

Judges Chapter 9 Part 6

Remember from past weeks that there are several versions of the New American Standard Bible. I will try to quote from the NASB 1995, and quoting from other translations as needed.

I am returning once again to Judges 9:23.

**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'),**

The verb for “dealt treacherously,” for me, is particularly significant. Here again is the TDOT comment:

“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.”

For me, this is one of the most important words in the book of Judges, even if it is only used once in this book. It expresses the attitudes of those

Judges Chapter 9 Part 6
Judges Chapter 9

who have abandoned God. They broke the treaty with God. Now, because they have abandoned God and his absolutes, everything in life becomes relative. And everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

This verse is particularly important for a couple of reasons:

1. God acts in human history. God does this sometimes to prevent complete destruction. God intervened in Genesis chapter 6, the great flood. By the way, the Bible is not the only account of a great flood. There are other ancient documents that refer to that historical event. They are not God-inspired and so do not completely agree with the Bible. But the Bible is God-inspired and inerrant. This verse, Judges 9:23, is unusual in that, God on His own, without humans crying out to Him, acted. Sometimes we look back on our lives and see that God acted in our lives at times we didn't even have the presence of mind to pray to Him. In grace, He acted. Thank you Father!
2. God sends an evil spirit to accomplish some work on earth. Some particulars of why and how God sent an evil spirit were discussed last week. This is a contrast to the sending of the Holy Spirit to Gideon to strengthen him to lead the fight against Midian.
3. This verse relates men of Shechem and treachery. Remember that there was a chiasm within this verse that emphasized the word "treacherous." This is reminiscent of the sons of Jacob dealing with Shechem the son of Hamor in Genesis chapter 34. And in case we didn't get that connection, a new character is introduced into this narrative, Gaal. He will make that connection for us.
4. Shechem wanted to marry Dinah after raping her in Genesis 34. Marriage is a contract or "covenant." Shechem tried to meet the terms for the marriage contract given deceitfully. Shechem acted as if he was already in a covenant. That was treachery. Then the sons

Judges Chapter 9 Part 6
Judges Chapter 9

of Jacob gave terms for a marriage contract deceitfully which they did not intend to honor. That was treachery.

The word for treacherous in Judges 9:23 means breaking a covenant. There already was a covenant between the “baal”/leaders of Shechem and Abimelech. The leaders of Shechem were now breaking an existing covenant. That means there are consequences.

5. It is interesting to note that the NASB 1995 titles chapter 34 as “The Treachery of Jacob’s Sons.”
6. As other commentators have said, the Gideon narrative is a turning point in the book of Judges. Yes, things were getting worse with each narrative. But after Gideon’s death things got worse rapidly. The Abimelech narrative showcases this.

Let us revisit that word “treacherously.” The word used for deceit in Genesis 34 is different than the word used in Judges 9. The sons of Jacob deceived Hamor and Shechem who then passed on that deception to the village of Shechem in Genesis 34. The intent was to make a marriage covenant. Here in Judges 9, there is an implied covenant between the people of Shechem and Abimelech when they anointed him king.

Here, then, the people of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech. The word used is for breaking an existing covenant. In both cases, Genesis chapter 34 and Judges chapter 9, the village of Shechem is visited with death and destruction after the treachery. A parallel is being drawn between Genesis 34 and Judges chapter 9. The parallels do not seem to be as striking as between John chapter 4 and Genesis 34, but they are there.

**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**

Judges Chapter 9 Part 6
Judges Chapter 9

brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers.

Again, this was covered previously. The point is that God had a reason for intervening in this narrative. Blood vengeance.

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.

Since the leaders of Shechem were breaking the covenant, they are testing the terms of it. They are on purpose provoking Abimelech. A king, by the usual terms of a covenant, is supposed to protect his people. If he can't he is not meeting his terms of the covenant.

The question becomes, who told Abimelech. Although we are not told, there is a new person, the "mayor" of Shechem that is a likely candidate. But that will come in a couple of verses.

Judges 9:26 Now Gaal the son of Ebed came with his relatives, and crossed over into Shechem; and the men of Shechem put their trust in him.

Gaal. This name is based on the verb "to loath." So his name means "loathing" per Unger.

Robbie Dean mentions that there is a similar sounding word with a slightly different spelling in the Hebrew, although it may look the same in the English transliteration. It is not a cognate but sounds similar: "gaal." It means kinsman/redeemer. That is Boaz in the book of Ruth.

Judges Chapter 9 Part 6
Judges Chapter 9

The action in the book of Ruth was “in the days when the judges governed.”

Now, people are just popping up out of “nowhere.” First we have Gaal. In a little bit we will have Zebul. When a con man detects someone or some people who are easy to mislead, they swoop down ready to separate the people from their money.

After my father died, my mother got a visit from a man claiming to be a termite inspector. He seemed dressed for the part and spoke authoritatively. So, when he insisted on inspecting the basement, she let him look. He returned from the basement with a handful of termites. He said she needed to take care of this problem immediately. She thanked him and said she would call him later for an appropriate time. She called me. I reminded her that she lived in a brick house. Termites like wood, not brick. He was a con man.

So we now have a stream of con men or men associated with con men. First of course is Abimelech. Then Gaal. Then Zebul who was already a community leader, perhaps someone like the mayor is in league with Abimelech. The problem is that the community had abandoned Yahweh and now worshiped Baal.

Ebed. Many commentators take this to be the noun “slave,” rather than a proper noun/name. So at first, the men/leaders (baal) of Shechem anoint Abimelech king. They put their trust in him, the son of a maid servant/slave. Now, after they realize their mistake, here comes the son of a slave named “loathing.” Loathing, the son of a slave. They put their trust in him. The sad irony is overwhelming.

Crossed over. I previously mentioned that important events sometimes follow someone “crossing over” a river. The text here does not say what was crossed over.

Judges Chapter 9 Part 6
Judges Chapter 9

Trust. This is the Hebrew word “batach.” It is one of the Hebrew words for faith.

Jeremiah 17:5 Thus says the Lord, “Cursed is the man who trusts (verb from the same root) in mankind And makes flesh his strength, And whose heart turns away from the Lord.

Psalm 37:5 5 Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, and He will do it.

Moving on...

Judges 9:27 They went out into the field and gathered the grapes of their vineyards and trod them, and held a festival; and they went into the house of their god, and ate and drank and cursed Abimelech.

To make the translation easily readable for an English reader, many translations add a couple of words. For instance, grapes are not mentioned but obviously intended. Here is a more literal translation from Young’s Literal Translation (YLT):

Judges 9:27 (YLT) and go out into the field, and gather their vineyards, and tread, and make praises, and go into the house of their god, and eat and drink, and revile Abimelech.

Interesting that here the people went to the vineyards to gather grapes. In Genesis 34 the sons of Jacob came in from the fields where the livestock was.

Judges Chapter 9 Part 6
Judges Chapter 9

Field. This is the same word used in Genesis 34. Why use this word in addition to “vineyards.” One translator (Holman Christian Standard Bible) translates this word as “countryside.” That may be a good word to use here for an English reader. The idea is that they are not inside the city but some ways outside of the city. This becomes important because this countryside is not behind the city walls.

Festival. This is not the normal word for festival. This is not a Jewish festival. This is more like a celebration of praise or rejoicing. They have gotten rid of evil Abimelech in their minds. Reminds one of the rejoicing in the Land of Oz, “Ding Dong the wicked witch is dead.” Since I find that there are some good words used in the Holman Christian Standard Bible for this verse, here it is:

Judges 9:27 (HCSB) 27 So they went out to the countryside and harvested grapes (word grapes is not in the Hebrew text but implied) from their vineyards. They trampled the grapes and held a celebration. Then they went to the house of their god, and as they ate and drank, they cursed Abimelech.

Per Trent Butler, “Based on the covenant nuances associated with Shechem, the leaders of Shechem may well have used the occasion to enter into covenant relationships with Gaal as their new leader. Part of such covenant making in the house of the lord of the covenant would be cursing their enemy, Abimelech. As the NET textual note says, “here the verb probably describes more than a mental attitude. It is likely that the Shechemites made an alliance with Gaal and were now trusting him for protection in return for their loyalty (and probably tribute).” In so doing they show “not only their foolhardy bravado but also their nonworship of Yahweh” (Matthews,109-10).”

Judges Chapter 9 Part 6
Judges Chapter 9

Yawheh? Oops. The forgot the real God. When you abandon God, he can remove his protective umbrella and even direct your discipline.

The actions contained in this verse took weeks. They first have to harvest from the vineyard. Then the grapes must be “trod.” The juice is collected and then fermented.

Cursed. The Hebrew word is derived from “to be small, light, easy.” (TDOT). I am not sure “cursed” provides a good translation to the youth of today. If I said they “disrespected” him, I think they might. The English language is changing as fast as technology. Words that meant one thing when I was a child mean something totally different today. Other words that were not said in public are now bandied about without batting an eye.

Here is an interesting chart of “disrespectful” behavior in physicians.

<https://www.ismp.org/resources/disrespectful-behaviors-their-impact-why-they-arise-and-persist-and-how-address-them-part>

**Judges 9:28 Then Gaal the son of Ebed said,
“Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that
we should serve him? Is he not the son of
Jerubbaal, and is Zebul not his lieutenant?
Serve the men of Hamor the father of
Shechem; but why should we serve him?**

Gaal the son of Ebed (or slave). Irony! While Gaal is asking “who is...” he himself is a no one, the son of a slave.

Now the reference to Genesis 34 is overt.

Judges Chapter 9 Part 6
Judges Chapter 9

I find this verse a little difficult to interpret. Here is Trent Butler's translation:

Judges 9:28 (Butler) Gaal, the son of a slave, said, "Who is Abimelech? On the other hand, who is Shechem? Should we be his servants? Is he not the son of Jerubbaal? Is not Zebul his administrator? Serve the men of Hamor, Shechem's father. Why should we, yes, even we, be servants?"

Judges 9:28 (Chisholm) Gaal son of Ebed said, "Who is Abimelech and who is Shechem, that we should serve him? Is he not the son of Jerubbaal, and is not Zebul the deputy he appointed? Serve the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem! But why should we serve Abimelech?"

So, now we have yet another person thrown into the mix, Zebul. But there is something more going on here. Up until this verse, we had hints that there might be something similar to the Genesis chapter 34 narrative. But here, there is no doubt: Up until this point, Shechem was the name of the village. Now, Shechem is a person, perhaps the original founder of the village of Shechem. Hamor was the father of Shechem. Hamor shows up in Genesis chapter 34.

Let us read Genesis chapter 34 to refresh our memories of what happened there.

When reading John chapter 4, some commentators are frantic to find another woman at a well to compare with the one in John chapter 4. The

Judges Chapter 9 Part 6
Judges Chapter 9

obvious choice is Dinah in Genesis chapter 34. But, things are backwards in the Genesis chapter 34 narrative.

1. Same location. In all these narratives, the location is Shechem. In John chapter 4 the author names the place “Sychar.” This might have been a nickname as opposed to the actual placename. That is not the issue here. In Judges chapter 9, most of the action revolves around the village of Shechem.
2. Woman “at the well.” In all three narratives, the initial issue deals with a woman. In Genesis chapter 34, this is Dinah who goes to the village to visit the women of the land. In Judges chapter 9, Abimelech makes his mother, a native of Shechem the issue. In John chapter 9, the issue is that the woman is a native of the town of Shechem or one close by.
3. In Genesis chapter 34, Shechem is the one whose actions caused the response reported in the rest of that chapter. He “forces” Dinah. In John chapter 4, Jesus is the instigator of the action. He slowly provides gospel information to the Samaritan woman. In Judges chapter 9, the parallel is not as clear. However, if one considers that the action is repeated multiple times we end up with three cycles: a) Jerubbaal as “ruling,” b) Abimelech as king and c) Gaal as usurper. I am using the term “usurper” as Merriam-Webster defines it, “one who seizes and holds office, power, position, etc., by force or without right.” In this case Gaal did not have the right to become the leader since in order to do so would cause the leaders of Shechem to break the covenant with Abimelech, which they did.

Judges 9:29 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.”

Judges Chapter 9 Part 6
Judges Chapter 9

Judges 9:29 (Chisholm) “If only these men were under my command, I would get rid of Abimelech!” He challenged Abimelech, “Muster your army and come out for battle!”

The point is this. These people started in spiritual revolt against God. They “abandoned” God. The sons of Israel had and continue to have a covenant with God. But they abandoned God and His covenant with them. But God is faithful. The covenant is still in effect. The current dispensation of the Church is an interlude while the Jews are out of the land and continuing in unbelief. It is true there is a Jewish nation and that they are being regathered to the land in unbelief. At the point of the Rapture, the final years of the Jewish Age will run their course: the Tribulation.

A second issue is the fact that they made a covenant with Abimelech to be king and to be ruled by him. When Gaal arrives on the scene, they break that covenant. So now they have not only broken the covenant with God, they broke a covenant with man.

What eventually happens when anarchy runs its course is destruction.