

Judges 08-05-09b

Let's resume our study now in Judges chapter 9. We see the burgeoning of badness all around Shechem. The seeds of destruction have begun to sprout and flower their weed-like fruit. And so as we pick up here in verse 30, again, Zebul, the ruler of the city, heard the words of Ga'al the son of Ebed, his anger was aroused, he sent messengers, take note, Ga'al the son of Ebed and his brothers have come to Shechem, and here they are fortifying the city against you." Well, we don't have any information from the word of God that that's what they were doing.

They were, you know, they were waylaying the stagecoaches and stuff up in the hills. They were doing the Robin Hood thing up on the roads. Now, therefore, get up by night, you and the people who are with you, and lie in wait in the field.

And it shall be, as soon as the sun is up in the morning, that you shall rise early and rush upon the city. And when he and the people who are with him come out against you, you may then do to them as you find opportunity. So he basically says, the early bird catches the worm.

If you want to put an end to Mr. Fowle and his henchmen, his robber bands, and his little extemporanized militia, why, hide in the field, and he thinks you're going to be coming down the road, but you'll actually kind of flank him. They'll be in the bushes beside the road waiting to ambush, while you come up behind and ambush them. And you can see that Ga'al is the guy who is really thinking things out.

You don't get the idea that Abimelech is really a military genius, killing guys on a stone doesn't really qualify you for any sort of strategic merit badges. So then you can do to them as you find opportunity, do whatever your heart desires. So Abimelech, of course, takes this advice, because he's got no original ideas of his own.

He and all the people who are with him rose by night and lay in wait against Shechem in four companies. When Ga'al, the son of Ebed, went out and stood in the entrance to the city gate, Abimelech and the people who were with him rose from lying in wait. When Ga'al saw the people, he said to Zebul, look, people are coming down from the tops of the mountains.

But Zebul said, no, those are shadows, you're seeing things, that's the rising sun, shadows are moving, that's not people, pay no mind. So Ga'al says, look, people are coming down from the center of the land, and another company is coming from the Terebinth tree, remember the famous Terebinth tree of Shechem. Look I'm telling you, I think I see people coming, I see live people, I see people coming.

Zebul says, hey, yeah you do, where's your mouth now? Let's hear you talk some more about what you're going to do to Abimelech. And he drops all of his subterfuge, and he literally says, where's your mouth now? That's right, those are people, where's your mouth? Let's hear another speech. Here, I've got a box for you, stand up here and tell us what you're going to do to these guys now.

So Zebul is sort of taunting him and mocking him now. Where indeed is your mouth now, with which you said, who is Abimelech, that we should serve him? Are not these the people whom you despise? Go out, if you will, and fight with them now, Mr. Brave Man, Mr. Foul, head on up. So Ga'al gets this kind of, well, I'll show you kind of thing, so he goes out, leading the men of Shechem, and fought with Abimelech, and Abimelech chased him, and he fled from him, and many fell wounded to the very entrance of the gate.

So he went out, and he said, well, I've got to make good on what I said, and he leads the guys out. Well, then he gets routed, he comes running back in, and guys are dropping, and Ga'al is at the head of the sprint to get back into the city gate, and he just basically gets deeply embarrassed and humiliated by the men of Abimelech. So, Abimelech dwelt at Arumah, it says, and Zebul drove out Ga'al and his brothers so that they would not dwell in Shechem.

Well, I think that this, again, there is no known place called Arumah, and I think the text has been troubled here, and I think what this basically is trying to say is that Abimelech prevailed by craftiness. If there is, in fact, a town, if I've gauged this wrong, and there really isn't Arumah, then the name of that town basically tells you the same thing. Either way you interpret the passage, Abimelech, by craft, puts down for the moment this uprising by Ga'al.

And it seems like Ga'al as well. But I want to point something out before we go any further, just as an interesting foreshadowing. Remember when we first got into this portion of the story in verse 22, what does it say? How long had Abimelech reigned when the trouble started and his own people rose up against him? He went to the men of Shechem and that's how he got his big chair.

And now it's those same men of Shechem that have turned on him under the influence of Ga'al. How long had he reigned? Three years. And then this evil spirit starts festering and a little bit more time passes and these guys start waylaying people in the hills and some undetermined period of time passes.

But if you remember when we were studying the book of Revelation and we were looking at the career of the Antichrist, remember what happens to him after his three and a half years of peaceful rule? The very same thing happens to him. God was relying on Satan when he was Lucifer and he was the guardian cherub of the throne room and so on and Satan betrayed him and rebelled against him and turned on him. Well Satan has the Antichrist in his hip pocket and the Antichrist is going along great guns but then dissension breaks out in the ranks and suddenly there is trouble from within and the Antichrist has to start taking steps and the whole confederation starts to crumble apart and this is going to culminate at Armageddon.

But it crumbles from within and part of the problem is the Antichrist himself rebels against the Satanic plan and those are the seeds of the downfall and you can see sort of the same thing happening here. The men of Shechem are the ones that put Abimelech where he is and now they are going to essentially be the means of his downfall. There is a temporary victory, it looks like Abimelech has survived this coup attempt so to speak.

Gaal and his brothers do not dwell at Shechem. It came about the next day that the people went out into the field and they told Abimelech and this again is why I don't think Arumah is a dwelling place because they go out the next day into the field and they tell Abimelech, well if Abimelech is dwelling in Arumah then why can't they just walk out into the field and tell him stuff? I think this has been an editing attempt by a later scribe to try to make this a dwelling place and Arumah is a fairly rare word in Hebrew but I think it has connections all the way back to Genesis and this craftiness is going to be his undoing. The serpent succeeds in manipulating the man and the woman first and then ultimately the man in the garden but he shall bruise your head.

The curse comes on him. Well in the same way, so the next day after this is routed and Zebul, basically when Gaal and his men start running back in, Zebul has got the gate locked and they can't come back in and so he has got to flee. And so the next day the people went out into the field and they told Abimelech and so he took his people and divided them into three companies.

There were four before but now he divides them into three companies, shades of his daddy at the Midianite camp, three companies and he lay in wait in the field and he looked and there were the people coming out from the city and he rose against them and attacked them. Abimelech and the company that was with him rushed forward and stood at the entrance of the gate of the city and the other two companies rushed upon all who were in the fields and killed them. So Abimelech fought against the city all that day.

He took the city and killed all the people who were in it and he demolished the city and sewed it with salt. And this is the first occasion in the Bible where you have this sewing with salt idea. Why would somebody sew a place with salt? It's really a symbolic act.

How much salt would it take to actually render a place uninhabitable? But sewing with salt is, if you sew a field with salt, the soil is going to become unusable. It will not sustain or grow crops. And sewing the city with salt, he basically made sure that nobody would rebuild it any time soon.

And symbolically, in the same way that you, Abimelech is big on symbolism, you kill everybody on one stone, it sends a message, he sews the city with salt, it's like, I dare you to come back and try to rebuild this place, I sewed it with salt, I don't want this place used for anything. You can't even grow a crop here. Now when all the men of the tower of Shechem heard that, they entered the stronghold of the temple of the god Berit.

What does Berit mean in Hebrew? Baal Berit is the lord of what? Covenant. Berit is covenant. Baal Berit is the lord of the covenant.

This is the pseudo-god that is supposedly linked with Yahweh or the god of Abraham or whatever, but in fact it's a completely false representation of God. So they don't call him Yahweh, they don't call him Yahweh Elohim, he's Baal Berit, lord of the covenant. Well, there's

only one covenant.

That's the law of Moses. Well this is not the god of the covenant, this is the whole false worship system that has grown up in Israel. So the men of the tower of Shechem heard that the guys that had been caught out of the city had been slaughtered, they go to the stronghold of the temple of the god Berit and it was told Abimelech that all the men of the tower of Shechem were gathered together.

So Abimelech went up on Mount Zalmon, he and all the people who were with him, and Abimelech took an axe in his hand and cut down a bough from the trees and he took it and laid it on his shoulder. Then he said to the people who were with him, what you have seen me do, make haste and do as I have done. And once again that echoes back to the Gideon story, do what I do.

What you see me, remember he told the guys do what I do and he broke the pitcher, held up the torch, blew the trumpet, shouted, everybody did likewise. So Abimelech is doing the same thing but you note the contrast, Gideon at that time was fulfilling a mission from God using men that God had personally designated. This guy is an anti-Gideon and he's got his own agenda, he's got his three companies, he says do what I do and you would think well this cutting of boughs and laying them on your shoulder, normally this would be preparatory to the Feast of Tabernacles.

You would build shelters and God with us and that sort of thing. Instead this is going to be the destruction mode. So they cut down the boughs, they took it and laid it on his shoulder, he and the people cut down their boughs, followed Abimelech, put them against the stronghold and set the stronghold on fire above them so that all the people of the Tower of Shechem died, about a thousand men and women.

Then Abimelech went to Thebes and he encamped against Thebes and took it, but there was a strong tower in the city and all the men and women, all the people of the city fled there and shut themselves in. So you know what's in Abimelech's mind, well towers are no problem for me, I know what to do with these towers, you just get ready to burn them out. So Abimelech came as far as the tower and fought against it and he drew near the door of the tower to burn it.

It worked once, bound to work again. He had a bow on his shoulder, he told everybody else bring your branches and stuff, we'll do here what we did in Shechem. But a certain woman dropped an upper millstone.

You know there's two millstones, there's the flat one where you put all your grain and then there's the wheel and these are of varying sizes depending on, you know you've got your, it's kind of like your home mixer or your home blender versus the industrial ones they use in restaurants or cafeterias or mess halls or whatever. If you've ever been in a military mess hall, most of you haven't, or any kind of an industrial strength high volume food preparation area,

everything is just giant versions of what you have in your kitchen. They've got great bathtub sized bowls with these giant mixers and they can mix just vast hundreds of pounds of dough or whatever they're going to blend.

Everything is just bigger. Well, they had small home version millstones. You didn't have to have a gigantic thing with an ox going around because a woman couldn't lift that, but there were smaller ones and you could run these things around, the stone might weigh 20 or 30 pounds, but you could run that thing around and do a small batch of grain.

So she sees the guys coming down there with, you know, the matches and gasoline down there and she says, hey, wait a minute, you know, I heard what happened in Shechem. So she goes over to the food preparation area and she grabs this big stone and she totters over to the edge of the thing, looks over and drops it. About that time, Abimelech looks up and she crowns him, she crowns him king.

And now think about it though, think about this because the last time a bad guy leader died in conflict in this book was when? You think about Jabin, king in Hazor, you think about his general Sisera, and you've got Beric and Deborah and Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, and how did the erstwhile hero die? He got a little too close to a woman and bad consequences ensued. And once again, Abimelech dies at the hands of a woman due to something happening to his head. And so this is not accidental, at least not in the plan and purpose of God.

She drops a millstone on Abimelech's head and crushed his skull. Well, I guess so. You drop a 20, 30 pound rock off a tower and it hits you in the head, your minutes are numbered.

And so he called quickly to his young armor bearer and said to him, draw your sword and kill me, lest men say of me a woman killed him. And this is in the eternal and abiding word of God forever. His solution, it's kind of like, what are you going to do in Beirut right now? There is no good solution.

You've already been killed by a woman. You're just talking, you're a dead man talking. And the woman killed, there's nothing you can do.

And this not only looks backward, but for those of us who know the story of 1 Samuel, it looks forward because there's going to be another disobedient individual who is the king of Israel and is going to call out to his armor bearer, slay me. So his young man thrust him through. Remember Saul's armor bearer said, I can't raise my hand against the Lord's anointed.

But this guy doesn't have any such compunctions. And he says, well, you know, this is a bad scene here, looking at your head. He goes ahead and runs him through.

Thrust him through and he died. And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they departed every man to his place. And it's amazing that a single individual can have such an effect.

Not always. The PLO didn't go away when Yasser Arafat died. The Sunni militants in Iraq didn't go away when Saddam died.

But there are times when you cut the head off the serpent and the rest of the body just has nothing more to say or to do. And in this case, this guy with the force of his leadership and so on, when he's cracked in the head and thrust through with a sword, that's it. The rest of the people just say, well, why are we still standing here? They just go away.

They go to their place. So what happens? Jotham doesn't have to raise an army. He doesn't have to pull an Othniel or an Ehud or a Gideon.

He pronounces the curse of God on Abimelech and God brings it about. But people had to wait. It took well over three years before this guy finally gets his comeuppance.

But God brings it about and he sows the seeds of his own destruction. He appeals to fickle people who can't be trusted, who are willing to betray a leader. You ask yourself the question, this is my question, and I say this in the abstract, but you think about people who, let's say there's two couples and, of course, the people are married to each other, and then the husband and one couple and the wife and another couple go off and have an affair and they eventually divorce their spouses and get married to each other.

You wonder about the prospects for that marriage because both of you are now married to a person who was willing to betray the person to whom they're married. What kind of a person is this if you've done it once? What delusion are you under that they wouldn't do it again? You could ask the same question about Abimelech. He has appealed to men who are willing to throw off the current rulership and betray them and go a weird direction.

Well, surprise, surprise, they did it again with Gaal. He thinks that he's got them licked, but ultimately, and of course the men of Shechem are going to get punished because they were part of that original sin against the Lord God himself first and foremost and then against the 70 sons of Gideon who are apparently not guilty of anything. Scripture doesn't say that Jether or Jotham or any of these other guys are guilty of anything.

They're just all murdered and the only surviving son outside of Jotham is Abimelech. So the men of Shechem are complicit in that murderous crime and so God uses Abimelech to lay waste to them at the instigation of Mr. Fowl but then when he tries to repeat that performance, God uses the people of Thebes, it says, to actually a woman, one woman in the town, puts that whole thing out of action. So it tells us by way of summary in verse 56, Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech.

And that's something to ponder for a moment because we see wickedness take place. You think about Jotham watching the murder of his entire household and he could be looking to God and saying, where is the justice in this? And a month goes by, and six months go by, and a year goes by, and two years go by, and three years go by, and it looks like Abimelech is just sitting pretty.

And he's a fugitive and he's in fear for his life because if Abimelech can find Jotham, he's going to be number 71 of the dead guys.

Depending on, you know, the Bible just rounds off to 70. I don't know if he's number 70 or number 71 or was it 69 or 70 other sons that got killed. He's the last remaining guy and you know Abimelech is going to murder him on sight.

And he says, why am I a fugitive? What have I done wrong? And you can tell he's got some divine viewpoint because of that curse and that parable that he tells from the mountain. But he's got to live as a fugitive for three and a half years. And where's the justice? Where is the recompense? How long, O Lord? You can see a lot of the Psalms where people who were in captivity or people who were under oppression say, David himself, some of the Davidic songs, Lord, how long will my enemies prevail? How long will they oppress and sow all kinds of confusion and discord amongst the people I'm trying to rule in your name? And it requires patience.

God will balance the scales. This is the theme of Peter's first epistle. When you go to 1 Peter and he talks about the sufferings that believers experience in this world, we've memorized that passage.

After you have suffered a while, God perfects and strengthens you. You come into the inheritance. But as virtually all the New Testament writers point out, it requires faith and it requires patience.

And it's one thing to say faith and patience. It's something else to sit for over three years or thirty years. You think about Ezekiel and you think about Daniel and Hananiah and Mishael and Azariah and other faithful believers who got scooped up in the divine discipline of God's scourging of the southern kingdom of Judah with Nebuchadnezzar.

And how long, O Lord? When will the wrath be passed? Hide me in the shelter of the rock until your anger has subsided. And we sometimes have to just wait. God has larger plans, larger issues are in play and at work.

And the whole plan of God is not about us and about optimizing every day of our experience in this life. There are bigger things going on. And sometimes perfectly obedient and faithful believers have to endure suffering.

And if you have a question about that, think about the Lord Jesus. Did he deserve any kind of suffering? Did he deserve abuse? Did he deserve hardship? The birds of the air have nests, the foxes have dens, the Son of Man doesn't have a place to lay his head. What did Jesus do wrong? Absolutely nothing.

But scripture says he learned, he became intimately acquainted with obedience through the things that he suffered. Even though he didn't earn or deserve any of the abuse that came his way, certainly not in the week of the crucifixion, God worked it together for good. But it

requires the long view.

A lot of people have been thinking about this as our economy goes up and down. If you have investments, if you have anything related to stocks or almost anything except maybe gold, which went two and a half times its value in the space of a month or so. But you have to take the long view.

If you invest in things and they say, well, the value of your portfolio is X, well, a month later the value of your portfolio is X minus 0.7X, and it's down to like a third of its value. Well, a lot of people panic and say, well, I've got to sell these and invest in something else. No, you take the long view.

Jesus told the people with the talents, the guy that had the one and didn't do anything, why didn't you invest it with the bankers and let it accrue interest? Just put it there and leave it there, let it do its work. Take the long view, ride out. People generally do well if they don't panic and just by faith and patience let the magic of compounding do its work.

And it's the same thing with righteousness. Do you think Jotham finally felt vindicated when he heard that the woman dropped the rock on his half-brother's head? Interestingly, you don't see Jotham running in saying, well, I'm your next leader. If you look at the next verse there, the first verse in chapter 10, after Bimelech there arose to save Israel Jotham, the son of Jerubbaal.

Jotham says, look, that wasn't my ambition. It probably wasn't the ambition of most of the other brothers. It's somebody else that's going to become prominent.

But the point here is, commit it to God. God is working things out and we have to just take the long view and trust. There's a reason why things are the way they are.

And it gets wearisome and it gets tedious. But there's a reason why God does what he does. Well, this brings us now to chapter 10 and it talks about Tola.

We're going to have a couple of what they call minor judges. These are almost footnotes in the account. You think, well, why are these even in here? What can you learn from this? After Bimelech there arose to save Israel, Tola, the son of Pua, the son of Dodo.

Now, I've seen a lot of biblical names. A lady contacted me this week who's a distant cousin in the whole family. If you go back like six generations, she's descended from a brother of a guy we're descended from.

But she contacted me. She found something on the web that had my name on it and she contacted me. I was talking about the fact that there's so much confusion trying to trace your ancestors very far back.

Because in our family, everybody was believers and they always named their kids biblical names. So the whole generations, when you go back, you've got Samuels and Moses and

Davids and Jesses and all of these names going back. And there'll be like two or three generations in a row of Moses and a couple of generations of Davids.

And there's all kinds of Elijahs and Samuels. I've traced like six or seven different Samuels just in the space of two or three generations. It's just an old name.

Everybody named people. Have you ever seen anybody name their child Dodo? It's a biblical name. But it's kind of like Gomer for girls.

You don't find girls named Gomer. And you don't find boys named Dodo. You even find people named Ishmael.

But in Christian circles, there's someone amongst the tribe of Judah, if you go over to Chronicles, named Ishmael. And you think, well, it's a perfectly good name. Man of God and so on.

Ishmael, man from God, has a good meaning. But nobody names him Dodo for some reason. And it's strange because the root of this name is the same as the root for David.

Dawid or Dude. Now, there are people named Dude. At least I've heard people called that.

I assume that's their name. But D-W-D is the root. And it has the idea of being beloved.

And O is the suffix that means it's a possessive for the third person singular. You know, his wife or his field or whatever would have it. And so Dudo or Dodo basically means his beloved one or something along that line.

But anyway, he's a man of Issachar. You don't hear an awful lot about the tribe of Issachar in the stories of the Bible. But if you remember when Gideon called out to get help back in the end of chapter 7, the men of Israel gathered together from Naphtali, Asher, Manasseh, as well as some Ephraimites.

Remember the Ephraimites got in there? But you don't see anything about Issachar. Well, if you have a map in the back of your Bible and you look at where the territory of Issachar was, you should have a map back there that shows the conquest of Canaan or whatever, and it will show the different tribal areas. You'll see that this is a different area of the land.

So here's my question. If it's just a guy in Issachar, and he's not near Shechem, and he's not down there in Judah or Benjamin, he's up in this little tiny place, and you've got Tola the son of Pua, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar. He dwelt in Shemir in the mountains of Ephraim.

He judged Israel 23 years, and he died and was buried in Shemir. He judged Israel. He's up in Ephraim.

This is further north. They eventually will call the whole ten-tribe confederation in the northern kingdom Ephraim. But he's a man of Issachar.

How does he come to judge? How does he come to rule? Did he accomplish a military victory? Did he sit under a terebinth tree and render decisions? Was he in a city gate at Shemir? And all of the other tribes sent people. They're coming from down south and across the Jordan. Well, let's go ask Tola what he thinks.

What does this really represent? Why are we even told this? Well, keep reading. After him arose Jair, a Gileadite. Is this the tribe of Gilead? What is it? It's a region.

It's over on the far side, on the wrong side of the Jordan. This is king of Bashan and that whole thing. Jair, a Gileadite, judged Israel 22 years.

He had 30 sons who rode on 30 donkeys. They also had 30 towns which are called Havot, Jair, to this day. These are the towns of Jair, which are in the land of Gilead.

And he died and was buried in Khamon. Now, if I said, okay, close your books, take out a sheet of paper, and tell me what the use of these verses are in the word of God, what would you guess? Well, I can tell you what I guessed. I just came up with a blank sheet.

I look at this and I say, well, I have no idea what the significance of this is. Why is it in the word of God? But every word is valuable. So it just means we have to think about it a little longer.

Well, let me give you a first glance here, and I'll have a little bit more to say about these next week, and then we will move on into the next cycle of oppression. But notice, these two judges, what's the first thing you think of here? Gideon arose because there was oppression. Deborah arose because there was oppression.

Othniel arose because there was oppression. Ehud arose because there was oppression. God sent dismal times as a cycle of discipline, and once the people of Israel were hurting, then God raised up their Deliverer.

And the most recent case of this was Gideon. The Midianites were just raising cain and playing havoc in the land, and Gideon solves that problem for them. He is the Deliverer, and all this other stuff has been aftermath.

Now, did Tola or Jair rise up to fix a problem? No. It seems as though the land is marking time here. They are not prospering.

They are not in dire straits. Their bad leadership under Abimelech has been eliminated, and now all you can say is, well, there's a guy who judges Israel, and we know that judging basically means making policy decisions, providing some guidance, settling disputes, and so on, but nothing by way of military leadership. He doesn't slaughter any enemies.

He doesn't build any towers. He doesn't set up any ephods. He just serves as an administrator, right? So, significance? I'm still drawing a blank.

But we are given his lineage. Half of this story is his family lineage. It's Tola, the son of Pua, the

son of Dodo, a man of Issachar.

So we get his whole pedigree here. Why do I need that if all he's doing is sitting up there judging for a few years, and then he died and was buried? Well, it must have something to do with that pedigree. That's half of what we're told.

And we'll just mention one thing tonight, and I'll give you the rest next time. What tribe is this? What tribe is supposed to be leading in Israel? The scepter shall not depart from Judah. He's got his donkey tied to the vine.

He's got the white teeth and the milk and Shiloh and that whole business. Where is the tribe of Judah here? They're doing nothing. They're providing nothing.

That's their responsibility. Where is the tribe of Reuben or Simeon or Levi, the first four sons of Jacob? It's just like pachinko. It just ratcheted down from... Reuben lost it because he slept with his father's handmaid, and then Simeon and Levi did the dinah thing in Shechem, and they were disqualified.

So the rulership portion went to Judah. The double portion tickered all the way down to Joseph. And Benjamin is saying, ah, one more brother and I'd have had it.

But it stops at Joseph, and you have Ephraim and Manasseh. But Issachar, you're being led and judged by a man from Issachar, whose claim to fame is what? Mediocrity. Blase.

Nothingness. Accomplishments are? Resume is? Tola did what now? He administrated for a couple of decades. Did he achieve a victory? Did he accomplish a deliverance? Did he restore anything? Did he lead people back to God? What did he do? He's going up the down escalator.

He's just walking and going nowhere. He's done nothing. And we're going to see a little bit more when we look at his lineage.

But think about it. There is a great failure manifested in mediocrity, in lack of accomplishment. Nothing is lost, but nothing is gained.

What does the Lord Jesus say to the church? I worked that you were hot or cold, but being lukewarm I will spew you out of my mouth. Hot water has got uses. Cold water has got uses.

Tepid water is good for nothing. I don't want your tepid water. Give me something hot.

Give me something cold. Either one of those has beneficial uses. Your tepid water is disgusting, and I spit it out.

Tola is your tepid water. Israel has the chance to learn from their experience with Abimelech. They have a chance to learn from their experience with the golden ephod and the disastrous consequences of departure from the law of Moses, from the Levitical priesthood.

Where are the Levites? Every different area of leadership in Israel has failed. The leadership that ought to be exhibited, the priesthood that ought to be functional, where is it? It's absent. And you've got some unknown guy who does nothing from the tribe of Issachar.

It's the best they can come up with. It's pathetic. Tola may have been a nice guy, but if I had my name in the word of God, I would want it to serve some use, even if it was just a warning.

Jabez, his little brief note, you can at least get some application out of. Lord, don't let me be a pain to everybody else. But what can you apply from Tola? He just marks time.

He exists, and he disappears. And he dies and is buried. And you say, well, what good was that? And really, that's the point.

We have the opportunity, because of what God has given us, to make a difference, to have an impact, to be thoroughly equipped for every good work. And I don't know about you, but I don't see any value in just being a name on a page that does nothing. After him arose Jair, a Gileadite.

Now we're not even finding out what tribe you're from. Is he from the tribe of Ephraim? Is he from the tribe of Manasseh? Is he from the tribe of Reuben or Gad? Who's living over there? Well, evidently, his ancestry is so mixed, and they've intermarried with the Canaanites, and you can't even identify him with Israel. You can't even trace him back to Jacob.

Well, he's from the mountains of Gilead. Well, when's the last time we saw Gilead mentioned? The fearful guys who went home from Gideon, went home to the mountains of Gilead? Well, one of their illustrious descendants is now going to be the big cheese in whatever you want to call Israel at this point. Jair, a Gileadite, he judged Israel 22 years, and his big claim to fame is his ride.

He gives them all special cars, 30 sons, 30 donkeys. Do you wonder, well, which one is the bigger donkey? The one riding or the one traveling underneath? You've got 30 donkeys on 30 donkeys maybe. These guys don't have any accomplishments either.

Their big claim to fame is what they rode around. And they had 30 towns. I've got 30 sons, and I don't want the Shechem thing happening, so I give each son a town, each son a donkey, and this is my hegemony.

And you get the idea that this is all in the mountains of Gilead. He died and was buried in Kamon. Well, there is no progress.

What do you say about this? It's just pathetic. It's boring. And that's the point.

That's exactly the point. Why live if you're not going to grab for the gusto? What's the point of having an opportunity and frittering it away and squandering it away and having your life mean nothing? You might as well be an atheist. You might as well be a secular humanist.

Well, I don't really know. I'm a happy accident, a fortuitous combination of carbon atoms, and here I am. I was sitting out in the backyard last night and the night before petting the little black cat.

Most of you all know that little black cat. It's been coming around for like 11 or 12 years. A little crippled, twitchy kitty out there.

And I look at him. I've seen a lot of dead cats. One of these days, he's going to be a dead cat.

And one of these days, I'm going to be a dead guy. And you think, well, in the great overall celestial scheme of things, you had a cat and you had a guy out there petting them, and now they're both dead. So what? If we don't avail ourselves of the opportunities that God gives us, there is no difference between the cat and the man.

They're both brief episodes that disappear. And that's what Tola and Jair are. There's nothing to show for their 20 and 22 years respectively.

Well, we'll stop here at the threshold of chapter 10. Actually, chapter 10, verse 6. And we will see that this cyclic tale is going to move forward into the climactic portion of the book of Judges. That's where we'll pick up next week.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for the warnings that it gives us, the opportunities that it reminds us of. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will use these episodes and these stories to impress on us the importance of redeeming the time and taking advantage of every opportunity that you give to us in this brief time that we are on this earth.

We pray that our lives will reflect your glory and the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. We ask it in his name. Amen.