

Judges Chapter 9 Part 7

First, a little house keeping. I apologize for not having class last week. I had difficulty speaking to no one, an empty house. Even when a single member of the congregation showed up, I found it difficult to proceed.

If you listen to this on Facebook real time, consider physically showing up. For some, this is not practical. I understand. When I was working, it was sometimes difficult to get off work at 6PM and make it to class. Other times, I was so dead tired that I was concerned I might fall asleep at the wheel on the way home from church. Use your best judgment.

Sunday's classes were special. I enjoyed very much Phil's lesson on Proverbs chapter 12. The contrasts of good and evil found in that chapter of Proverbs reflected what exists today in our society. Herman's teaching on the New Covenant spurred many questions. That showed it engaged the whole congregation. It also enforced what I am seeing in my own study of the book of Judges. Sometimes the lexical definition of a Greek or Hebrew word does not necessarily communicate to today's audiences. Take for instance something I already taught, Judges 9:7

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.

I suggested that today, the word disrespect might communicate better, especially with the younger generation. Curse is kind of a Shakespeare term in some peoples' thoughts. Today, people disrespect you. Here is a partial quote from a website on how to disrespect someone. This is only step one of three. Steps two and three I don't want to repeat here:

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“The first thing you need to is make the other person aware of how you feel about him/her. The best way to disrespect one is by telling him/her what you think about them. Why would you consider wasting your time in trying to be considerate with people who deserve to be humiliated? Such stubborn people need to be told what they really are and you can do that by making things personal. Initially, try with words, say harsh thing, leaving no ambiguity about how you feel.”

site: <https://www.stepbystep.com/how-to-disrespect-someone-23529/>

So, in Abimelech’s day, the people of Shechem were saying out loud what they thought of him. They were disrespecting him.

Now, for “~~old~~” “experienced” people like myself, coming up with synonyms for the lexical entries is challenging. But I am aware that translation like teaching the Bible depends partly on who the audience is.

This week, I will try to finish chapter 9. However, I will reserve the right to revisit topics as needed. I find myself skipping over some words and focusing on others.

Last week, we saw that the people of Shechem had a party where the wine flowed freely at which they disrespected Abimelech. Cursed is probably a better translation from the lexicons but less understood in our culture as I already said. Then Gaal, who may have been drunk called Abimelech out. Of course, Abimelech was not at the party so Gaal wasn’t facing his opponent.

Have you ever seen a little dog on one side of a fence barking ferociously at a big dog on the other side of the fence? Now, take away the fence and the little dog will run and hide. Or, it will get chewed up by the big dog. So Gaal is a little dog disrespecting Abimelech with men of Shechem as his audience.

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 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!”

Abimelech was not at the party. He did not hear directly the words of disrespect. Gaal is like the little dog barking from afar. Abimelech is the big dog with many thugs in his gang.

Judges 9:30 When Zebul the ruler of the city heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger burned.

Ruler. This is not the word “baal” that we have seen so far for the leaders of the city. Now we have the word we expected to see, the Hebrew word *sar*. The author of this book does not explain the difference. It may have been that once Abimelech became king, that he installed Zebul as his representative or governor over Shechem and surrounding areas, reporting directly to him.

Anger burned. Remember, when someone is angry in Hebrew, their “nose burns.” So it is here.

Judges 9:31 He sent messengers to Abimelech deceitfully, saying, “Behold, Gaal the son of Ebed and his relatives have come to Shechem; and behold, they are stirring up the city against you.

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Sent. Sent on a mission or with a purpose.

Messengers. Same word as “angel.”

Deceitfully. Zebul is aligned with Abimelech, not Gaal. The “Shechem” valley seems to have been a constant place of deceit. Genesis 34 started us off with deceit in almost every verse. When we get to John chapter 4, the woman at the well tries to evade answering Jesus’ questions using deceit. In a sense, Zebul was right because the inhabitants had entered into a covenant with “king” Abimelech. But he was a bad king. And now the inhabitants have entered into an agreement with someone else. Zebul is not following the wishes of the people at Shechem. This is a case in which no one is right. All have abandoned the living God.

Judges 9:32 Now therefore, arise by night, you and the people who are with you, and lie in wait in the field.

By night. So, Zebul is telling Abimelech what to do? Or perhaps he is just suggesting the best course of action based upon his perspective of living in Shechem. By moving at night their movements are hidden by darkness.

Lie in wait. In Joshua chapter 8, this word is used three times. Each time it is translated “ambush.” That is the meaning. Perhaps another way to translate this would be “set up an ambush.” Here, the ambush would be a total surprise. But then, the inhabitants surprised Abimelech by changing allegiance. They themselves had set up ambushes (our word) in verse 25. And that was before Gaal arrived on the scene.

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

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pass by them along the road; and it was told to Abimelech.

This word is used four times in this chapter so it is something we need to take note of. In a way, an ambush is a military action taken to deceive the enemy.

Deceit. This is a concept that runs through the book of Judges like a thread from the fabric of Scripture. Men are deceivers. At Shechem, Jacob was a deceiver. But behind the deceit is the Angelic Conflict with Satan as the Father of Lies.

Sometimes a story, especially a true story helps gain the attention of the audience. There is a story about Gerald Durrell a writer of animal stories, written by him about his own education as a young boy (book—My Family and Other Animals). He was intensely interested in animals. But, he was not interested in dry history full of dates to memorize. His mother acquired the help of a tutor who understood how to motivate a young boy to learn history. The topic of the lesson was Hannibal's defeat of the Roman army. One of the amazing feats that Hannibal accomplished was to cross the Alps (mountain range in Europe) with several elephants. The tutor focused on the elephants and their part in the victory. The young Gerald was all ears. If I remember, he ended up naming Hannibal's elephants.

Talking about ambushes and Hannibal, there is a short, to-the-point story of Hannibal's ambush of the Roman army at: <http://eskify.com/10-most-shocking-ambushes-in-history/>.

“This was another one of Rome's most devastating defeats, this time at the hands of their bane, Hannibal Barca. This was the largest ambush in military history. The Romans chased after Hannibal's troops, not

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realising it was simply a decoy. Now the Roman forces were split, just like Hannibal planned. He waited for the perfect moment, and then order (sic) a general attack. His men charged down from where they were hiding, and surprised the Romans. Behind them [that is behind the Romans] was Lake Trasimene [north of Rome in Italy], and everywhere else were Hannibal's troops, they had no way of escaping. Slowly they were all cut down. The ones that weren't killed were sold into slavery, not a single man escaped."

Ambush. It can be a very effective combat tactic.

Judges 9:33 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."

You shall rise up early. Interesting that the triliteral verb root for rise up early has the same Hebrew consonants as the place "Shechem." Was the author making a play on words?

Rush. Can mean "raid."

Whatever you can. Literally, "as your hand will find," per the Holman translation. Once again, the Hebrew goes to parts of the body to express something.

Judges 9:34 So Abimelech and all the people who were with him arose by night and lay in wait against (literally waited in ambush against) Shechem in four companies.

Judges 9:34 (HCSB/Holman) So Abimelech and all the people with him got up at night and waited in ambush for Shechem in four units.

Judges 9:35 Now Gaal 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.

Judges 9:36 When Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, “Look, people are coming down from the tops of the mountains.” But Zebul said to him, “You are seeing the shadow of the mountains as if they were men.”

What Zebul is saying is deceit. It is a lie, said to slow Gaal down from reacting. He was verbally ambushing him.

Judges 9:37 Gaal 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 diviners’ oak.”

Judges 9:38 Then Zebul 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!”

Now Zebul’s alliance with Abimelech is revealed.

Just as I am writing this lesson, I noticed something interesting. Zebul engaged in deceit. One might characterize him as a deceiver. Zebul

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characterizes Gaal's actions as "boasting." One might characterize Gaal as a boaster. Abimelech has the name "My Father is King." One might characterize him as arrogant.

This reminds me of a passage in the book of Romans that one might say summarizes the book of Judges:

Romans 1:28 And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer (Shechemites worshiped Baal not Yahweh), God gave them over to a depraved mind (remember God sent an evil spirit), to do those things which are not proper,

Romans 1:29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips,

Romans 1:30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,

Romans 1:31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;

Romans 1:32 and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

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I could just say I covered the entire book of Judges and go home. Except that the important part about God's faithful grace would be missed. In spite of all the failures of the people, God kept tapping his foot waiting for someone to have even a mustard seed of faith. And so He is even today.

Judges 9:39 So Gaal went out before the leaders of Shechem and fought with Abimelech.

He has to make good on his promise. And, he has to defend himself and his men.

Judges 9:40 Abimelech chased him, and he fled before him; and many fell wounded up to the entrance of the gate.

The ambush worked.

Judges 9:41 Then Abimelech remained at Arumah, but Zebul drove out Gaal and his relatives so that they could not remain in Shechem.

Now Zebul has shown his hand. He goes from pretending to be a friend of Gaal's to now being an active enemy.

Zebul drove out Gaal. The word for "drove" is from the same root as that used of God driving Adam out of the Garden of Eden.

Judges 9:42 Now it came about the next day, that the people went out to the field, and it was told to Abimelech.

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Judges 9:43 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.

Slew them. This is from the same root as the word for “smitten” in Isaiah chapter 53. The King James says “smote them.”

Judges 9:44 Then Abimelech and the company who was with him dashed forward and stood in the entrance of the city gate; the other two companies then dashed against all who were in the field and slew them.

Slew them. Again, this is the same word used in the previous verse which is also the word used in Isaiah chapter 53 for “smitten.”

Judges 9:45 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 sowed it with salt.

Fought against the city. Abimelech is fighting the city of his mother. He made the case that he was one of them. Now he is treating the people of Shechem as the enemy, like he treated the sons of Jerubbaal/Gideon.

All that day. There are several events in this chapter that take time to accomplish. This is one of those. Abimelech didn't just march into the city and take it. This was a day-long battle. Even so, that is fairly quick. The Shechemites were not prepared for this.

Sowed it with salt. What? What is sowing the ground with salt?

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Here is from Wikipedia:

“Salting the earth, or sowing with salt, is the ritual of spreading salt in the soil of conquered land by the conquerors, in order to, either symbolically or literally, prevent crops from ever growing there again, thereby preventing the conquered from rebuilding. It originated as a symbolic practice to indicate total destruction in the ancient Near East and became a well-established folkloric motif in the Middle Ages.”

This makes sense if he is talking about the fields where wheat and barley are grown. But this text in Judges chapter 9 would indicate the city itself was sown with salt. If inside the city, crops are not grown there, then what use is salting it? Would it have made walking on the salt difficult with sandals and no socks? Would the salt interact with leather sandals? There are many unanswered questions. What kind of salt? How much salt? Where did they get the salt from? Would salting the ground destabilize the soil?

Shechem was not the only city sown with salt. The Romans, when they conquered Carthage also salted it:

Again from Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salting_the_earth

“At least as early as 1863, various texts claimed that the Roman general Scipio Aemilianus plowed over and sowed the city of Carthage with salt after defeating it in the Third Punic War (146 BC), sacking it, and enslaving the survivors. The salting was probably modeled on the story of Shechem. Though ancient sources do mention symbolically drawing a plow over various cities and salting them, none mention Carthage in particular. The salting story entered the academic literature in Bertrand Hallward's article in the first edition of the Cambridge Ancient History (1930), and was taken up by others. In the 1980s scholars raised strong arguments calling into question the Roman salting of the Carthaginian fields.”

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Interesting comment, “The salting was probably modeled on the story of Shechem.”

This brings up the historical impact of ancient Israel. I have mentioned previously that Greece possibly picked up the idea of an amphictyony (loose confederation of city states) from pre-monarchial Israel. Here Rome apparently was aware of Israelite history and used some of it.

We often think of Israel as an isolated country trying to mind its own business and being invaded by foreigners from time to time. The historical impact of ancient Israel on Greece and Rome could be a fascinating study. Where ever God’s word is treasured and obeyed, there is impact. Historians today have missed this.

From: <https://www.renalfellow.org/2009/10/13/electrolyte-composition-of-dead-sea/>

“The Dead Sea, located between Israel and Jordan, is considered one the saltiest bodies of water on earth, giving swimmers a peculiar buoyancy when immersed. Interestingly, the electrolyte composition of the Dead Sea is quite different from that of ordinary seawater. The salt composition of most ocean water is 97% sodium chloride, whereas the salt composition of the Dead Sea surface water is only 30.4% sodium chloride with additional contributions from calcium chloride (14.4%), potassium chloride (4.4%), and a shockingly high magnesium chloride (50.8%).”

This is quoted because it highlights the fact that there are many different kinds of salt. Table salt is “sodium chloride.” Some people watching their sodium intake, use “potassium chloride” instead of regular table salt.

So when the Bible says “salt,” it doesn’t necessarily mean table salt. The Dead sea was not called the Dead Sea in the Old Testament. It was called

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the “Salt Sea.” And as the article from Wikipedia says, there are a variety of salts there. It is possible that salt from the Salt Sea was used to salt the city. But that is one of those questions that the text doesn’t answer.

Judges 9:46 When all the leaders of the tower of Shechem heard of it, they entered the inner chamber of the temple of El-berith.

We see repeatedly in the Bible, those who trust God are provided protection in one way or another. Take for instance Noah’s ark.

Here, the people trust in Baal and enter into the “temple” of (Baal) Berith. The word for “temple” is actually “house.” They have rejected the living God and have no real protection. This is repeatedly called “evil.” This evil is from God’s perspective. As Herman has said, evil is anything outside of the bounds of God’s Righteousness.

Judges 9:47 It was told Abimelech that all the leaders of the tower of Shechem were gathered together.

It is interesting when someone in the Bible is “told” about something. It doesn’t say how or who told them the information. For the Bible narrative, that is not important and might lead us on a wild goose chase. Still, curious minds would like to know. Perhaps God will explain this in heaven when we get there.

Judges 9:48 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 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.”

Mount Zalmon. The location of this wooded mountain area, is not confidently identified. It could be Mount Gerizim which is near Shechem.

Axe. Remember, the Israelites did not have iron. So this would have likely been a bronze axe.

Judges 9:49 All the people also cut down each one his branch and followed Abimelech, and 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.

One commentary made the remark that Abimelech first killed his brothers, his father’s sons. Then he killed his mother’s clan and the entire city of Shechem. And as we will see, that was still not enough destruction for him.

Judges 9:50 Then Abimelech went to Thebez, and he camped against Thebez and captured it.

Judges 9:51 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.

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Judges 9:52 So Abimelech came to the tower and fought against it, and approached the entrance of the tower to burn it with fire.

Here Abimelech is going to repeat his destruction of Shechem in Thebez.

Thebez. The exact location is uncertain. It was likely in the vicinity of Shechem.

Judges 9:53 But a certain woman threw an upper millstone on Abimelech's head, crushing his skull.

A certain woman. In the narrative of Barak, we know the name of the woman who killed Sisera. She was a hero or I guess the correct term is heroine. Here we do not know the name of the woman. It was unimportant to the narrative. She was likely a worshiper of Baal and hence not under the protection of the living God.

Crushed. This is not the word from Isaiah 53. This is a different word.

Judges 9:54 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.

Judges 9:55 When the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, each departed to his home.

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Judges 9:56 Thus God repaid the wickedness (evil) of Abimelech, which he had done to his father in killing his seventy brothers.

Here we have the point of this narrative. God acted.

Repaid. This is literally, “returned.”

Evil. This is one of the words that composes a thread running through the book of Judges. Anti-God activity meaning against the character of God, Righteousness. Did you take note on Sunday how often this word is used in Proverbs chapter 12 and how it is contrasted with the word for good? It is not just a theme running through the book of Judges, but also running through the entire Bible.

So God returned the evil of Abimelech back onto him. But, the only action we saw God take was to send an evil spirit.

Judges 9:57 Also God returned all the wickedness (evil) of the men of Shechem on their heads, and the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal came upon them.

Wickedness. This is the word for evil, yet again.

It is God’s prerogative to take “vengeance.” Romans 12:19 quotes Deuteronomy 32:35:

Romans 12:19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.

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As Douglas Moo says in his commentary on Romans, “It is not our job to execute justice on evil people; that is God’s prerogative, and he will visit his wrath on such people when he deems it right to do so.”

An arrogant man took control of a city calling himself “king.” A boastful man stirred up trouble in the town and led a revolt against the “king.” The king’s henchman in the city, a deceitful man, deceived the boastful man resulting in his being driven out of town. The king ends up being hit on the head with a millstone dropped by a woman. He is so arrogant that he would rather die by a man running a sword through him than have it said a woman killed him.