

Dr. David Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 26, Judges 6-9 Gideon and the Aftermath

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This is Dr. David Howard in his teaching on the books of Joshua through Ruth. This is session 26, Judges 6-9, Gideon and the Aftermath.

Greetings again. In this segment we're going to be discussing the story of Gideon, the next judge, and it's the aftermath of his time with one of his sons, Abimelech. So, we'll be looking at Judges 6 through 9 in this section. So, Gideon is one of the most prominent judges in the book, after Samson, whose story consumes a good four chapters.

Gideon is three chapters, plus his son. So, it begins as most of the stories of the major judges do. It comes right after the final line of chapter 5, which says that the land had rest for 40 years after the time of Deborah and Beric.

And chapter 6, verse 1, begins by telling us that again, Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. God gave them into the hands of the Midianites for seven years, and they oppressed the Israelites in multiple different ways, devouring their crops and leaving nothing for them, stealing their food, and so on. So, Israel was brought very low, chapter 6, verse 6, and again people cried out for help from God.

So, in contrast to some of the earlier accounts where the next thing would be said would be God raised up the next judge and delivered Israel through them, we have a much more extended story now. And it takes us, first of all, to a prophet who tells them that God has been faithful to them from Egypt on, and they should not fear the gods of the Amorites, in verse 10. But then we have the angel of the Lord coming and appearing to the father of Gideon, Joash.

And so, we have in verse 11 and following the story of the angel of the Lord. He comes to the place, the property that belongs to Joash, and he actually appears to Gideon. Gideon is actually there beating out the wheat, and the angel of the Lord. This story kind of tells us some interesting things about Gideon, and we'll look at some of them here.

Gideon asks the angel of the Lord for a sign. So, Gideon goes into his house, prepares some food, comes back out, places it there, and the angel of the Lord reaches out, touches it with the tip of his staff in verse 20, in verse 21, and it immediately is consumed with fire. So, this is clearly a sign from the Lord that this was the angel of the Lord, and we see that in verse 22.

Gideon perceived that this was the angel of the Lord, and he worshiped him there. He builds an altar, verse 24, and calls it the Lord is Peace, and it stands there till this day, again to the day of the writing of the book here. Let me pause here and talk a little bit about the identity of the angel of the Lord because this is not the only place in Scripture where the angel of the Lord is mentioned.

So, a lot of discussion as to who or what this angel of the Lord was, and so we'll kind of try to talk through some of those discussions. Usually, there are three different options presented as to who or what this angel of the Lord is. First of all, we'll just say the word angel, this translated angel, is mal'ak in Hebrew, and it means messenger.

So, an angel from the Lord is a messenger from the Lord, a representative, bringing some sort of message. The prophet Malachi, his name is mal'aki. The suffix i means my, so his name is my messenger, the Lord's messenger.

So, what are the options as to what is the angel Lord, and what does he do? One option is that it really just basically is an angel, like the angel Gabriel, the angel Michael, an inferior being to God himself, but clearly with divine authority. Some have argued, no, that it's a temporary or momentary descent of God himself into visible presence before some person or group of people. A third option that's often presented is that the angel Lord is actually what we might call a pre-incarnate manifestation of Christ himself, namely before Christ became incarnate in the New Testament era, that he descended into human form or angelic form in different times and places in the Old Testament.

There's a key text that tells us about the angel Lord back in the book of Exodus, so I'm going to ask you to turn to that. Exodus chapter 23 introduces us to the angel Lord, and it shows how the angel Lord carries God's character and his authority. So Exodus 23, starting in verse 20, God is speaking to the Israelites here through Moses, and it says, Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way, to bring you to the place that I have prepared.

Pay careful attention to him, obey his voice, and do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in it. So clearly, in this instance, it appears that the angel has the authority to speak for God. My name is in him.

And many have said this appears like it's almost God himself. It says He will not pardon your transgression. Implicit in that, the flip side seems to be he would have the power to do that.

He would have the authority to do that. He could forgive sins, but he's not going to do in this case if you rebel. But if you carefully obey his voice, verse 22, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and adversary to your adversaries.

I will not be an enemy to you. I'll be an enemy to your enemies, which is a good thing for you. And verse 23, when my angel goes before you, brings you to the Amorites, Hittites, et cetera, I will blot them out.

And so, it goes. So, in this case, it appears that the identity of the angel of the Lord or the authority of the angel of the Lord is very closely bound up with the Lord himself, with God himself. However, in another passage later in chapter 32 and part of 33, we see more of a distinction between the Lord and his angel.

So, let's look at that briefly. Chapter 32, starting in verse 34. In the next chapter, up to around verse 17.

And the features of the angel of the Lord here appear to be separate from God himself. Chapter 33, verse 2, for example, says, I will send an angel before you. I'll drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, and so on.

But this angel is not presented as if my name is in him. He's not forgiving sins or not forgiving sins. So, the question is, what is exactly happening here? Some evangelical interpreters have taken these manifestations of the angel of the Lord to be pre-New Testament revelations of Christ, as we've said, pre-incarnate revelations of Christ.

There's an angelic type of being mentioned in Daniel chapter 10, and in Ezekiel chapter 1 also, and it appears to be similar to descriptions of Jesus that John makes in the book of Revelation chapter 1, in a couple of places. It's also been noted that the angel of the Lord is never mentioned in the New Testament when Jesus himself is on the earth. And so, if that was Jesus, he was called the angel of the Lord before he came, but when he was here, he's not called that.

He's just called God incarnate. Jesus was sent to do God's will, of course, the same way the angel was sent. So many evangelicals have made that argument.

My own view is that that's probably not the case. An important reason for me is that the New Testament is very open about making connections between the Old and New Testaments. Over and over again, we find in the New Testament writers, quotes from the Old Testament and analogies and saying, this happened in order to fulfill that, and so on.

But if these appearances were actually Jesus in pre-incarnate form, it seems very strange that the New Testament would not have made something of that. It appears to me that it would have been very easy for Matthew or others to say, that was Jesus, and Jesus is now fulfilling those things. So, to me, the silence in the New Testament is an important piece in the puzzle.

So, it would appear to me that in some cases, it may just strictly be a separate messenger, an angel from God. Sometimes it's an angel that's much more closely bound up with the nature of God, and it appears that that's what's happening here in Gideon's day as well. So, that's kind of a discussion that we find as to the nature of the angel of the Lord.

So, we continue back in Judges chapter 6 now, and Gideon is very reticent. In verse 15, he says, I'm the least of people, but God says, in verse 16, I will be with you. Coming down after the passage we just looked at, God tells him in verse 26, and following, notice the kind of interplay in this chapter between the angel of the Lord and the Lord.

So, it's almost, that's why some would argue that this is the Lord himself. It's just kind of different ways of talking about him, but maybe not God personally, but certainly a close representative of him. He's told to pull down the altar of Baal in verse 25 and also to cut down the Asherah pole that's there, and he's to build an altar to God on top of that.

The great irony is that he's to take the wood of the Asherah poles that he's cutting down in verse 26 and use that as the fire, as the kindling for his own burnt offering. So, Gideon does this, which is a good thing, but in verse 27, he's also afraid, and he doesn't tell anyone else about this except the ten servants that he had done with him. So, when everybody wakes up the next day, the altars are broken down, verse 28, and they wonder what's happening, and they realize that Gideon has done this.

And so, they challenge Joash, Gideon's father, to bring out your son so that he may die, because they're still faithful worshippers of Baal and Asherah, and they're not happy to see the symbols of their worship toppled. And, to his credit, Joash, Gideon's father, stands up and rebuts them and says, will you contend for Baal? In other words, are you going to actually defend this god who's not really a god, or he's the god of the Canaanites? Or, will you save him? Are you going to be the one that rescues him? Whoever contends for him shall be put to death by warning. If he's a god, let him contend for himself.

He doesn't need your help. Let him defend his own altar. And, an interesting irony now, in verse 32, is that Joash names Gideon, or from that day forward at least, Gideon has a second name, which is Jerubbaal.

And, you can notice carefully in the second part of that name, Baal, Baal, and Yeru, that part means the idea of contending. And so, there's a play on words here. Gideon's father is saying, are you going to contend for Baal? Are you going to defend him? Are you going to argue for him? And, the ironic name that Gideon gets is that Baal contends, and under the subtext, there is that, yeah, he contends for himself,

but Gideon is the one that actually defeated him, and he assumes that ironic mantle for himself.

Let Baal contend against him, because he broke down the altar, and Baal couldn't defend himself. So, there's now a following coalition coming against Israel, but in verse 34, the spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon. He sounded the trumpet, and they brought people together.

And then, we have an interesting story about Gideon asking for God's guidance in verses 36 to the end of the chapter. And, it's a famous passage about Gideon putting out a fleece, sheep's wool fleece, and essentially asks God to confirm to him that God is going to do what God has already said he's going to do. And, he says, I'm going to put out the fleece, and please, in the morning, let the dew come up, and if it's dry on the ground around it, and the fleece is wet, which is an unnatural thing.

Normally, the dew is going to be wetting the ground, but if there's no dew around the ground and on the fleece, then I'll know that you're speaking. So, God grants that request. Then, to his discredit, Gideon asks for a second sign, when this time it's really a third sign from earlier.

He's asked for a sign from the angel before. But, he asks God to do it the other way around, and make the fleece dry, the ground wet. God also answers that request, but we learn that this is not the best thing to have done, because, and Gideon himself knows that.

Verse 39 says Gideon says to God, don't let your anger burn against me. In other words, don't get too angry with me, but I want to try it again. The reason I'm lingering here is because, in many evangelical circles, this has become a model for how to seek God's guidance for actions and decisions that we face.

My mother routinely would say, let's put out a fleece for the Lord. The idea was, if this set of events happened, then we're to do that, or that set of events. If this door was open, that door was, and so on.

And, of course, God did graciously answer Gideon, even though it's really, in my view, a lack of faith. He already knew before this what God wanted him to do. He didn't need these additional signs.

He shouldn't have needed the additional signs. So, God graciously did accommodate himself to this request, even though it was kind of a foolish, unneeded request. And, God certainly answered my mother's prayers along those lines on occasion.

And many other Christians, of course, I'm sure, as well. But, my view is that better examples of following God's will are, for example, Isaiah. In Isaiah chapter 6, when

Isaiah is beholding God's glory in the temple and hears a voice saying, whom shall I send? Isaiah doesn't say, well, let me put out a fleece and do it this way or that way.

Isaiah just says, here am I, send me. Or, the disciples. When Jesus called them to follow him, they dropped their nets and followed him.

So, in those instances, God's will was clear, and Isaiah and the disciples followed without question. Here, God's will was clear. Gideon should have done the same thing.

Now, that's not to say that many times God's will is not immediately clear. For many of us, we have decisions we have to make that are not specifically revealed to us in the Bible or from some special revelation. So, the choice of a spouse, the choice of a job, the choice of where to go to school.

Sometimes we don't have real answers in Scripture for that. And we can say, Lord, please open this door or close that door, and that would become the method of guidance. So, I think that certainly, God does work in those ways.

But I just want to caution ourselves that when God's will is clear, we shouldn't engage in delaying tactics the way that Gideon seemed to be doing here. So, that's the prelude to the big battles that come up in chapters 7 and 8. Gideon has done some good things in tearing down the altars of Baal and the Asherah. And he has responded to the angel of the Lord that appeared to him.

And now in chapters 7 and 8, there are these big battles against the Midianites. It's in two segments, one in chapter 7 against the main army. In chapter 8, it appears more like Gideon has a personal vendetta against the kings of the Midianites.

And it's not such a rosy picture there. But it's all introduced by the story of Gideon and his 300, or his men. It ends up being 300.

And we see in verses 1 to 8, that's the story that sets the stage for what's to come. And it's ironic that chapter 7 begins with Gideon's name Jeroboam. Kind of reminds us of the polemic against Baal that we've seen in chapter 6. So, it says, God says to Gideon that you have too many men.

Here, verse 2. And so, Gideon says whoever is afraid and wants to go home, feel free to go home. Turns out 22,000 left and there's 10,000 left. So, the number that he has appears to have been 32,000 at the beginning.

22,000 are gone and he has 10,000 men. That's still a pretty impressive fighting force. But the Lord says there are still too many.

And he has them bring them down to the brook and drink water. And there's not exactly a clear picture of exactly what's happening, how this works. But whoever ends up drinking water in an unapproved way or the wrong way gets sent home.

And it ends up that it's only 300 that are the ones that he's going to take into battle. And of course, the whole point of that story is that this is much too small a force to contend with the forces of Midian. Over in chapter 8, in verse 15, it mentions that there were 15,000 men in the army who were left because there had fallen 120,000 men.

So, those are huge numbers. Now, we mentioned in the context of the book of Joshua that the large numbers in the Old Testament are kind of a thorny issue. And it may be that these numbers are inflated by a factor of 1,000 because of some linguistic problem with Hebrew.

So, it might have been 150 and 1,200 men over here in Judges 8. But certainly, the 300 over here in Gideon's day seems to be a real number. And whatever the numbers in Gideon of Midian, it's still a very small number to oppose those great forces. So, that's the point.

Obviously, the implicit point behind that is that when Israel does win the victory, and of course, we know that Israel does, the credit is to be given to God, not to Gideon or the men. So, my preface, that's what happens. And so, in chapter 8, I'm sorry, chapter 7, after this introduction, starting in verses 9 and following, God gives him instructions.

And he's going to go down to the camp. And so, Gideon kind of sneaks up into the camp with his servant. And he hears one of the Midianites talking to one of his fellows about a dream that he had.

And there was a dream in which a large cake of barley tumbled into the camp of Midian and struck everybody, and everybody's dead. And the comrade understood to interpret that dream as saying, uh-oh, the problem, that represents the camp of Gideon, the sword of Gideon, and all his people. And we're now in verse 14, chapter 7. This is no other than the sword of Gideon, the son of Joash, the man of Israel.

God has given into his hand Midian and all the camp. This echoes the words of Rahab to the spies in Israel, where she says, we've heard what your God has done to the Egyptians and to Sihon and to Og, and I know that God has given you this land. Here, this man understands this dream, this Midianite man understands the dream that we're sunk.

We can't resist Israel's God. So, Gideon is encouraged by this in verses 15 and following. And he divides his men into companies, and everybody has trumpets, and they have torches and empty jars.

These are not really usually the weapons of war. But that's what they take with them. And he tells them in verse 19 when I blow the trumpet, I and everybody with me, then blow your trumpets on every side of the camp and shout out for the Lord and for Gideon.

So, we see that they do this. In verse 19, they blew the trumpets, and smashed the jars, and this is surrounding the larger camp of Midian. And they all cried out, a sword for the Lord and for Gideon.

And everybody stood in their place, the army ran, and it turns out all the Midianites wake up, and they're so confused, they end up killing each other. And so that's the method of the great victory. And at the end, in verse 23, it says, the men of Israel were called out from Naphtali and Asher and from Manasseh, and they pursued after the Midianites.

And so, it's kind of a joint effort of a number of the tribes in the northern part of the land. They pursued the Midianites, they captured them in verse 24. In verse 25, they captured the two princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeev.

They killed them there. And they brought their heads back to Gideon in the final verse of chapter 7. A great victory was given. And if the story ended there, we would assume that God would be given the credit.

We may expect another song, like the Song of Deborah, or some statement about the author of the book saying God gave it in the hand of Midian, or Midian himself, praising God for this. But we don't have that. We have a story continuing.

And as things move along, we don't have Gideon being shown in quite a positive light. Here, first of all, we have the tribe of Ephraim in chapter 8, the beginning, complaining that they had not been called out to help with the battle earlier on. And so Gideon responds and doesn't really respond.

He just says I'm busy pursuing after the two kings of Midian in verse 5. And there's some back and forth. So, it appears that in this chapter, the battle is not so much a coalition of all of Israel, but it's Gideon pursuing his personal agenda. Significantly enough, God does not appear in this part of the chapter as one who's sending Gideon out.

But Gideon is pursuing, for example, verse 10, Ziba and Zalmunah. These are the two kings. And they've got their army there.

And Gideon is chasing after them. And finally, he gets them and commands one of his young men to kill these kings toward the end of this section. In verse 20, he says to Gaither, his firstborn, rise up and kill them.

But the young man did not draw his sword because he was afraid. So, then these two kings begin taunting Gideon in verse 21. Rise up yourself, fall upon us.

For as the man is, so is his strength. They're kind of questioning his masculinity almost. Are you a coward? Are you afraid to fall upon us? So, Gideon took the challenge, rose up and killed them, and took the ornaments that were with them.

So, the entire segment of people of the Midianites are now pacified. They've lost tens of thousands of people it would seem. Their leaders are gone.

And so, we now have the aftermath of that. Instead of a hymn of praise of God for giving the victory here, we have something very different. So, in verses 22 and 23, well verse 22 we'll start.

We have a very remarkable statement. In some ways it shouldn't be real surprising. But it's remarkable because the men of Israel came to Gideon, verse 22, and said, Rule over us, you, your son, your grandson also.

This is the language of royalty. This is the language of kingship. So, they're saying to Gideon, you should be our king, and it should be a dynastic succession.

It should be you, your son, your grandson, the way the kings are in every other culture around us. I mentioned in a different lecture about the establishment of kingship in Israel and the contrast between the godly ideal king that the Bible talks about in the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 17, where the king is to be someone whom God chooses, is to be an Israelite, is not to rely on his army, not to multiply horses, not to rely on foreign alliances with Egypt, not to multiply wives or riches. But rather the king, the Israelite king, the ideal Israelite king, is to be rooted in God's word.

That's the key to success for this king, and it's a profoundly countercultural picture. I'll urge you to watch that video segment because that's a video segment that covers not only the book of Joshua, but also the book of Judges, and even the book of Ruth. And go back to review the passage about kingship in Deuteronomy 17, verses 14 to 20.

That's where we see the picture of the ideal king in Israel. Now most of the kings sadly did not live up to that ideal, but that's what God was wanting for a king to be.

And as I just said, that picture is profoundly countercultural to the picture of the kingships in the nations around.

I'll give you a visual illustration here that I've also done in the other lecture, but I'm going to try to draw a scene from an Egyptian relief that shows the pharaoh in his chariot. This is my rendition of a picture that is found in the Egyptian reliefs as part of a bigger relief of a great battle. When I draw this, my students are always complaining about what a bad artist I am, so I apologize for that.

But there is a picture like this, and it includes the enemies of the pharaoh. Here are the enemies. They're scattered across the ground, and the pharaoh's chariot and horse are trampling over them.

The whole point of this depiction is that the pharaoh is seen in Egypt as the great warrior, as the mighty man who conquers all his enemies effortlessly and puts them under his thumb and his feet and his chariot and his horses. And that kind of picture is found in the reliefs in Babylon and Assyria as well. So, prevailing throughout the eastern Near East is this idea that the king in the society is to be the greatest warrior.

Or, the flip side, the greatest warrior is the one who should ascend to be the king. The biblical picture of Israel's king is the precise opposite of that. Again, back in Deuteronomy 17, it says the king should not multiply horses.

Horses were the ones that pulled the chariots. The chariots were the ancient equivalent of tanks, and they were the backbone of the military. So multiplying horses was, in a sense, building up your defenses or offenses, building up the army.

And depending on the army because of that. So the Israelite king was not to do that. So, therefore, it was a very profoundly countercultural thing.

The Israelite king was to rely on keeping God's word as part of his life and rely on the Lord to fight the battles. This whole idea of God as the divine warrior is an important theme throughout the Old Testament. So here in Judges 8, when the man of Israel comes to Gideon and asks this and says, you should rule over us, you, your son, your grandson also.

They are reflecting the mindset of the ancient Near East. They are reflecting what's pictured in this kind of relief. I should also say that in the written texts of the Egyptians, Assyrians, and Babylonians, we also find that same kind of picture.

The kings are boasting that they are the greatest and they are the ones that have conquered all things. So, the king is the great focus. In a sense, they're kind of like modern-day dictators who make a cult of themselves.

Everything kind of revolves around them. And the great tragedy here, it's an irony, but it's a tragic irony in this passage, is that these men who are asking Gideon to be their king, what is the reason that they want this to be? End of verse 22, because you have saved us from the hand of Midian. So again, these guys are idiots.

They have completely overturned the lesson from the winnowing down of the army down to 300 men. The whole point of that is clear, as obvious as the nose on your face, that when it gets down to that small a number, whatever victory comes is going to be at the hand of the Lord, not of Gideon or anyone else. So they are reverting back, in a sense, to their kind of natural tendencies of looking to humans for their deliverance, and it's a sad thing.

Now, to his credit, Gideon declines the honor. Gideon says, I will not rule over you. My son will not rule over you.

The Lord, Yahweh, will rule over you. So that's exactly the thing you should have said, and that's a good thing. In the churches that I grew up in, there was some phenomenon that was sometimes called the Sunday school answer.

And it turns out, Sunday school answers when you're growing up as a kid and you're in Sunday school, there's always sort of a super spiritual answer that's supposed to be the right answer. Even though the evidence might not point in that direction. So, there's a humorous story about that.

There was a teacher in a Sunday school with kids in the class who drew a picture of an elephant and wanted to make a point of this, some type of point, and she said to the class, what is this? And nobody spoke up. And she said, well, class, what is this? You know what this is. It's a familiar animal.

And nobody spoke up. Eventually, a little boy in the back kind of timidly said, well, I know the answer is supposed to be Jesus, but it sure looks like an elephant to me. So, he was kind of conditioned that it was always the super spiritual answer that he was supposed to say, even though the evidence would point it in a different direction.

So, to me, in a sense, Gideon, in his response here in verse 23, was giving the Sunday school answer. He knew what he was supposed to say. The words are exactly the right words.

But immediately in the next verse, we see him beginning to undermine that answer because he begins acting like a king, in a sense. He begins acting like a leader and he's leading them astray, not in the direction of the Lord. So, in verse 24, Gideon says, bring me your stuff.

Bring me all your valuables. And they answer, we will willingly give them. It's an ironic echo of back in Exodus when Moses said, bring me your stuff, and they willingly brought their treasures.

And that was to build the tabernacle. Now all the beautiful things in the tabernacle here, Gideon does something different with it. And verse 27, Gideon made an ephod out of it and put it in his city in Ophrah.

Not exactly sure what an ephod was, but it appeared to be a kind of breastplate of some type that the priests or someone would use that sometimes had 12 stones. And it was beautifully decorated and it was sometimes used to discern God's will. Somehow God would cause it to communicate his will in some way or another.

But it became kind of a talisman, almost, of people wanting to see it as a magical thing. And so here, Gideon, verse 27, made an ephod of all this stuff, put it in his city, and all Israel whored after it. All of Israel prostituted themselves after it.

They played the prostitute with it. The vivid imagery of whoring in the Bible, there's natural going after prostitutes that Israelites did with Moabite women and others. But there's a figurative use of that, a metaphorical use of that, where God speaks of himself as the husband of Israel, and Israel is prostituting themselves by following after other gods and goddesses.

And that's the idea here. They're following after something else than him. And that's a tragic thing.

So, all Israel whored after it, and it became a snare to Gideon and his family. So, this is not a good thing. Now, verse 28 is kind of the wrap-up to this part of Gideon's story.

And so, it says, Midian was subdued, and that's true. They did win great battles, and they raised their heads no more. The Moabites are no longer a threat.

And the land had rested for 40 years in his day. So that kind of ends the story of Gideon. But it's a mixed bag.

He does good things early on. Toward the end, he's not so good. It tells us that he has 70 sons in verses 29 and following.

Verse 30 says 70 sons. And verse 31 tells us about one of his sons. He had a concubine who was like a servant in his household.

And concubines, we see Hagar was Abraham's concubine. And Zilpah and Bilhah were Jacob's concubines back in the book of Genesis. They were employees, servants, slash slaves in a household.

And they usually performed a childbearing function. Here, Gideon has one son, and he calls him Abimelech in verse 31. And we will review here something I said in the earlier lecture.

But just a little lesson in Hebrew and Aramaic. We know this term from the New Testament, Abba. It's the Aramaic term for father.

And the Hebrew term for father is related to that. It's Av. If we say Avi, this in Hebrew is translated into English as my father.

And then the word for king is Melech. So, we notice that Gideon is naming his son, my father the king, or my father is king. So that's kind of ironic in light of his statement in verse 23 where it says, I will not rule over you, my son will not rule over you, the Lord will rule over you, and yet he names his son, my dad's king.

So, it's another way in which I think his actions have undermined the Sunday school answer that he gave in verse 23. As soon as Gideon dies, verse 33, he dies at a good old age, so that's all good. But as soon as he died, people turned again and whored after the Baals, making Baal bereth their god, verse 33.

And they did not remember the Lord their god, and that's not a good thing. It does conclude by saying something, they did not show steadfast love to the family of Jerubaal, that is Gideon, in return for all the good that he'd done for Israel. So, Gideon had done good, as we've already seen, but sadly he did not, it appears like he did not finish well, to use terminology that we hear today sometimes about finishing our lives well, following the Lord all the way to the end.

So, the next chapter tells us about the aftermath of Gideon, that it's not a new story of Israel turning away from the Lord and having battles against Canaanites, but it's rather the story of what happens with this Abimelech, and how he kind of perverts things as well. So, Abimelech is Gideon's son who has a violent grab for power. It appears to me that it kind of organically leads out of this request for the king in chapter 8. They're asking for a king, essentially like the nations, and in a sense, in the person of Abimelech, they get that kind of a king.

They get the king who establishes himself as a great warrior. Remember, Abimelech kills 70 of his brothers, there are 72 sons of Gideon. Abimelech kills 70 of them, and one escapes, Jotham.

But Abimelech is a good example of the warrior king that the people were thinking about, but he turns out to be a very bad example of that in the eyes of the Lord. So he rises to power, chapter 9, verses 1-6, by ruthlessly killing his own brothers with the help of the Shechemites. And then they made him king at Shechem in verse 6. Jotham, his brother, escapes, but everybody else, the Shechemites seem to appreciate him in making their king.

So Jotham, the brother that escapes, hears about this, and he comes to the top of Mount Gerizim, which is right overshadowing Shechem, and cries out aloud and has this speech that's an indictment of the Shechemites themselves, it's an indictment of Abimelech, and it's presented essentially as a fable. It tells the story of the trees. And the trees went out to anoint a king over them.

And they said verse 8, they said to the olive tree, Reign over us! Echoing the language of chapter 8, verse 22, the people of Israel came to Gideon and said, Rule over us here. The trees are doing that. And the olive tree declines, he says, I'm not going to leave my stuff.

And then they go to the fig tree, verse 10, same thing. They said to the vine, verse 12, the same thing. And finally, they get down to the least and the lowest of the plants, and it's the bramble that they ask.

And the bramble says, yeah, sure, I'll do that. But it's a ridiculous picture of having to go down the level of the majestic trees to this lowest of things, and it's clearly an indictment of the person who has been installed as the king. Again, an echo of what comes out of a request for a king that's based on military prowess.

That's the lesson in chapter 8, verse 22, and we see that played out here in a negative way in the person of Abimelech. So, he uses that fable to show the ridiculousness of what they have done, and then he begins to comment on that and explain that in verse 16. Therefore, if you've acted in good faith and integrity when you made Abimelech king, and so on, then if you've acted in good faith, verse 19, then you should rejoice in Abimelech and let him rejoice in you.

But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech and devour the leaders of Shechem and Beth-Melo, and the fire comes out. And then he runs away. So it says, verse 22, Abimelech reigns over Israel for about three years.

God sent an evil spirit between him and the leaders of Shechem. So originally the people that installed him as king, now there's a conflict between them, tension between them, and there's conflict, and so on. By the end of the story, it's a long chapter that goes through lots of backs and forth, Eventually, Abimelech is turning against Shechem and the Shechemites, and in verse 45, we see Abimelech fights against the city all day.

He captures the city, kills the people who were there, razed the city, and sowed it with salt. Sewing with salt basically means it's just desolate, nothing can grow, and so on. In the aftermath of that, there are still pockets of resistance to him, and eventually, he comes to the tower of a place nearby called Thebez, there's a strong tower there, verse 51, and everybody shuts themselves up there, and Abimelech comes to fight against it and gets ready to burn that tower down.

A woman throws a millstone down on his head, and he is killed dead. So, in verse 56, God returned the evil of Abimelech, which he committed against his father in killing his 70 brothers, and God also made the evil of the men of Shechem return on their heads, and upon them came the curse of Jotham, son of Jeroboam. So, Abimelech, in killing his 70 brothers, God turns that back on him, and he reigns as king, quote-unquote, for three years.

One thing we might say is, well, technically, in one sense, Abimelech is Israel's first king, but the Bible never treats him that way because he was not chosen by God. Back in Deuteronomy 17, one of the criteria for the God of the king is that God has to choose him. Abimelech is the one who set himself up as king, coming out of, again, this idea that he is a great warrior.

But the sin of Shechem, the evil of Shechem coming back on their heads, there's kind of a spotted history between Israel and Shechem, and it goes all the way back to the book of Genesis in chapter 34, where Shechem rapes Adina, one of the daughters of Jacob, and her brothers take revenge on them, and there's some bad blood that happens there. And certainly, the Shechemites were opposing Israel in these days, but it probably ultimately goes back to those stories from the very beginning of the Bible. And that ends kind of a sordid picture in Israel's history in the period of the judges.

Then we turn on to even more sordid stories to come in the following chapters.

This is Dr. David Howard in his teaching on the books of Joshua through Ruth. This is session 26, Judges 6-9, Gideon and the Aftermath.