

Judges 08-05-09a

This is Friday, May the 9th, 2008. We continue our study in the book of Judges. We're in Judges chapter 9, looking at this aftermath.

Most people know the story of Gideon, if they know anything about the Bible and the Old Testament and the period of the Judges. But the story of his sons is much less well known, and yet it is a very fascinating tale. We are in the midst of it tonight.

We'll take a moment as we begin to address ourselves to God the Father individually and ensure that the ministry of His Spirit that has been given to each one of us is effective and that the things that we look at tonight will not just be a story and not just be something that we think about for a few minutes, but something that will make a difference in our thoughts and actions in the future. Shall we pray?

Father, it is such a refreshment to come to the end of a week. Many of us are glad to see the end of the week come and to find refreshment in fellowship and in the encouragement that comes from the shared enthusiasm that we have for Your plan and Your purpose and for the truth of Your word.

We thank You for the Lord Jesus Christ, who is revealed in every page of the Scriptures. He is our Savior and our Redeemer. He is our hope of the future, even as He is our righteousness and our peace and our sanctification in the present.

We pray that as we study this particular section of Your word tonight, that we will gain insight and understanding not only into what Your word says, but also into what it means to us, and that we will not be nominal Christians or superficial Christians, but we will be those who by faith and patience inherit the promises. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, this is a very interesting section to me. There is so much to be gained by looking at the way God has arranged the material in these stories. Many details are left out.

Other details are included. It always leaves us asking the question, well, why is the story told this way and not some other way? Why does this person have this name and not that name? Every word that proceeds from the mouth of God is powerful. It is something that affects our lives.

Jesus told this to Satan, to his face: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." These sections of Scripture that we have are sometimes inscrutable when you first glance at them, but as we study and as we meditate, some fascinating truth comes to light. You will remember that Gideon has shuffled off his mortal coil.

He's history. He's out of here. He's resting with his fathers up there in Ophrah.

His 70 sons were in play. It's kind of like if you think the political scene is interesting at this particular time with two Democrats fighting tooth and nail to try to gain the upper hand and get their party's nomination, well, there were potentially 70 such individuals being drawn into the vacuum left by Gideon's death. Somebody's got to run the ephod and the tourist business and so on in Ophrah.

Somebody's got to take over the family business, so to speak. Gideon has sort of come full circle. His father ran an idolatry shop there, and Gideon tore it all down and built an altar to the Lord, but before too many more years passed, well, he's created essentially the same thing with the golden ephod.

It's interesting because the kids in the back are looking at a story where you have the Urim and the Thummim, and I made a fresh model. You remember my little two-dimensional models of the Urim and the Thummim that have the Alephs on one side and the Tavs on the other, but I did it right this time for them, and it's got the old Hebrew script, which would probably actually have been engraved on there. The old Aleph, it looks kind of like a golf club or like an eighth note sideways with the end bit off, and then the Tav just looks like a big X. If you get two Alephs, you get these two things, and they're like flat dice.

They'll either come up heads or tails, and heads is Aleph; Urim begins with Aleph. The word Ur is the Hebrew word for light, and as the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, what's the first thing God says in recorded history?

What's the very first statement we have from God? If you start reading chronologically in Genesis, what's God's first quote? "Let there be Ur. Let there be light."

Light is the first thing God creates here, and so the Urim are the lights, and so if you get two Alephs, you get two lights. That's the first thing. That's the head of the list.

That's the beginning of the alphabet. Tav, or Tau, is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It's the Z. Actually, the Hebrews call it an Alephbeit, because Alephbeit, gimel, dalet, hei, so the Hebrew Alephbeit begins with Aleph and ends with Tau.

Tau, like several other consonants in Hebrew, has a hard and a soft form. Beit, if it's a hard Beit, sounds like the letter B. If it's soft, it sounds like V or a W. Tav is the same way. If it's hard, it sounds like a T. If it's soft, it's TH.

It's a dental kind of a consonant, and so you have Thummim, and Thummim is related to the word we're going to see tonight that means perfect, Tam, Tam, Thummim, and of course the Im is the dual, or the plural. The dual is important, because if you have Urim, Im is the doubled form, and so you have two lights. If you have two Tavs, you have two perfections, or you have Thummim.

So, somebody comes up, and you'll notice that many of the questions that the kings ask the high priest when they're inquiring of the Lord, he called the high priest and he inquired of the Lord, "What shall I do?" When you read those questions, most of them are yes and no type of questions. The Philistines are in camp around about, shall I go up? In the Scriptures it might say, "And the Lord replied, 'Yes, you shall go up,'" but basically the high priest threw the lots, cast the lots, and he got two heads, he got two Urims, and that's a yes. If you get two Xs, two Tavs, that's a no, and remember Saul for a period of time kept inquiring of the Lord, and the Lord wouldn't answer him.

"Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, your sins have hid His face from you, you will not hear," and Saul kept inquiring of the Lord, and it says the Lord gave no answer. Well, that's an Ur and a Tav, that's a yes and no, it's indeterminate, doesn't say yes or no, and no matter how many times he threw them, he never could get two to come up, couldn't get a pair, and God just refused to let them fall with a yes or a no, and he finally ends up having to go to the Witch of Endor because he's out of ideas.

These things are fascinating to me, and some of this comes into play in our study in Judges because after Gideon has his great success and he asks all these guys for an earring out of the loot from the enemy, he gets that 42 pounds of gold and he makes a golden ephod, and the ephod is that portion of the vesture of the high priest that contains the breastplate in which is the pocket where you keep the Urim and the Thummim, where you keep these lots that are cast to determine God's will. Remember, it's got the rows of stones representing the tribes, and inside you've got these indicators of God's will. And so Gideon basically makes an ephod, and what does that tell you? People are going to come there to find out what is God's will.

Well, cast some lots for me and tell me what I should do. Should I buy this field? Should I plant this crop? Should I dump this wife? What should I do? And you get the idea that it was rife corruption. Somebody comes in and says, "You know, I know that Ebul is going to be coming in here tomorrow and ask you whether or not you ought to buy my field. Well, I'll give you 10 shekels if you'll have it come up two heads."

And, you know, there's graft and corruption and all kinds of things, and pretty soon it turned into just rank idolatry. People started worshipping the golden image itself.

Even though it was of a holy object from the Law of Moses, they had taken something legitimate, made a false copy of it, and turned it into something illegitimate. Is there gold in the tabernacle? Is there gold in the holy place and the Holy of Holies? Of course. Is there an ephod associated with the worship of God? Of course.

But when you take those things and pervert them, they become evil. This has happened today, and I don't need to extend the application. Just look around.

Things that are right and holy and proper in the Word of God for the church have been taken and copied in an illegitimate way and turned into idolatry. And now we have a cult of personality and a cult of emotion and a cult of superficial, almost voyeurism, where people get to see a show, whether it's healing or tongues or holy laughter or just a putting forward of fellowship with believers in the place of fellowship with God. You think,

well now, and it's a really hard thing to point this out, who could walk into a wonderful, friendly fellowship where people are shaking your hand and asking questions and hope to see you next week and come to the weenie roast on Thursday night and so on.

How can that be wrong? Well, how can an ephod be wrong? It can be wrong if it gets put in the wrong place. Love for God comes first, then love for your neighbor as yourself. Jesus said, "If you love your father and your mother more than Me, you can't be My disciple."

And if you love your fellowship and your fellow believer more than God, if the reason you go to church is to get with the folks and to have fun conversations and sign up for trips and have activities and we're all going to go miniature golfing or whatever they do now, that's what they did back when I was a member of a youth group. People would go miniature golfing all the time, and the last couple of miniature golf courses I saw were rotting into ruins, so maybe it's video arcades and paintball or something now, but whatever they do, if that becomes a substitute, as great as it is and as proper as it is and as wonderful as it is, if it supplants and supersedes the desire for relationship with God, it becomes evil. What we're looking at tonight in Judges is the result when that happens.

Gideon didn't see it. Gideon lived out a full long life, died, got buried in the tomb of his father, and he said, "You know, that's a pretty good deal. I kind of like the fact that I put that ephod. Everybody's coming in, we've got the gold, we've got worship, God's probably pleased," and Gideon died at a ripe old age, but it sowed the seeds of destruction for the next generation and the failures of earlier generations in this country to teach the Word of God from the pulpit faithfully and to shrink congregations by preaching sin and preaching righteousness and preaching judgment so that you don't get a big happy glad conglomeration of people who assemble for the wrong reasons.

By failing to inculcate and failing to emphasize and failing to hold the hard line on the doctrines of the Word of God, we have a generation of marshmallow-soft Christians and a puffy, air-filled kind of a Christianity that has no real substance, and when pressure comes, it collapses like a cheap sponge.

There's just no strength, there's no resistance, there's no fortitude in it. As long as we're singing songs and having campfires and everybody is smiling and shaking hands, it's great, but if temptation comes, if something scandalous happens and there's an opportunity for a big gossip fest or there's an opportunity to pile on or whatever, all of the baser instincts of human nature run free and feed on the sugar of that false Christianity, and there is no real strength. Some of us have seen this up close and personal, and you know what I'm talking about.

This is what happens here. When the next generation comes up, the hollow tree is cracked open and all of the rottenness is revealed. That's the background for what we see here.

So you had the son of Gideon with his concubine over in Shechem, half Canaanite, half Israelite, rising up. He's got the name Abimelech. Abi, my father; Melech, king.

Gideon said, "I won't be your king," but yet he names his son, "My father's the king." It's kind of tough to get that to stand up in court. "I'm not your king, but why did you name your son, 'My father's the king'?" Well, all I can tell you is I'm not the king.

I just set up the ephod. God is king. See the big golden ephod I set up? God is king.

Of course, I run the ephod. I own the land. I charge the admission.

I determine the outcomes because God wasn't having any outcomes on that thing. So it's a false front. It has the aspect of humility and service, but in reality, he has taken over.

And this is why there's such a power struggle in the vacuum left by his death. So Abimelech goes and slays the 70 sons of Gideon that are over in his hometown. Kills them all on one stone.

This is a ritual slaying. I don't recommend this movie, but if you have seen Mel Gibson's latest effort, *Apocalypto*, there's a scene they reproduce. Is it the Aztecs or the Incas that that thing is about? The Mayans.

Well, it's one of those old South American civilizations. But the point is, you can tell I wasn't really paying a whole lot of attention, but the one scene that struck me, it reminds me of this passage, because they're having a

famine or something, and the crops are not good. And so these Mayan priests are up on top of their ziggurat, and they're capturing hapless villagers out of the jungle and dragging them in.

And the protagonist of this story is one of these guys. They slap some blue paint on them, and then they bring them up one by one, and on the same stone, they lop off their head. And with the modern-day cinematic technology, I mean, this is pretty strong stuff.

You don't want to be having your small ones in there watching these, you know, gravity do its work. But they slay them on one stone, and the guy grins with his black, you know, they chew those leaves, and he's got this black-red stuff all over his teeth. And the priest is grinning, and these fat rulers are sitting up there, and they run another blue guy up there, chop off his head, and it bounces down the steps.

And everybody cheers, and they're kind of doing a sort of a cross thing down below, trying to catch these heads. And then the next guy comes up. But my point is, they slay them on one stone.

Why? Why don't they slay them out in the back, and just bring the heads? People want to see the slaughter, and they want to see the head roll down. It's a spectacle, and it's a ritualized execution. It's a ritual.

And it has a significance that goes beyond just the murder of these innocent guys. It has religious overtones, has political overtones. We are the guys in charge.

We have the power to dominate and do what we will with people over whom we have this hegemony, this power. So they slay them on one stone. This is what Abimelech does with the 70 sons of Gideon.

Lines them up, brings them up. There's a big crowd, and remember the firstborn that wouldn't kill the two kings, wouldn't kill wolf and raven? He said, "Oh, Dad, what am I doing killing kings?" He's the first to go. He gets his head chopped off.

Number two, number three, and he runs them all up. You can imagine the blood and the gore and the dismal scene after 70 guys are slain in front of this huge crowd. What message is that designed to send? It's all about the ritual.

It's all about the, you know, this is better than TV. What's the message? I am the guy. There is no other.

Anybody that opposes me, here you go. And I spare no one. These guys are my half-brothers.

They're all dead. Count the heads. They're all dead.

Although, he missed one. If he actually counted the heads, he'd say, "Wait a minute, short one." But you know, in all of that mess, how would you know? And Jotham escapes.

And by the way, you remember the Thummim, and I said Tam is the word for perfection and so on. Jotham's name is a contraction of two Hebrew words. The first is the name for God, Yahweh, or sometimes it's like Yehohanan becomes Jonathan, and the Yeho prefix gets squashed to just Y-O, or in this case, J-O.

But this is the Jehovah piece, if you will, the Yeho or Yahweh prefix. And the last part is Tam, or it means perfect or honest. It's the very same root that you have in the Thummim.

Yahweh is perfect. This is Gideon's youngest son. And you think, well, was Gideon kind of coming around there at the end? Why did he name his son, "Yahweh is perfect"? Yahweh is the sum, the summation.

That's what Jotham's name means, and he's the one that escapes. And this is going to be made clear, that the significance of Jotham's name is going to come out in what happens, because Jotham gets up there in the rocks and tells this story that we covered last time about the bramble. "Well, if you want me to be your king, come and rest in my shade," all of these tall trees trying to crawl under this thorny little bramble.

And the curse is pronounced there from Mount Gerizim. We studied that last time. And so, it tells us, and what we pick up tonight is that Abimelech, after he slaughters all of his brethren, and the curse is pronounced on him by the only one who escaped, it tells us in verse 22 of Judges chapter 9, "Abimelech ruled over Israel three years.

Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem.” These are the guys that put him in office, but God sends an evil spirit between them, “and the men of Shechem deal treacherously with Abimelech.” And we have a little parenthesis here, a little parenthetical remark: “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.”

So, Abimelech is no better than the men of Shechem, and the men of Shechem are no better than Abimelech, but they have been in cahoots, and God sends this spirit of division in their midst. Now, have we seen this theme before in the book of Judges? Well, think back to the last time we had a battle in this book. How does Gideon prevail over the Midianites? He crashes the pitchers and raises the torches, and everybody yells, and the Midianites kill each other.

God says, “I can get three hundred guys, and I'll get the enemy to basically slay themselves.” Well, this is the theme in the next generation. God is basically going to take these evil men and pit them against each other, and they will wipe each other out, essentially.

So, it says, “The men of Shechem set men in ambush against him on the tops of the mountains.” Now, when it says against him, this is against his regime, against the order that he had established. They're not waiting for him to come out of whatever he's using for a palace, but his couriers, his messengers, his enforcers, all of his minions and his followers are getting attacked and robbed and beaten and so on.

They're ambushed and robbed all along the road. So, this comes back to Abimelech: “Well, we didn't get the payroll this week because they held up the stagecoach. We're being opposed.”

And so, the people in the community say, “Well, this is very disruptive. This guy is not ruling well. His authority is being countered and his sense of order is disintegrating, and this guy is no longer qualified to rule over us.”

So, it says, “Gaal, the son of Ebed, came with his relatives.” Now, I don't think I mentioned this last time, but Gaal in Hebrew means foul, worthless, disgusting. And this is probably not the man's actual name.

It is probably a nickname. You know how they do, where a name will be switched around, where it's supposed to mean one thing and it ends up being slightly changed to mean something else. Because I can't imagine anybody looking, you know, the midwife comes out, “Well, you have a son,” and Ebed is there and he says, “Well, I'm going to call him foul.”

You know, maybe he had problems as a child and had to be changed a lot and they would name him that, but it just seems very unlikely. But that's his name. I mean, there is no good use of the word Gaal.

It means something stenchful and disgusting and just foul. And I mean, you don't find people today named foul. “Hello there, I'm Foul Smith or Foul Jones.”

People just don't name their children this. It's a disgusting term, but that's his name. And son of Ebed, Ebed is the word that means slave.

Now, this is very interesting, and I was working on this. In fact, I almost made myself late because I got on the trail of this by accident. But I got to wondering, I thought, you know, this word looks awfully familiar to me, this Ebed.

I was reading along and I thought, you know, it starts with that, that ayin and it's, it's ayin and then bet and then, you know, Ebed, Ebed, why is it, why is it catching at the edges of my conscious mind here? And it dawned on me that this is the noun form, Ebed, E-B-E-D. That's a noun that means slave. But you remember how, and it's from the verb Abad that means to serve.

Do you remember in Hebrew, I've told you this many times, how do you make a gerund, how do you make an I-N-G word in Hebrew? You take, instead of A-A, Abad, you say O-E, Obed. Obed is the gerund form, it means the one who is serving. And there's a difference in one who is serving and servant.

Servant is an identity, serving is a function. You can be serving without being a servant, right? And there's all the difference in the world just by the pointing. Well, you know who Obed is, right? Ruth marries Boaz and they have a child and Naomi takes care of it and his name is Obed.

And Obed is the father of Jesse, who is the father of David. By the way, Jesse is an interesting word as well because it's Yeshi, and if you, if you add a little bit to that you get Yeshua. You know, it's just one step away from Yeshi to Yeshua and it's just a kind of a short form.

But, anyway, names are very, very fascinating. But instead of being Obed here, this is Ebed, and there's all the difference in the world because this is foul boy, son of slave. I mean, it's, and, and it, it just reminds us that God is pitting these evil people against each other.

Now, here's the application. Think about this. Remember what the Bible says, "Fret not thyself because of evil men. Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord."

Right? It's a hard thing because we want to be judge and jury and executioner, especially executioner. And this, this, you remember many times we've talked about what it means to judge. We are supposed to discern.

"Note those who walk not according to this rule and separate from them." Paul tells the church, note who is faithful and who is not and get away from the people who are not faithful. Bad company corrupts good morals.

Well, how do you know bad company? It's more than a band. It's a category of people. You have to be old to appreciate that.

Yeah. How do you know who's, who to separate from? How do you know who not to really be chummy with? You've got to discern. You have to, you have to draw judgment.

Why does the Bible say, "Judge not lest you be judged"? Because judging means after I have made that discernment and I have, I have perceived that you are a rascal. Well, now I'm going to punish you. I am going to mete out some consequences to you because you are a bad person.

So I'm going to talk about you and I'm going to undermine you and I'm going to, I'm going to cause others to look askance at you and I'm going to make you a pariah and a heathen and a tax collector to everyone I know. And I'm going to cold shoulder you and I'm going to undercut you and I will make you pay because you have annoyed me. You have angered me.

You have wronged me in some way. You have messed with the wrong Marine. And now comes payback time.

That's judging. We are supposed to discern. We are supposed to identify those who are faithful and those who are not.

And we take certain steps accordingly, but we are not in the position to punish. And this is why God says, "With the judgment with which you judge others, you will be judged yourself." Well, obviously that's not just perception, is it? "Well, the perception that I perceive others, I'm going to be perceived myself."

No, that doesn't make any sense. But if you are ruining reputations, if you are gossiping and maligning and bad-mouthing someone, you will die by that same sword. If you financially harm someone, if you ensure that their stuff is taken away, you call up the city and have their stuff impounded or I don't know what it is you might do.

But those consequences will be stored up on the day of wrath. They will come back down on your head exponentially. So it's important for us to be wise and be discerning, but having perceived and having noted, that's as far as it goes.

We can take steps ourselves to make sure that we are not defiled by the garment spotted by the flesh, right? Hating even the garment. Notice it's the garment, not the person. We don't hate the person with the corrupt flesh.

Hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. This is the loss of righteousness due to failure and apathy and indifference and disobedience and unfaithfulness. We hate that garment.

We don't touch that unclean thing. That's as far as it goes. Well, these men, and again, by way of application, think about Ebed and his son, foul boy, and think about the men of Shechem.

Has any good thing come out of Shechem? Can you think of anything good that happened at Shechem? This is where Dinah got raped. This is where the people involved in that got slaughtered and the animals were hamstrung. Bad things always seem to happen in Shechem.

And the men of Shechem are going to pay the price here. So they instigate this thing. They get this plot.

And Gaal goes up and he moves into Shechem. We don't know where he came from. But it says he came with his brothers, with his relatives, and crossed over into Shechem.

And he became the next big thing. He's the new kid in town. Abimelech is old, out with the old, in with the new.

Here's Gaal. And we now love what is foul. We love that which smacks of servitude.

And you can draw your conclusions about that as well. Back in the 1950s, the communists actually published documents in the Soviet Union talking about how to overthrow the United States from within. And they said, in the event that we don't actually get into a pitched battle or exchange nuclear warheads or whatever, how can we wipe out the capitalists? We have to encourage them.

We can put our agents and our sleepers and different people in. And what we want to do is glorify the sloppy and the shabby and the mundane and the tacky and the cheap and the low quality. We need to replace the American love of quality and integrity and character with something else.

We need to swap out what is good and put in what is bad and rot their character so that they will lose the will to fight and lose the will to resist and lose the will to defend their way of government and their way of life and their whole political and economic philosophy. We've got to disassociate them from that by turning their affections to shallow things, tawdry things. Let's promote pornography.

Let's promote cultural trends where fashions are bad. I mean, this is in the documentation. They wrote this up and said, here's how to subvert this culture.

They are too wedded to their Puritan roots and their biblical mores and so on. We've got to drive a wedge in there and we'll work with the youth and we'll promote sloppiness and rebellion and rejection of authority amongst the youth. Counterculture.

And of course it probably would have happened anyway and it probably largely did happen without their instigation. But they recognized that this is the way to rot the fabric and the foundations of American society, is to promote the foul. Well, the Shechemites are going to do this to themselves.

They fall in love with the foul, literally. The men of Shechem put their confidence in him, it says in verse 26. And he's got the big new message.

Abimelech is not doing a good job. I can do it better. You know, we hear these messages every election cycle.

So, once they put their trust in Gaal, they say, "Wow, this is great, we're going to have a whole new age." And so they go and gather from their vineyards and trod the grapes and they make merry. The word tread is interesting here because the Hebrew word for the way in Proverbs chapter 2, when it talks about God preserves the way of His saints and so on, it's the word Derek, D-E-R-E-K.

It's a man's name in English even. And Derek means the way. And it has the idea of your feet treading a path.

And that's the verb form that's used here. When it says they trod the grapes, it's the same root as Derek. But this is a bad way instead of a good way.

Instead of treading the way of righteousness or treading the way of faith, well, they're treading these grapes. And in a way, they're treading the grapes of God's wrath. So, they went into the house of their god and ate and drank and cursed Abimelech.

And of course, this is an easy thing to do when the guy is not present and doesn't have any troops around. Boo on Abimelech and worse, you know, whatever they were saying in Hebrew. And so then, foul, the son of slave, said, "Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should serve him?"

You see this looking up from the gutter and dragging down. I mean, Abimelech is no great shakes, but this guy makes Abimelech look like a choir boy. Now, who is Abimelech and who is Shechem that we should serve him? Is he not the son of Jerubbaal and is not Zebul his lieutenant, or literally the word means overseer, his hatchet man, his enforcer, his XO?

Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem, but why should we serve him? Let's go back and get rid of these guys that are our immediate predecessors. Let's shake off.

And it puts you in mind of after Solomon's death, who became king after Solomon died. Anybody remember? Remember Rehoboam? And he says, "Well, I wonder how I should implement my government here." Well, in the multitude of counselors there is safety, so let me ask around.

And so he asks the old guys and they say, "You know, you need to take it slow. You need to continue the policies of your father. People will put your trust in you and everything will be well."

Then what does he do? He goes to the young bucks and he says, "Well, what should I do?" "Oh, you crack down harder." And so he comes back and he says, "Well, you know, my little finger is thicker than my father's waist. If you think he was bad news, wait till you see me in action."

And of course he winds up just, you know, the kingdom was his to lose and he lost it in a big way. And you have Jeroboam coming on the scene and the prediction of Samuel where the cloak is torn in half and Samuel turns around to Saul and says, "The kingdom is going to be torn from you and given to another." Well, that kingdom is going to be torn further after David's day.

So, who is Abimelech? Who is Shechem that we should serve him? Let's wipe the slate clean. So, "If only these people were under my authority," which you have in the New King James. Let me ask you if you remember, what was probably the most frequent word in the preceding section that we've studied? From the time we started studying the story of Gideon, what's the word we've seen more than any other? It's a part of the body.

Y-A-D. Yad. Hand.

God delivered them into the hand of the Midianites and then God delivers the Midianites into the hand of Gideon. Hand, hand, hand. It just keeps going and going and going all through there.

Raise your hand against these kings and so on. Well, literally here, and this is the shame. We should all learn Hebrew.

We should just stop right now. We should all learn Hebrew and then just study out of Hebrew and just skip the English. It does not say, "If only these people were under my authority."

It literally says, "Who will give these people into my hand? Who will give these people into my hand?" There is no if only. There is no authority. It's hand.

"Who will give these people into my hand? Give it to me. Let me have the reins. Let me have power over these people.

I'll show you how it's done." And that theme, because this ties this whole section together, it's all about power. Are you going to operate in your own power or are you going to submit yourself under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you in due time? "Who will give this people into my hand? Then I would remove Abimelech."

So he said to Abimelech, he sent a messenger, no doubt, "Pump up your army and come out. Whip up your boys. Saddle up.

Let's go." Zebul, the overseer, the ruler of the city, heard the words of Gaal. Zebul is the governor of the city of Shechem under Abimelech, who of course has got even more territory.

So he says, “Zebul, you keep your eye on Shechem. I'm going to administrate. I've got some other guys watching these other counties, so to speak.”

So Zebul is sort of the mayor of Shechem and he answers to Abimelech. So he heard the words of worthless, disgusting, the son of a slave. His anger was aroused because he'll be out of a job if this succeeds.

So he sent messengers to Abimelech secretly. Now that's what it says in the New King James. In the New American Standard, it says he sent messengers to Abimelech deceitfully.

There are other translations, like the New English Translation, that say, “When Zebul, the city commissioner, heard the words of Gaal, son of Ebed, he was furious. He sent messengers to Abimelech, who was in Arumah.” This is the beauty of having parallel versions.

If you have one of those parallel Bibles and you're working through and all of a sudden everybody's pretty much saying the same thing and then they just all diverge, that's your big clue. It's like there's a lump under the carpet. You say, “Well, I don't know what's under there, but something's not right because it's not laying down flat and they haven't been able to decide what the Hebrew actually says.”

Well, you and I, all of us that have been through Genesis know exactly what this word is. “Now the serpent was more” what “than any beast in the field?” Arumah. That's the word here.

Crafty. Slick. Clever.

Cunning. The man with the plan, or the man with the devil with the plan, or whatever it may be. Arum.

Arum means manipulative, crafty, wise in the ways of Machiavellian pragmatism. That's how I would put it in the lexicon. So he doesn't just, he's not like a sort of a shallow, overweight little mayor saying, “Oh, help, help, something bad's happening in the town.”

This guy didn't get to where he was without being sharp. And he thinks about it. Even before he talks to Abimelech, he says, “I've got to find a way to ride this storm out and not lose my job.”

So he thinks about it and he crafts his message to gain a certain kind of response. You get the idea that Abimelech may not have been the sharpest knife in the drawer and Zebul, remember Baal-zebul? This Zebul is nobody's fool. And you get the idea that he knows how to spin things so that Abimelech will react in certain ways.

There's a reason why the Bible puts Arum here. It's not deceitful, and it's not in some unknown town called Aruma, although we're going to see a reference that sounds like it is. And it's not just secretly.

It's craftily, with malice of forethought, he crafts this. He sends messengers to Abimelech and he says, “Hey, take note. Gaal, the son of Ebed, foul, the son of slave, and his brothers have come to Shechem, and here they are fortifying the city against you.”

Now, has the Bible said anything about fortifications? How are the men of Shechem harassing Abimelech? There's nothing about fortification. They're up in the mountains waylaying people.

They're doing snatch-and-grab work up in the passes. But there's no good guy to root for here, because Abimelech is a murdering devil, Gaal is nothing to write home about, and Zebul is lying to his Lord to create a certain response. So this is like watching, and I actually have never watched them, but I understand that if you watch the Mafia movies and The Godfather and Goodfellas and some of those, the reason I don't watch them is I don't think there's anybody to root for.

You're going to watch The Godfather? Who's the good guy? There are no good guys. In the same way that I never watched Gandhi.

Just millions of people in white garments and there's nobody to root for. So why would I watch that movie? I've never seen any of the Godfather movies there are. I don't watch Mafia movies.

I don't care. I just hope they all kill each other. Let there be a St. Valentine's Day and be done with.

But that's kind of what this story is. Who are we rooting for here? Are we rooting for Gaal? Are we rooting for Abimelech? Are we rooting for the men of Shechem? Are we rooting for Zebul? No, we're just kind of watching the train wreck in slow motion here.

This is a good place for us to pause and take our break because we're going to see the wind that was sowed by Gideon turn into a whirlwind that annihilates his house and everything that he did in the subsequent generation. It is a warning to the entire nation of Israel. They're all aware of what's going on down here, and this is a message.

It's a pantomime. It's a play designed to wake Israel up to the consequences of their apathy and indifference towards God Himself. Well, we'll pause here and take our break.

We'll come back and we'll see if we can conclude this story.