." There is nothing wrong with that part of the translation. "...between Abimelech...between men of Shechem." That is how Hebrew grammar works.

Men of Shechem. There is no word "men" in the Hebrew. It is again the word "baal." It refers to the "lords" or "princes" of Shechem. Here the

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NASB has it wrong. The Holman has it correct. It is obviously ironic to use this word here. These people were not believers operating under the Mosaic Law. We saw they had a temple to Baal Berith (Covenant). And the leaders of Shechem were little “baals.” At some point, God’s righteousness and justice must judge them. So he uses an “evil spirit” to move this judgment along.

And the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech, There is an interesting verse in Proverbs that uses our word treacherous:

Proverbs 2:22 (NASB 1995) But the wicked will be cut off from the land And the treacherous will be uprooted from it.

God is going to uproot the treacherous men of Shechem as well as Abimelech.

So what is treachery? The verb is used in our passage in Judges 9:23. The TDOT has an enlightening comment on it:

“The verb expresses the unstable relationship of man to an existing established regulation and can be translated “to act faithlessly (treacherously).” It is used when the OT writer wants to say that a man does not honor an agreement, or commits adultery, or breaks a covenant or some other ordinance given by God. The treacherous acts of man stand in contrast to Yahweh’s faithfulness to his covenant and trustworthiness (*chesedh ve’emeth*). Thus *baghadh*, “to act treacherously,” has primarily a religious function. As a rule the object of this verb is God. But God-given ordinances also include a man’s relationship to his fellow man, and thus occasionally man is also the object of a treacherous act. Sometimes *baghadh* is used to denote the violation of a purely human ordinance.”

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There is an interesting flow of words around “treacherously” in this verse.

The actual word flow in Hebrew is

**Judges 9:23 Then sent God a spirit of evil
between Abimelech (A)
and between the men of Shechem (B);
and dealt treacherously (C)
the men of Shechem (B’)
with Abimelech (A’),**

In other words there is an apparent mini-chiasm with the word “treacherously” in the middle, thereby emphasizing it. It is obvious from the text that the object of this verb is Abimelech. But, if indeed they are Israelites, they themselves have dealt treacherously with God. Another irony hidden in the text.

I began to realize as I am doing my final edits on this document that the author has used several different methods of emphasizing various points. He used repetition in the word for leader/princes (baal). He used the Hebrew infinitive absolute in Judges 9:8. Here he used a chiasm. If I go back and look, I am sure I will find others.

**Judges 9:24 so that the violence done to the
seventy sons of Jerubbaal 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.**

**Judges 9:24 (HCSB) so that the crime against
the 70 sons of Jerubbaal might come to**

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justice and their blood would be avenged on their brother Abimelech, who killed them, and on the lords of Shechem, who had helped him kill his brothers.

Violence/Crime. This word can mean violence or wrong. The first use of this noun is found in Genesis:

Genesis 6:11 (HCSB) Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with wickedness.

Genesis 6:12 (HCSB) God saw how corrupt the earth was, for every creature had corrupted its way on the earth.

Genesis 6:13 (HCSB) Then God said to Noah, "I have decided to put an end to every creature, for the earth is filled with wickedness because of them; therefore I am going to destroy them along with the earth.

So wickedness or treachery, when widespread, prompts God to destroy people.

There is a word in Arabic, similar sounding to American ears which is not a cognate of the Hebrew word, that has people making up stories:

The name of the Palestinian organization Hamas is an acronym from the term "Islamic Resistance Movement." Those words for the acronym HMS in English. From Wikipedia: "This acronym, HMS, was later glossed in the Hamas Covenant by the Arabic word ḥamās (حماس) which itself means "zeal", "strength", or "bravery". In Hebrew, there is a

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similar-sounding word, ḥāmās (חַמָּס) connoting "violence" and it has been suggested that the phonemic resemblance between the two terms may have conduced to abetting acrimonious relations between Israel and this Palestinian movement.”

Seventy sons. Here is a question I cannot answer: Since Jerubbaal/Gideon had 70 sons and they were killed, was Jotham a 71st son or was someone killed in his place making 70 men who were killed?

Blood might be laid. The TDOT says for this expression in “...most of the passages are based on the notion that blood shed through violence spreads out as a burden over both people and places...”

Notice that there is a difference in the NASB and Holman translations. The Holman attempts to explain the significance of blood in that culture by using “avenge.” That is not what is said literally, but that is the meaning in context. It is a reminder of a verse in the “Song of Moses.”

Deuteronomy 32:35 ‘Vengeance is Mine, and retribution, In due time their foot will slip; For the day of their calamity is near, And the impending things are hastening upon them.’

Kill. This is the word I explained last week. It is used twice here. Again, this is not the usual word for murder. In this context, the “lords” of Shechem consented to the killing of Jerubbaal’s sons. In their eyes it was OK. But in God’s eyes, this was murder. Hence the “avenging.”

After reading this chapter a number of times, I would guess the author is setting this up for the reader to make a judgment. It is obviously “murder.” But, the text just says kill because that is what Abimelech did in his eyes. If this was a movie, the audience might be yelling at the screen, “That is murder!!!” I suspect that was the author’s intent.

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Helped. This is perhaps more than “helped” or “aided.” The word means strengthened. Indeed, remember that the lords of Shechem gave Abimelech 70 pieces of silver. This was active aid. Indeed, in the Hebrew this is the “piel” or intensive stem.

Don’t lose sight of God’s involvement. In verse 23, it was God that sent the evil spirit to get things started. God was using evil against evil to further the resolution of the angelic conflict and provide evidence to Satan that his way of violence leads to destruction as it did in Noah’s day.

Judges 9:25 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.

If Abimelech is ruling, then he is responsible for protecting the people. But, the Shechemites have decided to rebel. If Abimelech doesn’t do something to establish his authority, then he will lose his reign.

Men. Again, this is not the word for men. It is the word “baal” meaning “lords” or “princes.”

Set in ambush. Verb to place, put or set plus the participle of “to lie in wait.” It is in the intensive stem. A similar word is used in

Deuteronomy 19:11 “But if there is a man who hates his neighbor and lies in wait for him and rises up against him and strikes him so that he dies, and he flees to one of these cities,

Deuteronomy 19:12 then the elders of his city shall send and take him from there and deliver

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him into the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die.

Deuteronomy 19:13 You shall not pity him, but you shall purge the blood of the innocent from Israel, that it may go well with you.