

JUDGES 9-10

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Judges chapter 9, as we continue our study through the Word of God.

So far in our study of the book of Judges we have seen God raise up five Judges to deliver the various tribes in Israel from the bondage, the oppression they faced from their enemies.

Remember the cycle that they were in – *SIN, SERVITUDE, SUPPLICATION, SALVATION* and then, when the Judge dies, the cycle repeats itself!

This bondage from the enemies of Israel God allowed because of Israel's apostasy and once they turned back to the Lord, He raised up a deliverer or a Judge to free them.

The Judges we have seen so far are Othniel, Ehud and Shamgar who ministered in the southern region of Israel.

Then we saw Deborah in the northern region of Israel.

And last time we saw Gideon in the central region of Israel.

When God called Gideon, he was hiding in a wine press threshing wheat, afraid that the enemy would come and steal the wheat!

It is here that God calls Gideon a "**mighty man of valor.**"

Yes, he was fearful, but God saw the potential in Gideon and saw what he would accomplish.

And Gideon destroyed the idol and wooden image of Baal that Gideon's father set up and the people came to worship, Gideon tore it down! A step of faith.

Remember that the Midianites were oppressing the children of Israel, for seven years they were coming and stealing their food after they harvested it.

And God is calling Gideon to deliver them from this bondage.

The problem was that there were 135,000 Midianites to Israel's 32,000 troops. Not good odds, but God tells Gideon that they still have too many and God brings the number of fighting men from 32,000 down to 300! That is 450 to 1 odds against them winning this battle!

Why did God do this?

We don't have to guess because He tells us. In Judges 7:2 we are told, "**And the Lord said to Gideon, 'The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.'''**"

In other words, God wants them to understand that this victory is not going to be because of their strength, but it is the Lord who will give them this victory!

And God did deliver them with only 300 men!

On the heels of that great victory, the people wanted to make Gideon their King and not only him but his children and grandchildren down the road, but he refused. Which was good.

But that didn't stop Gideon from taking the Jewels from this victory, which the people gladly gave to Gideon.

And with these gold jewels he made an ephod, an idol!

We know that this is not of God because we are told in Judges 8:27 what they did with this idol, how it affected their lives. We are told, "**. . . And all Israel played the harlot with it there. It became a snare to Gideon and to his house.**"

Not only that, but he built a huge harem and through these women he had 70 sons, plus one from a concubine. And he named this son Abimelech, which means *“my father is King!”*

I thought he did not want to be King!

That is what he said but his actions spoke differently!

Gideon dies and now we are going to see what happens as Abimelech is going to desire the power and the prestige, he wants to be King!

And I guess you can say that Abimelech is a very controversial Judge who also ministered in the central region of Israel.

In fact, some don't even consider the son of Gideon, Abimelech as a Judge.

In any case, he was bad news as we will see, and we can learn some lessons from his life to help us in our walk with the Lord.

With that said, let's begin reading in Judges chapter 9, starting in verse 1 and see what the Lord has for us as we study His Word.

JUDGES 9

VERSES 1-2

As I have said, Gideon, also called Jerubbaal, finished his life with the Lord and he did not finish well, he did not finish strong.

He made a golden ephod, which he and the people worshiped.

Yes, the people wanted to make him King, but he told them, *“No, the Lord is our King!”*

And yet, his actions told a different story. His actions showed that he did want to be King!

Not only that but he had many wives that bore him seventy sons and one concubine who lived in Shechem with her family, who bore him one son and his name was Abimelech, who probably lived with his mother in Shechem.

Think about that for a minute. He has all these wives, and he also kept this concubine, a girl on the side.

Why?

Maybe to keep him company when he went to Shechem! But that is never a good thing, and we will see that as we continue our study here in Judges chapter 9!

Now why in the world did Gideon call his son "*Abimelech*"?

We aren't sure, but it is more of a title than a name and like I have said, it means, "*My father, a King.*"

Again, he said that he did not want to be King and yet his actions spoke of him wanting to be King and that was his downfall!

Now a concubine was not a wife but someone you would live with and have sexual relations with but as I have said, I don't believe that she even lived with Gideon but remained in Shechem with her family and he must have visited her from time to time and this is where Abimelech also grew up.

And the reason I believe this to be true, and not all do, is found in Judges 8:31, where we are told, "**And his concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, whose name he called Abimelech.**"

The Living Bible may make the point a little clearer as it says, "**He also had a concubine in Shechem, who presented him with a son named Abimelech.**"

Thus, Abimelech was probably seen as an outcast among his half-brothers, not really part of the family and I think that helped to set the stage for what we see taking place here. It does not excuse his behavior or make it right, but it helped to facilitate it!

Abimelech sees the handwriting on the wall, at least he thinks he does, and he goes to his mother's brothers to warn them.

Now there is no indication that these seventy sons of Gideon would try to rule over the people of Shechem, but that is what Abimelech tells them.

He basically says, ***“Hey, do you want your own flesh and blood to rule over you or do you want these strangers who do not know you to rule over you? I mean, who loves you baby! Obviously, I will be kind to you, you are my relative and they aren't and thus, you figure out how they will treat you!”***

I am paraphrasing but that is what he basically said to them and now look at how they responded to Abimelech!

VERSES 3-5

We see here that his relatives agree to this, and they then spoke so that the men of Shechem understood what was taking place, that Abimelech would now be their leader.

To help assist Abimelech they gave him seventy shekels of silver and Abimelech uses this to gather some worthless men to go and kill his half-brothers, the sons of Gideon, all 70 of them! They were nothing more than hit men!

I guess it was one shekel for each one! And they get this money from the god they worshiped, from the Temple of Baal-Berith, which means – ***Lord of the Covenant***. They turned from the living God to worship these false god's and their actions reflect that!

In regard to this, Clarke made this interesting comment. He wrote, *“A work begun under the name and influence of the devil is not likely to end to the glory of God, or to the welfare of men.”*

And how true that is as we will see and have seen even today!

Now, did Abimelech’s mother’s brothers and the men of Shechem know that is what Abimelech would do with the money?

We aren’t told but I don’t think that cared. *“Here’s the money, don’t tell us what you are going to do with it. But just get the job done”* mentality!

It was about their own personal gain, and they were not concerned about how it was attained.

In Habakkuk 2:9, as God pronounces judgment, the second woe against Babylon, He says, **“Woe to him who covets evil gain for his house, That he may set his nest on high, That he may be delivered from the power of disaster!”**

And The Amplified Bible puts it like this, **“Woe to him who obtains wicked gain for his house, [who thinks by so doing] to set his nest on high that he may be preserved from calamity and delivered from the power of evil!”**

That is what Abimelech is doing here and he will not get away with it in the end!

It is as Isaiah 59:7-8 says, **“Their feet run to evil, And they make haste to shed innocent blood; Their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; Wasting and destruction are in their paths. The way of peace they have not known, And there is no justice in their ways; They have made themselves crooked paths; Whoever takes that way shall not know peace.”**

How true that is!

Now the job was not completely carried out for Gideon's youngest son, Jotham hid himself.

But sixty-nine of Gideon's seventy sons were murdered by these worthless men that Abimelech hired.

Now what will the people of Shechem do when they find out what Abimelech did, this evil?

It is not good but let's read on and see.

VERSE 6

I am not sure who was worse here, what Abimelech did or what the people of Shechem did by making Abimelech their King!

Here's the thing. When a people reject the leadership of God in their lives, they will embrace all kinds of evil people to lead them and in the end, they will hate what they accepted into their lives as we will see here as we read on in this story!

Now Shechem is an interesting place. It is where God told Abraham that his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan.

It was the area where Jacob told his family to put away their idols.

And if you remember from our study in Joshua, it was the place the children of Israel gathered to hear the blessings from Mount Gerizim and the cursings from Mount Ebal.

But it is the place now where Abimelech was made King.

And, interestingly enough, his coronation took place by the same tree that Joshua had placed a copy of the Law of God.

In Joshua 24:25-27 we are told, **“So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem. Then Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone, and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the Lord. And Joshua said to all the people, ‘Behold, this stone shall be a witness to us, for it has heard all the words of the Lord which He spoke to us. It shall therefore be a witness to you, lest you deny your God.’”**

So here was this stone of witness that was right there, and they refused to read it or heed it.

Before we come against them for not following God’s Word, how often do we do that today?

We have the Word of God, probably several copies in our homes, several versions, even software for our computer and-so-on, but do we read it and then apply it into our lives?

If not, are we not doing what Abimelech and the people of Shechem were doing?

I believe we are!

VERSES 7-15

The sole remaining son of Gideon, Jotham, went to the top of Mount Gerizim, which is about 800 feet in elevation, and it probably took him some 20 minutes to get to the top and when he speaks, he will be facing Shechem.

If you remember, this is where the blessings were called out from when Joshua and the children of Israel entered the Promise Land and the cursings across the valley at Mount Ebal.

But now Jotham is going to rebuke the people of Shechem for making Abimelech their King. He is going to show them in this parable what a foolish choice they made and a choice that is in opposition to God!

What we see here, interestingly enough, is the first parable in the Bible. And here Jotham speaks to the men of Shechem, and I am sure they clearly understood what he was saying to them.

The trees spoke of the people, and they were looking for a King to rule over them.

They went to the olive tree, the fig tree and the vine, but they all refused. They all produced fruit and I believe that they represented Gideon and his sons.

And as we have seen in our studies, Gideon refused to be King, and also his sons.

Granted the actions of Gideon contradicted what he was doing, it seemed that he wanted to be King, but he did not have that title nor did his children, except now for Abimelech.

Now, in this parable, the olive tree, the fig tree and the vine refused so the trees then came to bramble, that is all that was left.

Now a bramble was a worthless piece of tumble weed that was good for nothing. It was only used to start fires. It produced no fruit let alone trying to take shade under it, that was a joke.

And Jotham is speaking to the people and saying to them, ***“Is this who you want to be your King, the bramble, Abimelech?”***

You see, he wanted them to see the foolishness of their decision but at this point, they refused to listen, but in a short time they will turn against Abimelech, the one they wanted to rule them!

How fickle people are, especially when they don't know the Lord, or they are not listening to the Lord and make decisions based on their own feelings!

And did you notice the ultimatum that Abimelech gave to the people, ***“Either elect me King or I will burn you to the ground!”***

Not a great way to start out your leadership, by threats, but that was Abimelech!

One writer summed it up like this for us, this parable. He wrote,

All three trees were bearing fruit pleasing to God. They didn't have time to step down from their calling and govern other trees.

The implication is that the wise and godly men in Israel knew that God alone was king over Israel.

Only a sinister, selfish bramble would try to take His place.

But the bramble bears no fruit. It's worthless. Its only ambition is to rule over other trees. A bramble only grows up to overshadow or choke out good trees.

- Sandy Adams, Judges 9

Jotham may be done with this parable, but he is not done speaking to the people of Shechem!

VERSES 16-20

I guess Jotham did not get the book on how to win friends and influence people and thus, Jotham lets the people have it.

Jotham reminds them of how his father, Gideon, not only fought for them but he delivered them from the hands of the Midianites, and this is how they repay him, the kindness he showed them.

Jotham basically said, ***“This man Gideon, this is the one you wanted to make King and now you have supported the effort to kill his offspring, all except for Abimelech, who is your brother. And now, after what he has done, you make him King? You are allowing the killer of Gideon’s sons to rule over you! And, if you did nothing wrong, then enjoy Abimelech as your King! But if you did do wrong, look out! A fire will not only devour you but also Abimelech!”***

In other words, if you are acting in truth and sincerity towards my family, then you have nothing to fear.

But if you are not, judgment is coming upon you and your city! And we will see that take place!

VERSE 21

After this tongue lashing, this rebuke and curse upon the people of Shechem and Abimelech, Jotham high tails it away, having at least a 20-minute head start on them if they wanted to come after him.

And where does Jotham go?

He goes into hiding in Beer.

No, he does not go hiding in a beer, trying to wash away all his troubles but in the city of Beer.

But isn't that like many today that when trouble comes, they try to hide themselves away in beer or alcohol or drugs, and folks, that does not work; it only brings about more trouble.

Bring it to the Lord, rest in Him and do not be drunk with wine or beer but be filled with the Spirit of God!

VERSES 22-24

All those words that Jotham spoke had no impact upon the people and the reason I say that is because they were at peace with their decision about Abimelech.

That is until God dealt with their evil and repaid them for what they had done.

Prior to this there was no strife between the people of Shechem and Abimelech, for three years!

And notice that the Lord sent a spirit of ill will.

How can that be, I thought God was holy, God was pure, there was no darkness in Him at all?

That is very true, there is no darkness in Him at all.

Then what is going on here?

I think God allowed this evil spirit to go forth and we do see this in the Scriptures.

We see this in I Samuel 16:14 as we are told, **“But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the Lord troubled him.”**

You see, I don't believe Satan or any of his demons can do anything apart from the Lord allowing it.

We see that in Job chapter 1.

Thus, God allowed this evil spirit to bring strife between the men of Shechem and Abimelech!

These demons are just waiting to act, but they can do nothing unless God allows it and God will give people just what they desire, what is in their heart as we see here.

And what we are seeing is that Abimelech was going to reap what he had sown, and judgment was not only going to fall upon him, but the people of Shechem also for what they had sown.

VERSE 25

As this evil spirit came upon the men of Shechem, as this spirit of strife came into their lives, they started to rebel against Abimelech.

This is how they were doing it.

They had guys who were hiding along the trade routes, up in the mountains, and as these caravans and the other travelers would come by, they would swoop down upon them, and they would rob them.

This not only reduced travel on these roads, but it was also taking money out of the King's pocket.

You see, these people would pay a tax, a kind of toll, for using these roads, like in Illinois! With these raiders around, the King was losing this tax, and it was of course showing great dishonor to the King.

Just the thing the men of Shechem wanted to do. It was a kind of in-your-face behavior towards Abimelech, who only reigned now for three years before this trouble started!

And keep in mind that he was not King over all of Israel, but just the people of Shechem. Saul would be the first King in Israel.

One writer summed it up like this for us. He wrote, *“This would have the effect of reducing the number of travelers and caravans in such a troubled area, thus emptying the pockets of Abimelech as well as hitting as his pride, for he could not guarantee the safety of travel in his domain.”* (Cundall)

And keep in mind that this was a judgment of God; He allowed this evil spirit to come upon them. They wanted nothing to do with God and this is what they received, a life apart from Him where there is evil, murder, strife and-so-on! They had a chance to repent of their evil, the sin that they committed, but they refused and now they are going to reap what they have sown!

VERSES 26-29

Because it was the time of the grape harvest, we know that the time of year this took place was probably June/July.

And here is this guy, Gaal and he was a big talker. The wine was flowing; they were drinking and drunk, having a good old time.

And as the wine caused them to let their defenses down, he began to speak what was in his heart.

And Gaal said, **“Who is Abimelech?”**

In other words, why should they serve this man Abimelech, who is he to them?

And he also says, **“Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem.”**

Now why in the world did he say that?

Remember from our study in Genesis chapter 34 and how Simeon and Levi killed Hamor and his son Shechem, because he wanted to marry their sister, Dinah.

Thus, Gaal is basically saying, *“Why should they serve the children of Israel, for they murdered our family! Serve me, a descendent of Hamor.”*

You see, if he were the King then he would destroy Abimelech. And you can just imagine how Gaal was acting, *“Let me at him, I’ll rip him to pieces. Come and get me if you can Abimelech. Or are you scared?”*

Big talk now, but trouble is coming quickly upon Gaal for his big mouth.

Make no mistake about it, alcohol makes us do things that we would not normally do, and that is not a good thing.

In Proverbs 23:29-35 we are told, **“Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long at the wine, Those who go in search of mixed wine. Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, When it swirls around smoothly; At the last it bites like a serpent, And stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things, And your heart will utter perverse things. Yes, you will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, Or like one who lies at the top of the mast, saying: ‘They have struck me, but I was not hurt; They have beaten me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake, that I may seek another drink?’”**

How true that is. The turmoil, the fights that people get into when they are drunk, and they may not feel it that night but when they wake up, there is pain.

And that is what we see here with Gaal, lots of talk, the alcohol has loosened him up and yet, it is going to be his downfall, as we will see.

VERSES 30-33

So here we see that Zebul, who was placed in charge of the city, a kind of “*city manager,*” warns Abimelech of what Gaal is doing, that he is trying to mobilize men to side with him.

I can imagine how loud and boisterous they were in this drunken state; all the big talk and Zebul heard what they said and what they were planning on doing.

Thus, Zebul warns Abimelech of what is going on and he tells Abimelech to set-up an ambush against Gaal. He wants Abimelech to take him by surprise instead of the other way around. Gaal thought he would take Abimelech by surprise and defeat him, but now the tables are turned!

VERSES 34-37

I love this story because it is almost comical what Zebul does here.

Abimelech sets his men in four divisions and prepares to take Gaal and those who were siding with him in this rebellion.

And as Gaal looks at the mountains he tells Zebul that it looks like people are coming down from the mountains.

And Zebul basically says, “*You’re out of your mind. You are seeing nothing more than shadows in the mountains. You don’t see people! You are seeing things!*”

And Gaal looks again and says, “*No, I think those are people that are coming down from the mountains, don’t you see them?*”

Zebul knew exactly what was coming down. He lets Gaal think he is seeing things until Abimelech was right upon him. And notice what Zebul now says to Gaal!

VERSES 38-41

Now Zebul lets the cat out of the bag you might say, and he lets Gaal have it.

He basically tells Gaal, ***“So you think you are so tough? So you think you can defeat Abimelech? Now put your money where your mouth is, speaking so boldly like you are some hot shot. Here is your chance, Abimelech is coming after you, go and get him!”***

And Gaal did go after Abimelech, but I am sure he was not as bold as he was when he was drunk.

And Abimelech defeats Gaal and his men and Gaal is exiled from Shechem.

And you would think that this is the end of the story, but it is not.

A man who has taken a position by force will have to fight to maintain that position and that is what we see here with Abimelech.

Notice what he does.

VERSES 42-45

Gaal was the man that was against Abimelech but now he turns his fury against all of Shechem.

For the people of Shechem, they thought the battle was over and they were getting back to a normal day’s work, a normal life you might say as they were going out into their fields to work.

But that was not the case. Abimelech destroys the people of Shechem and the land, he even sows salt on the land to make the land unfit for growing crops, and thus, people could not live there for a time!

That is their King!

Interestingly enough, archeology does confirm the destruction of Shechem during this period of time and it was not rebuilt again until the time of Jeroboam as he made Shechem his capital in I Kings 12:25 as we are told, “**Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the mountains of Ephraim, and dwelt there. Also he went out from there and built Penuel.**”

VERSES 46-49

As word spread about what Abimelech was doing, how he had destroyed the city of Shechem and his rampage was continuing on, about 1,000 men and women fled to the tower of the god they worshiped, the god Berith.

They were seeking safety in their tower you might say, safety in this god, and in the end, they found it was not a place of safety, but a place of destruction. What we see is that Abimelech and his men come in and set this stronghold on fire and burned them to death.

Isn't that exactly what Jotham said would happen if they refused to repent of their sin and get right with God?

Absolutely, they were warned but they chose not to listen, and they are reaping what they have sown! Jotham warned the men of Shechem if they followed Abimelech, they would get burned! And that is exactly what happened. The tower became an incinerator.

And I wonder if the people of Shechem are thinking that they would have been better off with the sons of Gideon than with Abimelech.

Now this tower in Shechem is still around today.

What do I mean by that?

It is anything or anyone that people run to for safety that is apart from the Lord and in the end; they will find out that it was not a place of safety for them at all!

You see, we are told in Proverbs 18:10, **“The name of the Lord is a strong tower; The righteous run to it and are safe.”**

Also, in Psalm 61:3 we are told, **“For You have been a shelter for me, A strong tower from the enemy.”**

Thus, if you want true safety and protection, you need to run to the Lord, into His arms for He alone can save and He alone is our strong tower to protect us from the enemy!

I thought God was going to judge Abimelech!

He will. Listen to what transpires.

VERSE 50-52

Thebez was located about 10 miles northeast of Shechem, and Abimelech was going to do to them what he did in Shechem.

He is still on this killing rampage, maybe trying to show the people who is in charge here but if he kills all the people, then there will be no one to rule over.

But when you are living in rebellion against God, you must try to maintain what you think is yours at any cost and that is what he is doing, and it isn't pretty!

But the people see what is happening and once again they hide themselves in a tower for safety, and Abimelech was once again going to burn the tower down as he had done earlier, at least that was his plan.

It worked once it has to work again, right?

Well, not exactly!

VERSES 53-55

Things did not work out exactly as Abimelech had planned.

There was this woman in the tower who had a millstone, and she threw it over the top of the tower, and it landed on Abimelech's head. Good shot or maybe God shot!

Now a millstone could weigh some 400 pounds and even upwards of 1 ton and I don't think this woman tossed a 400-pound millstone off the tower because Abimelech would not have woken up from that one nor could she do it.

According to Wood, "*Such hand-stones average ten to fourteen inches long and weighed five pounds or more.*"

That is what she probably tossed off the tower and hit Abimelech on the head, and that would hurt, it could kill you and it left him in a condition where he was dying but did not want to die at the hands of a woman, so he asks his armorbearer to get his sword and kill him, and he does.

Now, how did this cover up go for Abimelech, that a woman killed him, and he tried to cover it up?

Not too well since we are reading that he died at the hands of a woman and in II Samuel 11:21 we are also told, "**Who struck Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth? Was it not a woman who cast a piece of a millstone on him from the wall, so that he died in Thebez? . . .**"

Thus, just a little reminder that he died at the hands of a woman, which was a disgrace for a military man and for a King! And when you think about it, in either case, dead is still dead!

Now Abimelech reaped what he had sown as one commentator reminds us. He wrote, *“But commentators observe it for a just hand of God upon Abimelech, that upon one stone he had slain his seventy brethren, and now a stone slayeth him: his head had stolen the crown of Israel, and now his head is smitten.”* (Trapp)

VERSES 56-57

Just as Jotham said, **“if then you have acted in truth and sincerity with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, then rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you. But if not, let fire come from Abimelech and devour the men of Shechem and Beth Millo; and let fire come from the men of Shechem and from Beth Millo and devour Abimelech!”** Judges 9:19-20.

It has come to pass!

The lesson here is that we need to listen and obey the Lord’s voice to us, His warning because if we refuse there is a very real and a very terrible price to pay!

Now, what lessons can we learn from Abimelech?

First of all, his ungodly ambition brought him down.

The Lord reminds us in James 4:6, **“But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: ‘God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.’”**

You see, it is when we humble ourselves before the Lord that He lifts us up and if He does that for us, then we don’t have to strive to maintain something, we can just walk in faith knowing that He will keep us.

It is as Peter reminds us, **“Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.”** I Peter 5:5-6.

Also, we have seen the principle of sowing and reaping take place here.

All the evil that Abimelech perpetrated upon the people came back upon him. He wanted to be crowned King and he was crowned with a millstone!

Be careful what you are going after.

Seek first the Kingdom of God and God will give to you what you need, and it will be perfect!

JUDGES 10

VERSES 1-2

We are not told much of this seventh judge in Israel by the name of Tola. And Tola ministered in the central portion of the land of Israel, in the mountain area of Ephraim. And he judged Israel for twenty-three years after Abimelech had died!

VERSES 3-5

We also are not told much of this eighth judge in Israel, Jair.

We do know that he lived on the east side of the Jordan River in the area of Gilead, in the tribe of Manasseh.

And Jair was a wealthy man as we see that he was able to give his 30 sons, 30 donkeys to ride.

And he too ruled for a long period of time and it would seem that during his time as Judge the land had rest for 22 years.

What we see here is that both Tola and Jair judged Israel for a combined 45 years.

Then look at what we are told.

VERSE 6

Here we see the children of Israel worship a potpourri of god's instead of the true and living God.

We see listed seven different ethnic and national gods that they went after, and I think the number is significant.

The number seven speaks of completeness or that they had given themselves over totally to these gods, they had turned from the Lord.

But why did they do this?

Here is the reason.

I believe that Israel was attracted to these other gods not because of the beauty of an idol image, but because of what was associated with the pagan deity.

Baal, the weather god, was associated with financial success.

Ashtoreth, the goddess of fertility, was associated with love, sex, and romance.

As for the other gods of the neighboring nations around them, it was a matter of “*going with the flow*” and doing what everyone else did. And here’s the thing. When a person turns from the true and living God it is not that he stops believing in everything. He tends to focus on that which satisfies the flesh and that ends up being his god!

That is what Israel was doing and what a sad state of affairs. But if we are honest with ourselves, that is what we see happening in our own nation!

VERSES 7-9

God gave them what they wanted. If they wanted to serve these other god’s, go for it, but then His hand of protection would be removed from them!

And this oppression was severe as these nations came against Israel, but God did not do this, they forsook the Lord, and this is what happens, they were warned and did not listen! They faced eighteen years of oppression!

And notice that it was not just those on the east side of the Jordan River, the Ammonites crossed over into the Promise Land and attacked Judah, Benjamin and the house of Ephraim.

VERSE 10

In the earlier chapters we did not see them repent of their sins, but cry out because of the oppression they were in.

But here we see them repent of two sins - forsaking the Lord and serving these foreign gods.

That must take place folks, or the repentance is not sincere.

Think about it. Jails are full of people who are sorry they got caught but not because of their actions.

But here we see them repent of their sin and yes, for 18 years they were oppressed but now they cry out to God to deliver them.

VERSES 11-14

We see God re-cap for them how He had delivered them from the hands of their enemies who serve these so-called gods.

And you have to understand the mentality of the enemy. The gods they served where, in a sense, local gods.

Thus, when you would go to battle and you would defeat your opponent, you would come to the conclusion that your god is stronger than their god!

And God is saying to the children of Israel that no enemy, no god is able to stand against Him, for He has delivered them from all their enemies!

That should not be news to them for they had seen all that God had done for them, but they put it out of their memory and let other things, worthless things replace what God had done.

May we not forget all that God has done for us, is doing for us and will do for us! That should keep us focused on Him and not be distracted by these other things, these so-called god's that move us away from the Lord!

As you read this it does seem like the Lord is being a little harsh here. They did repent of their sin and yet God tells them if these other gods that you are now serving are so strong and powerful, then let them deliver you from your trouble.

Again, these gods appealed to their flesh, it satisfied those desires. But they were totally ineffective in times of trouble. These gods of pleasure were of no help.

We see that today, as people serve the gods of pleasure, power and wealth. But in times of trouble, can they truly save you?

No way!

It is only the living God that can heal you both physically and spiritually. He is the fountain of living water. And I think God wanted them to hate their sin so much that they would truly turn back to Him and not do so just because times were tough.

He wanted them to be sick of their sin and I think God will do that with us. If we don't want to let go, He will give us the full measure of it until we are sick of it and are ready to give it to Him!

What I see here is that God is testing them, seeing if they truly are ready to repent. God knows the answer, so this was for them to do a heart check!

VERSES 15-16

This is the place the Lord wanted them to be, ***TOTAL SURRENDER TO HIM!***

How do I know that they had surrendered to the Lord?

Two reasons.

First of all, we are told, "**We have sinned! Do to us whatever seems best to you.**"

They had surrendered to the Lord and were willing to take their punishment for their sin.

Secondly, they put away their foreign god's. In other words, it was not just empty words on their part, their lives reflected what they were saying, that they had indeed turned back to the Lord!

Now there is one more point I would like to make here, and I believe it is important.

Notice what it says about the Lord in verse 16, “**And His soul could no longer endure the misery of Israel.**”

For some reason people think God gets pleasure in punishing people, pouring out His judgment upon them. But when I read the Scriptures, I see a loving God who wants what is best for His people and when they are in sin, He will chasten them, but it is not something that He enjoys or gets pleasure from!

It is as Nehemiah 9:31 tells us, “**Nevertheless in Your great mercy You did not utterly consume them nor forsake them; For You are God, gracious and merciful.**”

That is our God and now the God we serve wants us to go and extend grace and mercy to the people that we encounter each day.

Yes, it is not easy but if God has done this for us, may we do the same to others, showing them the love of God!

VERSES 17-18

As Israel gathered together in Mizpah in response to the threat of the Ammonites, they had no leader!

What a sad state of affairs. They had no one to lead them in battle.

But, as we will see next time, God is going to raise up another Judge in Israel, the ninth Judge to deliver the children of Israel from the hands of their oppressors, the Ammonites!

Make no mistake about it. God's pattern for doing great works among His people is to raise up a man. He could do the work all by Himself; He could send angels to do the work for Him; He could use a leaderless mob or a committee. Yet God's normal means of operating is to raise up a man, and through that man to do a great work. God uses leaders.

Listen to what J. Vernon McGee said in regard to leadership. He wrote,

The Israelites lacked leadership. That is always characteristic of men, or of a generation, that has turned from God.

Lack of leadership has definitely characterized our nation for the last twenty-five years [over 60 years now, since J. Vernon McGee went to be with the Lord in 1988].

In fact, there has been a lack of leadership in the world for many years. We need vital leadership, but we cannot seem to find it.

This was Israel's experience. Now they are going to turn to a most unusual man for guidance. Under normal circumstances they would not have turned to him at all.

- J. Vernon McGee, Thru the Bible, Vol. II, p. 69

As I close this evening, what we truly need in this country, in the church, in our homes is godly leadership.

Men and women who are sold out for the Lord and are willing to walk by faith and do what is right and not necessarily what is popular. In Ezekiel 22:30 we see this sad statement, "**So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one.**"

May we be the ones who will stand in the gap, be those godly leaders in a nation that is starving for godly leadership, and they don't even know it!