

...Thorns of the Wilderness and Briars

<<< *Judges 8:1 – 10:2*

~ Our Spiritual Safari expedition through the entire Word of God was introduced to the fourth judge in the Book of Judges in our last report. We have more information about Gideon than any other judge in the Book of Judges. If you have not read our previous two reports from this book of the Bible, I highly suggest you go back and do so now. There has always been a question concerning Gideon's son: whether or not he was a judge. In this section of Scripture, we are presented with a series of events that occurred immediately following the remarkable deliverance God gave Israel over the Midianites through Gideon.

Israel has been liberated from bondage and are, once again, prosperous - and the Lord is blessing them. Naturally, they are grateful to Gideon for what he has done. Verse twenty-two of chapter eight brings us the first inclination the children of Israel wanted a king as they tell Gideon to rule over them. God has already told them a king was not His plan, as the nations around them had instituted; and Gideon correctly turned the offer down. The nation will soon become insistent and demand a king; at which time the Lord will tell Samuel to anoint king Saul. Saul will be a huge mistake for the nation. God Himself desired to rule over them Personally; and choosing Gideon as a king was not His plan or purpose.

All of this puts an idea in the head of Gideon's son and is likely the basis of his conspiracy to appoint himself as king of Israel. According to verse twenty-three of chapter eight, Gideon has certainly learned a remarkable lesson. When we met Gideon he was a coward threshing wheat down in the valley by the wine press. Gideon knows it was God Who had brought the victory; and Gideon also realized there was nothing in and of himself that was of any use to God. Gideon believes Israel is a theocracy; and makes it clear neither he nor his sons would rule over the nation. In Hebrews chapter eleven, the writer says the time would fail him to tell of Gideon. Also, in Hebrews, Gideon leads the list of all the judges; in fact, more is said about Gideon than is said about King David in Hebrews. That is, well, remarkable! See, David was a strong man who loved God, but God

chooses the weak things of the world for His glory. If you want to be used by God for His plan and purpose, you are going to have to agree to His terms of service. Most of us are simply too strong for God to lead us into a proper, correct and complete manner of service in the cause of Christ.

Alright, I wish we could close the record on Gideon at this point, but his account continues into abject darkness. God exposes the black mark in Gideon's life and reveals the basis for that which causes tragedy later. Remember, every judge we have or will examine had some glaring weaknesses. In most cases, those weaknesses were precisely what God used to deliver His chosen people. As we saw, Gideon's weakness was being a coward. Plain and simple. Personally, and let's not let this get around the internet, but I can identify completely with Gideon in this connection. When I made the decision to teach the Word of God and devote my life to Christ is the moment God exposed my weaknesses and my cowardly ways. All I can rejoice in is knowing God will never leave me nor forsake me. I am grateful to Him, and I trust Him; the problem is: I don't trust Andrew – at all – not for a moment. Moreover, I find myself constantly getting in God's way and that's when I stumble and fall - again. Interestingly, when you'll just allow Christ to live through you, it's remarkable what He can and will do in our stumbling lives.

I give God ALL glory for and in this so-called Spiritual Safari. There were several times I thought the end was inevitable. Honestly, I never sought to be this type of Bible teacher and, after writing for many years, I even abandoned my writing efforts for a long time as I returned to fishing for fish. Well, God brought me back - seemingly by accident. I have to be honest: I am still doubtful and unsure many, many times. I know most people despise me for various reasons, most do not believe in this ministry – at all – and I know I have never made a single convert that I am aware of. I do, however, believe God is blessing His Word going out to the entire world and THAT is my joy – you may be sure.

Alright, Gideon had another weakness; those seventy sons and many wives that are mentioned in verse thirty. That's the other blotch of badness in his life. Many question whether polygamy is right or wrong, and they cite King Solomon for having a thousand wives. Well, God didn't approve of either

one of those polygamous arrangements, friends; and God never does approve of polygamy. I recognize that both of those men went into polygamy AFTER God had called and chosen them. Well, God knew what would happen, of course; and God used them IN SPITE of their disobedience. The record is very clear, in both cases, that tragedy came to the nation Israel by the acts of Gideon and, later, Solomon. Their home lives were awful examples. Let's be clear: God forbids multiple marriages and God condemns inter-marriage to outsiders, i.e., unbelievers. After all, God only created one Eve for Adam from one rib.

Beginning with the example of Abraham, we learned God will not bless polygamy. Abraham had Hagar as a concubine, and it ended in disaster and heartache. In fact, that specific act of disobedience by Abraham still causes trouble for Israel today. David's family life was a pure disastrous hell. The Arab Muslim is quick and proud to tell you he is a descendant of Abraham, also; and that's true – but – that all came about through Hagar bearing Ishmael by Abraham - not through Isaac, the promise. It was a sin; and God isn't going to bless it, friends. God didn't bless Solomon in polygamy – and God isn't going to bless Gideon - or you, either. With Solomon, the kingdom was divided and, here, tragedy will follow. The account isn't memorialized because God approves of polygamy; it is recorded because God doesn't hide anything in His Word – even when the record is not pretty. God paints the picture of mankind as it is and – here it is! The modern-day biographer being paid to write Solomon's and Gideon's story would have either covered all of this up or exploited and glamorized it into a cheap thrill for profit, you may be sure. Well, the Artist known as God paints mankind with all of man's sinful and dark colors and impossible shapes – and it's mostly black semi-circles, as we shall see....

VIII

1 And the men of Ephraim said unto him, Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst us not, when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites? And they did chide with him sharply.

2 And he said unto them, What have I done now in comparison of you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer?

3 God hath delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb: and what was I able to do in comparison of you? Then their anger was abated toward him, when he had said that.

4 And Gideon came to Jordan, and passed over, he, and the three hundred men that were with him, faint, yet pursuing them.

5 And he said unto the men of Succoth, Give, I pray you, loaves of bread unto the people that follow me; for they be faint, and I am pursuing after Zebah and Zalmunna, kings of Midian.

6 And the princes of Succoth said, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thine army?

7 And Gideon said, Therefore when the LORD hath delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into mine hand, then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers.

8 And he went up thence to Penuel, and spake unto them likewise: and the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered him.

9 And he spake also unto the men of Penuel, saying, When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower.

10 Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor, and their hosts with them, about fifteen thousand men, all that were left of all the hosts of the children of the east: for there fell an hundred and twenty thousand men that drew sword.

11 And Gideon went up by the way of them that dwelt in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and smote the host: for the host was secure.

12 And when Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued after them, and took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and discomfited all the host.

13 And Gideon the son of Joash returned from battle before the sun was up,

14 And caught a young man of the men of Succoth, and enquired of him: and he described unto him the princes of Succoth, and the elders thereof, even threescore and seventeen men.

15 And he came unto the men of Succoth, and said, Behold Zebah and Zalmunna, with whom ye did upbraid me, saying, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thy men that are weary?

16 And he took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth.

17 And he beat down the tower of Penuel, and slew the men of the city.

18 Then said he unto Zebah and Zalmunna, What manner of men were they whom ye slew at Tabor? And they answered, As thou art, so were they; each one resembled the children of a king.

19 And he said, They were my brethren, even the sons of my mother: as the LORD liveth, if ye had saved them alive, I would not slay you.

20 And he said unto Jether his firstborn, Up, and slay them. But the youth drew not his sword: for he feared, because he was yet a youth.

21 Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, Rise thou, and fall upon us: for as the man is, so is his strength. And Gideon arose, and slew Zebah and Zalmunna, and took away the ornaments that were on their camels' necks.

22 Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian.

23 And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you.

24 And Gideon said unto them, I would desire a request of you, that ye would give me every man the earrings of his prey. (For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.)

25 And they answered, We will willingly give them. And they spread a garment, and did cast therein every man the earrings of his prey.

26 And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was a thousand and seven hundred shekels of gold; beside ornaments, and collars, and purple raiment that was on the kings of Midian, and beside the chains that were about their camels' necks.

27 And Gideon made an ephod thereof, and put it in his city, even in Ophrah: and all Israel went thither a whoring after it: which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house.

28 Thus was Midian subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted up their heads no more. And the country was in quietness forty years in the days of Gideon.

29 And Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and dwelt in his own house.

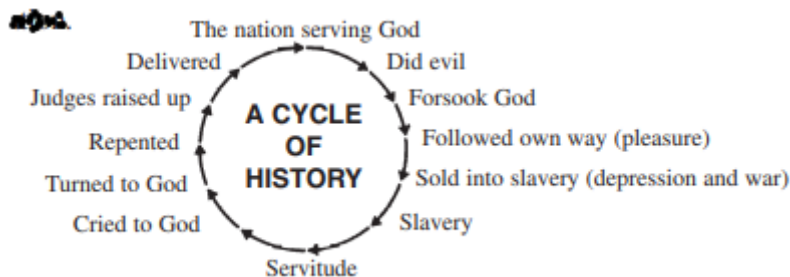
30 And Gideon had threescore and ten sons of his body begotten: for he had many wives.

31 And his concubine that was in Shechem, she also bare him a son, whose name he called Abimelech.

32 And Gideon the son of Joash died in a good old age, and was buried in the sepulchre of Joash his father, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

33 And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again, and went a whoring after Baalim, and made Baalberith their god.

~ Our safari philosophy of history - or the "hoop of history" as we dubbed it - continues to roll on at the time in which we are studying; and it is rolling along today at light speed as I type this report and you read it. Let's review it: Israel was serving God – they did evil – they forsook God – they turned to Baal – God sent them into slavery – in servitude they cried out to God – they repented – a judge was raised up to deliver them – and then they served God again; that is the "hoop of history" or the safari philosophy of history, as we have already established in our initial report from Judges. This is the sad, sordid story of the nation Israel; and it's the same sad song today. This is true in the lives of myriad modern-day nations, churches and individuals, to be sure; up and down repeatedly. Many so-called Christians are simply rolling along with the changes of the world. God never intended our spiritual life to be an up and down roller coaster ride. It isn't designed to go in violent circles that lead to nowhere....



34 And the children of Israel remembered not the LORD their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side:

35 Neither shewed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely, Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had shewed unto Israel.

IX

1 And Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem unto his mother's brethren, and communed with them, and with all the family of the house of his mother's father, saying,

2 Speak, I pray you, in the ears of all the men of Shechem, Whether is better for you, either that all the sons of Jerubbaal, which are threescore and ten persons, reign over you, or that one reign over you? remember also that I am your bone and your flesh.

3 And his mother's brethren spake of him in the ears of all the men of Shechem all these words: and their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech; for they said, He is our brother.

4 And they gave him threescore and ten pieces of silver out of the house of Baalberith, wherewith Abimelech hired vain and light persons, which followed him.

5 And he went unto his father's house at Ophrah, and slew his brethren the sons of Jerubbaal, being threescore and ten persons, upon one stone: notwithstanding yet Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left; for he hid himself.

6 And all the men of Shechem gathered together, and all the house of Millo, and went, and made Abimelech king, by the plain of the pillar that was in Shechem.

7 And when they told it to Jotham, he went and stood in the top of mount Gerizim, and lifted up his voice, and cried, and said unto them, Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you.

8 The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us.

9 But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?

10 And the trees said to the fig tree, Come thou, and reign over us.

11 But the fig tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees?

12 Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou, and reign over us.

13 And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?

14 Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou, and reign over us.

15 And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon.

16 Now therefore, if ye have done truly and sincerely, in that ye have made Abimelech king, and if ye have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have done unto him according to the deserving of his hands;

17 (For my father fought for you, and adventured his life far, and delivered you out of the hand of Midian:

18 And ye are risen up against my father's house this day, and have slain his sons, threescore and ten persons, upon one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his maidservant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your brother;)

19 If ye then have dealt truly and sincerely with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, then rejoice ye in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you:

20 But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech, and devour the men of Shechem, and the house of Millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem, and from the house of Millo, and devour Abimelech.

21 And Jotham ran away, and fled, and went to Beer, and dwelt there, for fear of Abimelech his brother.

22 When Abimelech had reigned three years over Israel,

23 Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech:

24 That the cruelty done to the threescore and ten sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood be laid upon Abimelech their brother, which slew them; and upon the men of Shechem, which aided him in the killing of his brethren.

25 And the men of Shechem set liers in wait for him in the top of the mountains, and they robbed all that came along that way by them: and it was told Abimelech.

26 And Gaal the son of Ebed came with his brethren, and went over to Shechem: and the men of Shechem put their confidence in him.

27 And they went out into the fields, and gathered their vineyards, and trode the grapes, and made merry, and went into the house of their god, and did eat and drink, and cursed Abimelech.

28 And Gaal the son of Ebed said, Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should serve him? is not he the son of Jerubbaal? and Zebul his officer? serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem: for why should we serve him?

29 And would to God this people were under my hand! then would I remove Abimelech. And he said to Abimelech, Increase thine army, and come out.

30 And when Zebul the ruler of the city heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was kindled.

31 And he sent messengers unto Abimelech privily, saying, Behold, Gaal the son of Ebed and his brethren be come to Shechem; and, behold, they fortify the city against thee.

32 Now therefore up by night, thou and the people that is with thee, and lie in wait in the field:

33 And it shall be, that in the morning, as soon as the sun is up, thou shalt rise early, and set upon the city: and, behold, when he and the people that is with him come out against thee, then mayest thou do to them as thou shalt find occasion.

34 And Abimelech rose up, and all the people that were with him, by night, and they laid wait against Shechem in four companies.

35 And Gaal the son of Ebed went out, and stood in the entering of the gate of the city: and Abimelech rose up, and the people that were with him, from lying in wait.

36 And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, Behold, there come people down from the top of the mountains. And Zebul said unto him, Thou seest the shadow of the mountains as if they were men.

37 And Gaal spake again and said, See there come people down by the middle of the land, and another company come along by the plain of Meonenim.

38 Then said Zebul unto him, Where is now thy mouth, wherewith thou saidst, Who is Abimelech, that we should serve him? is not this the people that thou hast despised? go out, I pray now, and fight with them.

39 And Gaal went out before the men of Shechem, and fought with Abimelech.

40 And Abimelech chased him, and he fled before him, and many were overthrown and wounded, even unto the entering of the gate.

41 And Abimelech dwelt at Arumah: and Zebul thrust out Gaal and his brethren, that they should not dwell in Shechem.

42 And it came to pass on the morrow, that the people went out into the field; and they told Abimelech.

43 And he took the people, and divided them into three companies, and laid wait in the field, and looked, and, behold, the people were come forth out of the city; and he rose up against them, and smote them.

44 And Abimelech, and the company that was with him, rushed forward, and stood in the entering of the gate of the city: and the two other companies ran upon all the people that were in the fields, and slew them.

45 And Abimelech fought against the city all that day; and he took the city, and slew the people that was therein, and beat down the city, and sowed it with salt.

46 And when all the men of the tower of Shechem heard that, they entered into an hold of the house of the god Berith.

47 And it was told Abimelech, that all the men of the tower of Shechem were gathered together.

48 And Abimelech gat him up to mount Zalmon, he and all the people that were with him; and Abimelech took an axe in his hand, and cut down a bough from the trees, and took it, and laid it on his shoulder, and said unto the people that were with him, What ye have seen me do, make haste, and do as I have done.

49 And all the people likewise cut down every man his bough, and followed Abimelech, and put them to the hold, and set the hold on fire upon them; so that all the men of the tower of Shechem died also, about a thousand men and women.

50 Then went Abimelech to Thebez, and encamped against Thebez, and took it.

51 But there was a strong tower within the city, and thither fled all the men and women, and all they of the city, and shut it to them, and gat them up to the top of the tower.

52 And Abimelech came unto the tower, and fought against it, and went hard unto the door of the tower to burn it with fire.

53 And a certain woman cast a piece of a millstone upon Abimelech's head, and all to brake his skull.

54 Then he called hastily unto the young man his armourbearer, and said unto him, Draw thy sword, and slay me, that men say not of me, A woman slew him. And his young man thrust him through, and he died.

55 And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they departed every man unto his place.

56 Thus God rendered the wickedness of Abimelech, which he did unto his father, in slaying his seventy brethren:

57 And all the evil of the men of Shechem did God render upon their heads: and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal.

~ There's really not much to say about chapter nine where we meet Abimelech; except to say Gideon shouldn't have had a concubine and he wouldn't have had this particular son! This chapter is nothing but trouble for the nation Israel. Abimelech is certainly ambitious, and he commits an awful, terrible deed. Some have called him a judge, but others have declared him NOT to be a judge over Israel. Well, in this fifth apostasy we see civil war raging, which was caused mostly by Abimelech. I'm not sure it matters if Abimelech was a judge because all he did were bad things. What we do know is that Gideon had seventy sons and Abimelech ambitiously exploited the nation desiring Gideon to be their king. I trust you read all of these chapters very carefully because they are profitable to our understanding and learning - to our growing in the grace and knowledge of our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ. In this case, the sin of man is revealed, and the wickedness of man is urgent cause for alarm.

The usurped rule and fratricide of Abimelech is, generally, reason enough to discount and exclude him as a judge of Israel by most fundamental conservative scholars. During the three recorded years of Abimelech, all he did was kill all of the other sons of Gideon – and made himself king – entirely against the proclamation of his father. If this is an abortive reign, it only serves to reveal the truth of Daniel chapter four verse seventeen. All you have to do is take a look around to see that’s the way it is. When a decent ruler comes along in the world, most people believe God raised that man to power; but, what about the wicked ruler? God permits this because “like priest like people!” That’s the principle we’re following, and we see here the nation receiving the type of ruler they deserve. They wanted Abimelech to rule over them and that’s exactly what they received.

Even so, God judges Abimelech for the awful things Abimelech did; and the men of Shechem were judged for desiring and making him king. Many people didn’t want Abimelech – and civil war was the result. It’s hilarious Abimelech didn’t want the reputation of being slain by a woman; but the record is clear in verse fifty-three. What a sad and dreadful end to the story of Gideon. After a remarkable defeat of the Midianites and delivering Israel back to the Lord – after being lifted out from nothing – these things happened that the Lord could not and would not approve of – and they brought about judgment....

X

1 And after Abimelech there arose to defend Israel Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar; and he dwelt in Shamir in mount Ephraim.

2 And he judged Israel twenty and three years, and died, and was buried in Shamir.

~ So, chapter ten brings us judge Tola; whom I am confident all except the sincerest students of Scripture have ever heard of. That’s understandable because Tola did nothing noteworthy except die. The names of his father and grandfather and the place where he died are about the only things we

know of this judge. I venture to say this man was a total and complete failure. I suppose we could say Tola was judged. As our safari rolls along, we will see another judge, Jair – the eighth judge so far; and he didn't do a whole lot, either. His thirty sons rode on their asses and Jair died and he was buried. All Jair ever did was buy his kids donkey's. The donkey was the equivalent of a convertible sports car in the days we are studying. Maybe Jair should have bought them each a Jaguar or a Mustang – I don't really know. I'm sure the pride was a showy event when they rode out of the palace in Gilead every morning on their way to do whatever they did. All this amounts to prosperity without purpose; affluence without effect and prestige without power. So, we'll also move along in the next report to the ninth judge of the nation Israel, Jephthah. Jephthah will be another man with another black streak in his life leading a band of desperados. Even so, God is going to use Jephthah at an abjectly low point in the history of the nation Israel. I hope you'll be with us ~

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