

Judges 9-10

Good evening, it is wonderful to be with you all tonight.

And it is wonderful to be back in the Book of Judges tonight.

If you are new here or listening online, our Wednesday Night Study is a survey through the Old Testament.

I had a missionary last week, tell me that it is very rare that churches teach through the Old Testament anymore.

She was shocked and excited to know that we are still doing this.

But you see our leadership here believes it is our calling to teach believers the whole counsel of God.

Paul told the Romans in **Rom. 15:4 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.**

So we have a desire to learn all we can from God's entire Word, including what valuable truths are found in the Old Testament.

So we have made it to Judges chapter 9, and we will look at Judges 9-10 tonight.

Let us pray before we start our study.

Now, my wife hates the ocean, or I should say she hates any kind of body of water.

She is barely okay with a swimming pool.

But one thing you can count on is she will never, ever get on a cruise ship.

For her the most terrifying thought is to be out to sea, with endless ocean as far as the eye can see.

Well, she watches YouTube videos that show cruise ship disasters, but it was in 2012 that her fear of going on a cruise ship was solidified by the News Reports of the Costa Concordia.

The huge cruise ship ran aground and overturned after it hit an underwater rock off coast of Tuscany.

32 people died because of the accident.

Now, if you remember the report, the whole incident was due to one man's negligence.

Captain Francesco Schettino wanted to show off the ship, and took the ship off course to give a wave to the land goers.

When the ship crashed, the man who was supposed to lead the evacuation, and be the last to leave the ship, was actually one of the first to race to shore.

They have recorded phone calls where the Coast Guard is pleading with the Captain to get back aboard and rescue his passengers.

For which the Cowardly Captain rejected the plea, because he was too scared, and really he was too selfish.

He ultimately was charged with manslaughter, and sentenced to 16 years in prison.

Now, this is a picture of poor, self-serving leadership, and today in our culture, there are too many people walking out and leaving their leadership roles, rejecting their responsibilities to lead, and leaving those entrusted to them to fend for themselves.

May it be in the business world or even in the home.

There is no shortage of selfish leaders today.

One of the greatest needs in our world is for wise, and honorable leaders to rise to the occasion in our families, churches, and even in the secular world.

We need leaders that serve others, and not simply their own interests.

Well before us tonight, is an example of a very self-serving leader, Abimelech will set forth a poor example of leadership.

And I read this next chapter, and wondered why the Holy Spirit gives such a large portion of scripture to such a poor example.

And as we seem to continually conclude, that the Biblical narrative is never focused on the man, but is a continuous picture of God's Grace.

Israel will turn from God, yet God will not turn from them, and will continually show them mercy at each failure, and grant them another chance.

So let us remember where we left off.

Gideon, the man who started out so well, in obedience to God's Word, ended his career on a sour note.

He made a shrine of the ephod made from the gold of the spoil from the battle.

The shrine led the people into another season of apostasy, and became a snare to Gideon and his family.

He denied the kingship when the people offered it to him, yet he chose to live like a king without the title.

He had many wives and even took on a relationship with a pagan concubine in Shechem, she bore Gideon a son out of wedlock, who would not have any right to the inheritance or even the name of Gideon's glory.

The woman named her son Abimelech, whose name means "My father the king."

And we will see this sinful relationship will lead to great consequences for the people of God.

Gideon was a poor father, and a man controlled by his flesh, and the consequences of his choices will be felt in his children.

We see Gideon at the beginning of his life ruled by God's Word, but at the end, God's Word was shelved, and it held no prominence in this man's life.

And we will see the fruit of his abandonment of God's Word from his life.

Understand men, if you are not leading your households in the reading of God's Word, if you are not bringing them to hear God's Word at church, if God's Word has no place in your life, no authority over your life, then your household will be effected by its absence.

This is the foundation of a godly home, it must be founded on God's Word, if we are to lead correctly.

So remember the verses that ended Gideon's career.

Judges 8:33-35 So it was, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals, and made Baal-Berith their god. 34 Thus the children of Israel did not remember the Lord their God, who had delivered them from the hands of all their enemies on every side; 35 nor did they show kindness to the house of Jerubbaal (Gideon) in accordance with the good he had done for Israel.

Now, typically we would get to meet another Judge that God raised up to lead Israel back to Him, but this time, we will see an event that took place because of Gideon's poor finish.

Look at the first six verses of chapter 9 with me...

Abimelech's Conspiracy

9:1 Then Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem, to his mother's brothers, and spoke with them and with all the family of the house of his mother's father, saying, 2 "Please speak in the hearing of all the men of Shechem: 'Which is better for you, that all seventy of the sons of Jerubbaal reign over you, or that one reign over you?' Remember that I am your own flesh and bone."

3 And his mother's brothers spoke all these words concerning him in the hearing of all the men of Shechem; and their heart was inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, "He is our brother." 4 So they gave him seventy shekels of silver from the temple of Baal-Berith, with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless men; and they followed him. 5 Then he went to his father's house at Ophrah and killed his brothers, the seventy sons of Jerubbaal, on one stone. But Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, because he hid himself. 6 And all the men of Shechem gathered together, all of Beth Millo, and they went and made Abimelech king beside the terebinth tree at the pillar that was in Shechem.

The main message of this story is to point out the effects of rejecting the true King.

Understand when God is not on the throne of the people a usurper will take His place.

Understand Israel was to have God as their King.

But we saw last time even with Gideon, the people's hearts are already in a place to make a man king over them.

Judges 8:22-24 Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, "Rule over us, both you and your son, and your grandson also; for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian." 23 But Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you."

The heart of the people have already begun to long for a man to rule over them.

Gideon denied this request, but Abimelech the illegitimate son has a thirst for power.

Gideon's death left a void, that needed to be filled, and if because Gideon did not establish the people in God's Word, and under its authority, the result was Abimelech.

Abimelech, the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem, to his mother the harlot's family,

Notice the writer calls him the son of Jerubbaal, or Baal-fighter, to remind the reader of the heroics of Gideon to stand against idolatry.

And here his son, goes to the Canaanites, to get help and support for his ambitious mission to fill the void left by his father.

We see it is here in Shechem that Abimelech starts his rebellion.

Now, this tells us the condition of the nation of Israel Shechem, if you remember, it is where Abraham's first well was.

It is where Jacob bought a parcel of land, and erected an altar there.

Also this is where Jacob's son's Simeon and Levi killed the inhabitants for defiling their sister Dinah.

Shechem is where they buried Joseph's bones.

It was outside this city that Joshua led the people to wholeheartedly commit themselves to God.

As they announced the blessings and cursings from Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim.

This town had such a rich heritage for the people of God.

Yet they had compromised with the Canaanites so much that it became a mixed city.

The two people groups lived as neighbors and we see they worshipped Baal-Berith there.

Abimelech perhaps, treated differently than his seventy brothers, as he was raised under his pagan mother's roof, and had no inheritance from his father.

This man fell very easily into his mother's faith, and the seductive worship of Baal.

He had no right to power or rule, but he was a shrewd and clever man.

Now, he exploits, perhaps the discontent and jealous hearts of the people of Shechem, who are his blood relatives through his mother.

And he uses the lie that many politicians still use today to gain power and control of over people, "I am just like you."

He tells them he is family with them, "I am your own flesh and bone."

And with contempt in their hearts toward the "Baal-Fighter's" seventy sons, they followed Abimelech.

We see the false god's temple finances the overthrow.

Abimelech hires worthless and reckless men with the seventy shekels of silver.

The Arrogant Abimelech empowered now with a following, goes to Ophrah and killed all his privileged brothers.

He, as a conqueror would do, kills them on one stone, all except one, Jotham the youngest, who escapes.

It is interesting that Abimelech used his illegitimacy, and exploited his half-brothers in Shechem to join him.

His illegitimacy was used ultimately as his right to lead them.

If they got rid of the threat of the Baal Fighter's sons they could worship unhindered according to their sinful passions.

But Abimelech exploited them to selfishly gain power for himself.

Like a drug, power corrupts, and this man is corrupt. But non-the-less they crown him king over Shechem. But Jotham, the final son of Gideon comes out from hiding to act as a prophet over this newly found unstable kingdom.

Look now at verse 7...

The Parable of the Trees

7 Now when they told Jotham, he went and stood on top of Mount Gerizim, and lifted his voice and cried out. And he said to them:

"Listen to me, you men of Shechem, That God may listen to you!

8 "The trees once went forth to anoint a king over them. And they said to the olive tree, 'Reign over us!' 9 But the olive tree said to them, 'Should I cease giving my oil, With which they honor God and men, And go to sway over trees?'

10 "Then the trees said to the fig tree, 'You come and reign over us!' 11 But the fig tree said to them, 'Should I cease my sweetness and my good fruit, And go to sway over trees?'

12 "Then the trees said to the vine, 'You come and reign over us!' 13 But the vine said to them, 'Should I cease my new wine, Which cheers both God and men, And go to sway over trees?'

14 "Then all the trees said to the bramble, 'You come and reign over us!' 15 And the bramble said to the trees, 'If in truth you anoint me as king over you, Then come and take shelter in my shade; But if not, let fire come out of the bramble And devour the cedars of Lebanon!'

16 "Now therefore, if you have acted in truth and sincerity in making Abimelech king, and if you have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have done to him as he deserves — 17 for my father fought for you, risked his life, and delivered you out of the hand of Midian; 18 but you have risen up against my father's house this day, and killed his seventy sons on one stone, and made Abimelech, the son of his female servant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your brother — 19 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. 20 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!" 21 And Jotham ran away and fled; and he went to Beer and dwelt there, for fear of Abimelech his brother.

So, Jotham here, the only member of Gideon's family that escaped the genocide, gets news of the ordaining of his half-brother as king in Shechem.

He courageously goes to challenge Abimelech, and from the safety of Mount Gerizim speaks a prophetic word for all the people to hear.

By staying on top of the mountain, he could easily flee, and also he would easily be heard, as the mountain and valley below provided the natural acoustics that he needed to get the message to those below.

He shouts a fable to the hearers, which would grab their imaginations.

He uses trees as a picture of the foolishness that is taking place.

The trees representing Israel, for some unknown reason are trying to appoint a king.

But Israel had a King, their God.

But they continue on in a search for another, they first approach the olive tree, which would be the most esteemed tree in Israel, because it produced their the valuable olive oil.

From this prestigious tree, they hear an emphatic "No!"

The Olive Tree replies, "Should I cease giving my oil, with which honor God and man, and go sway over the trees?"

What value does swaying in the wind over other trees have?

God created the Olive Tree to produce olive oil, that was his purpose, why does he need to rule, if God is already the King.

This seems to be a picture of Gideon denying the people their request to rule over them.

But in Jotham's picture here the nominating committee is not satisfied with that answer, they want another king beside God to rule, so they approach a fig tree.

This also is a valuable and prominent tree in Israel, but it was created to make sweet fruit, and that is what pleased its Creator.

This does not satisfy the committee at all.

So they find the grape vine, and ask it to rule over them.

They want it to disregard that it was created for making wine that pleased God in the drink offerings, and also brings a merry heart to man.

Plus it is only a vine, how do they expect it to sway over the trees.

Now, something we cannot miss here, is these valuable trees recognize they already have a King, and that King has given each of them a certain function.

They each were fruit bearing trees, and as long as they were being used for what God made them to do, they would be a blessing, both to God and man.

They understood they had value in just being who God created them to be.

They had no ambition, or a need to pursue higher things to find value in themselves.

But this did not satisfy the search committee, and they were now reduced to find a bramble bush or a tumble weed.

It was not even a tree, or of noble stock.

It is a useless bush and a product of the curse that God brought to this earth because of man's sin.

It bore no fruit or anything of value, it was nuisance and painful to touch.

There is nothing that fuels a fire greater than one of these dried up bramble bushes.

We know this all too well in our area, as they fuel many fires in the summer and in the fall here.

There was nothing productive, and how arrogant it is for the bramble to try to gather trees under its shade.

The point here, is that their foolish desire for a king besides God, will lead people to accept something that is worthless.

And Abimelech is this Bramble King, trying to gather the other trees to himself.

Jotham using sarcasm here, what kind of shade could this Bramble King even produce?

We see also this Bramble King threatens fire to come forth if the trees do not gather, and we see the arrogance of this king when he threatens the cedars of Lebanon.

The scale is too large and too far apart, what threat is a bramble to a huge cedar.

The Bramble King is blind to his own reality.

Jotham points out that the people were submitting themselves to a completely worthless man.

Then after this fable, Jotham starting in verse 16 brings home the application.

He reminds them of all that Gideon had done for the people, in delivering them.

They should have honored the family for the great heroics of their father.

They would have nothing to fear, but because of these actions, he states in verse 20, "let fire come from this Bramble King Abimelech, to devour Shechem, and their allies in Beth Millo."

And in this prophecy, Jotham states, the men of Shechem and Beth Millo will in turn destroy the Bramble King.

You see the problem was not bad leadership alone, it was also the evil of following such a worthless leader.

A friendship founded on wickedness, with ambition, treachery, murder and disloyalty could only lead to disastrous results.

And in verse 21, Jotham flees to watch the unfolding events from a distance and safe from the danger that lays ahead.

So the rest of this chapter shows Jotham's curse was from God, as the people receive the consequences of their choices.

Let us read the tragic story in full...

Downfall of Abimelech

22 After Abimelech had reigned over Israel three years,

23 God sent a spirit of ill will between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech, 24 that the crime done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might be settled and their blood be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who aided him in the killing of his brothers. 25 And the men of Shechem set men in ambush against him on the tops of the mountains, and they robbed all who passed by them along that way; and it was told Abimelech.

26 Now Gaal the son of Ebed came with his brothers and went over to Shechem; and the men of Shechem put their confidence in him. 27 So they went out into

the fields, and gathered grapes from their vineyards and trod them, and made merry. And they went into the house of their god, and ate and drank, and cursed Abimelech. 28 Then Gaal the son of Ebed said, "Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should serve him? Is he not the son of Jerubbaal, and is not Zebul his officer? Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem; but why should we serve him? 29 If only this people were under my authority! Then I would remove Abimelech." So he said to Abimelech, "Increase your army and come out!"

30 When Zebul, the ruler of the city, heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was aroused. 31 And he sent messengers to Abimelech secretly, saying, "Take note! Gaal the son of Ebed and his brothers have come to Shechem; and here they are, fortifying the city against you. 32 Now therefore, get up by night, you and the people who are with you, and lie in wait in the field. 33 And it shall be, as soon as the sun is up in the morning, that you shall rise early and rush upon the city; and when he and the people who are with him come out against you, you may then do to them as you find opportunity."

34 So Abimelech and all the people who were with him rose by night, and lay in wait against Shechem in four companies. 35 When Gaal the son of Ebed went out and stood in the entrance to the city gate, Abimelech and the people who were with him rose from lying in

wait. 36 And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, "Look, people are coming down from the tops of the mountains!"

But Zebul said to him, "You see the shadows of the mountains as if they were men."

37 So Gaal spoke again and said, "See, people are coming down from the center of the land, and another company is coming from the Diviners' Terebinth Tree."

38 Then Zebul said to him, "Where indeed is your mouth now, with which you said, 'Who is Abimelech, that we should serve him?' Are not these the people whom you despised? Go out, if you will, and fight with them now."

39 So Gaal went out, leading the men of Shechem, and fought with Abimelech. 40 And Abimelech chased him, and he fled from him; and many fell wounded, to the very entrance of the gate. 41 Then Abimelech dwelt at Arumah, and Zebul drove out Gaal and his brothers, so that they would not dwell in Shechem.

42 And it came about on the next day that the people went out into the field, and they told Abimelech. 43 So he took his people, divided them into three companies, and lay in wait in the field. And he looked, and there were the people, coming out of the city; and he rose against them and attacked them. 44 Then Abimelech and the company that was with him rushed forward and stood at the entrance of the gate of the city; and

the other two companies rushed upon all who were in the fields and killed them. 45 So Abimelech fought against the city all that day; he took the city and killed the people who were in it; and he demolished the city and sowed it with salt.

46 Now when all the men of the tower of Shechem had heard that, they entered the stronghold of the temple of the god Berith. 47 And it was told Abimelech that all the men of the tower of Shechem were gathered together. 48 Then Abimelech went up to Mount Zalmon, he and all the people who were with him. And Abimelech took an ax in his hand and cut down a bough from the trees, and took it and laid it on his shoulder; then he said to the people who were with him, "What you have seen me do, make haste and do as I have done." 49 So each of the people likewise cut down his own bough and followed Abimelech, put them against the stronghold, and set the stronghold on fire above them, so that all the people of the tower of Shechem died, about a thousand men and women.

Now we see from the very beginning that Abimelech's reign was not quite absolute in Israel.

His power was over the Shechemites, and after only 3 years, contention between the Bramble King and his subjects begins to brew.

God sent an evil spirit to influence the people to cause ill-will between them.

This ill-will began a rebellion in the city, and the men of Shechem set an ambush against Abimelech.

And the men, begin to rob the travelers coming along the way.

They are provoking their king to come.

A man named Gaal, sees the discontent in the people of Shechem and rallies their flaky and disloyal hearts to follow him.

These people are double-minded and unstable in all their ways.

They are the types we see today that Paul says are **Eph. 4:13 tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,**

These people are fickle, and unstable.

And the Shechemites only tolerate 3 years with Abimelech before their discontented hearts put their confidence into another man.

Perhaps this is the problem, people follow man, and celebrate man.

And man is as worthless to follow as a bramble bush.

Now with all this treachery and betrayal going on in this story, the Holy Spirit makes very clear who is really behind it all.

God is orchestrating this as it says in verse 24, in order that the crime against Gideon's sons might be judged.

Gaal, tries to align them with their heritage before Israel came into the region.

And Gaal exploits now this rebellion, and reminds them Abimelech is the son of Jerubbaal, and he now petitions them to remember their Canaanite heritage under Hamor the original father of Shechem.

Then he boasts, in verse 29, "only if this people were under my authority." Then he would get rid of this Bramble King.

And with a drunken courage he calls Abimelech out to fight.

But one of Abimelech's men were in ear shot to hear his big words, and he sized the man up, and new that he was not able to fight with Abimelech.

I had a friend like this in my younger years, he would get so courageous when he had alcohol in his system.

And he had a mouth, that boasted great things, but whenever it came time to get down to business, "Hey where is he at, didn't he start this."

And after business was done, there he was coming in pretending like we didn't just fight his fight for him.

"Oh, man, I just went to change my shoes, I didn't know it was time."

He always talked big, but it was only talk.

And Zebul knows Gaal is only talk.

However, Abimelech is a fighter, and Zebul knows Gaal is no match.

He sends word to the king who set up an ambush.

And in the morning, Gaal the big talker, probably a little hung over looks at the hills and sees men rushing in, and Zebul tries to buy time for them, and tells “No man, those are shadows.”

And when Abimelech and his fighters get closer, Zebul asks “where is your mouth now!”

He tells him “go, man, you wanted to fight, here they are.”

And of course Abimelech wipes the floor with Gaal and his men.

Now the next day the people of Shechem think the fighting is through, but remember Jotham’s omen.

Fire comes from the Bramble King, and he strikes the traitors of the city down in the field.

They piled into the defensive tower in the city, where Abimelech burns them down and kills over a thousand men and women.

Now, remember in the omen, the fire will also come from the people onto Abimelech.

So this Bramble King is ablaze with rage, and turns on another group of discontented countrymen.

Next we read in verse 50...

50 Then Abimelech went to Thebez, and he encamped against Thebez and took it. 51 But there was a strong tower in the city, and all the men and women — all the people of the city — fled there and shut themselves in; then they went up to the top of the tower. 52 So Abimelech came as far as the tower and fought against it; and he drew near the door of the tower to burn it with fire. 53 But a certain woman dropped an upper millstone on Abimelech's head and crushed his skull. 54 Then he called quickly to the young man, his armorbearer, and said to him, "Draw your sword and kill me, lest men say of me, 'A woman killed him.'" So 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 to his place.

56 Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father by killing his seventy brothers. 57 And all the evil of the men of Shechem God returned on their own heads, and on them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal.

So Abimelech is crazed by the incredible victory and bloodshed in Shechem he marches on, and tries to use the same tactic in Thebez.

But this time at the tower, a woman from above drops an upper millstone that crushes his skull.

This could have been a stone two feet in diameter two to four inches thick.

He does not want to be known as a warrior killed by a woman, so he has his servant end his life.

But the writer does not give Abimelech the privilege, and it is forever recorded that he was killed by a woman.

And we see the underline reason for all of this in the final verses, God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, and also the evil of the people of Shechem.

Gal 6:7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. 8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.

This is a Divine principle that cannot be overstated in the Book of Judges.

Now, there is some important lessons for us to learn here today, even in the church.

Please understand Christ is the Head of the Church.

Jesus is King, and we are the Body.

Just like the Olive Tree, the Fig Tree, The Grape Vine, we all have a place in His Body, and we were created for a special function within the Body.

But the danger lies, when the people cannot see Christ as King, and they begin to look to man.

They follow personalities, they get excited over the man rather than coming to church to meet with Jesus and hear from Jesus.

It is also so dangerous in the Church today to have this ambition, and a desire for people to follow you.

I have seen many with this desire for people to follow them, they complain about those in leadership, they try to gather others to the complaining parties, they rile up the troops, and it is always disastrous.

God created us all for special function within the church, and there seems to be a great discontent in the church at large.

We are told in **1 Tim 6:6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain.**

You see we are to be content with who God made you, and serve Him, and bear fruit for Him and others.

You see the Bramble Bush or the usurper is a product of the curse, and a tool for Satan.

The ambitious, attention hungry person will only cause contention, and actually work against the will of God.

1 Peter 5:6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time

Serve God where you are and wait, and let Him lift you up.

Be content, humble and patient and God will use your life for His Glory. This is all that matters.

Ambition and discontentment allow Satan to work among the people of God.

So, let us move on now into chapter 10...

Now, in this chapter, we will see after such great apostasy, the Grace of God will still be center stage.

God could have completely abandoned His people, but He continues to chasten them, and works to bring their hearts back to Him.

Tola

10:1 After Abimelech there arose to save Israel Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar; and he dwelt in Shamir in the mountains of Ephraim. 2 He judged Israel twenty-three years; and he died and was buried in Shamir.

Dodo – Loving

Puah – Splendor

Jair

3 After him arose Jair, a Gileadite; and he judged Israel twenty-two years. 4 Now he had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys; they also had thirty towns, which are called "Havoth Jair" to this day, which are in the land of Gilead. 5 And Jair died and was buried in Camon.

So two more, what are called minor judges are mentioned, Tola and Jair, they are not minor because of insignificance but because so little is given to us in scripture.

It seems Tola rescued Israel from the chaos Abimelech left in the land.

It seems this man brought some stability to the land.

The downward spiral of Israel was slowed somewhat by Tola, and this man Jair, who similarly we know little about.

Jair ruled from Gilead, who in a sign of power had thirty sons who rode on royal donkeys.

We see in times of prosperity, perhaps complacency led to nepotism, as Gilead became a family ruled area.

These thirty pampered sons were given settlements.

Now, nepotism rarely, if ever produces quality leaders.

We read nothing else of these thirty.

But non-the-less the judgeships of these two men Tola and Jair provided a little breathing room in the history of Israel, a time for the people to turn back to their God, to repent of their ways.

But the nation fails to do so, and we read next...

Israel Oppressed Again

6 Then the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals and the Ashtoreths,

the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the people of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; and they forsook the Lord and did not serve Him. 7 So the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel; and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the people of Ammon. 8 From that year they harassed and oppressed the children of Israel for eighteen years — all the children of Israel who were on the other side of the Jordan in the land of the Amorites, in Gilead. 9 Moreover the people of Ammon crossed over the Jordan to fight against Judah also, against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was severely distressed.

Once the protection the nation had, from the influence of godly leaders was gone, the enemy was quick to move in.

Idolatry flourished and we see a whole list of new gods inserted into the way of life in Israel.

Pluralism prevailed, as anything goes, and the detestable beliefs of the pagans surrounding them became a normal way of life.

Now, the root of all rebellion is really that man wants to be his own god.

Idolatry is just the byproduct of self-worship.

Instead of living with this awareness, that there is a Creator God that we are all accountable too, it

appeases man's heart to still have a god, but one that he created and can control.

A woman was telling me about our local Buddhist Temple, and how they leave snacks out for the statues, and how they need naptime for their gods.

And these powerless statues are honored and revered.

But you see, man is made in the image of God, we have no authority to try to make gods into our image.

Idolatry is empty and will never satisfy a person's soul.

So Israel's idolatry ends up leading them into being oppressed for 18 years.

As the tribes on the east side went first, the enemy eventually crossed the Jordan to conquer the western tribes as well.

And verse 10 explains now...

10 And the children of Israel cried out to the Lord, saying, "We have sinned against You, because we have both forsaken our God and served the Baals!"

11 So the Lord said to the children of Israel, "Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites and from the people of Ammon and from the Philistines? 12 Also the Sidonians and Amalekites and Maonites oppressed you; and you cried out to Me, and I delivered you from their hand. 13 Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods. Therefore I will deliver you no more. 14 Go and cry out to the gods

which you have chosen; let them deliver you in your time of distress."

Can you believe Israel is now so far in rebellion, they choose to stay in bondage for 18 years before they cry out to God to deliver them?

You see sin, is like a drug, it effects the will, and it is patient, it slowly takes the victim into its grasps before too long, they are surprised at the chokehold it has on one's life.

Eventually, the children of Israel cry out and confess in verse 10 that they have sinned and both forsaken their God and are serving idols.

But they are only sorry about their circumstances, and they want God to act like He always has, and once they are delivered God knows their rebellious hearts will return to the vomit He delivers them from.

Victory and prosperity can only come in conjunction with an obedient and faithful people.

But God's love drives him to discipline here.

God in verse 11 tells the Israelites to look back at their history, and His mighty hand of deliverance.

He wants them to look back and learn from the past.

The gods that He delivered them from are now the gods they are serving.

They went back on their end of the covenant and they voided the contract altogether, and God was not bound to help them.

They made their choice over and over again.

There comes a time in a person's life, that they want to rebel against God so much, after God has revealed Himself to them, they still choose to chase other gods, there comes a point where God hands them over to their desire.

In Romans 1 we were told 3 times that God gives the rebellious over to their sinful passions, the final time is in **Rom 1:28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting**

I have known men, who cry out for deliverance from a porn addiction, or alcohol addiction, or drug addiction, only after God gives them victory, they eventually return to it.

And it is clear there comes a point in a person's rebellion, that God just says, "If that is what you want in life, then go."

And He lets the person reap the consequences of their choice to follow after a false god.

In the end, it is shown that they are only sorry for the consequences and they are not repentant.

Repentance is a heart change, not just being sorry for the consequences in our lives.

It is a complete change of heart, a turning from something, to God, completely.

And this is not repentance in Israel, as we will see next.

15 And the children of Israel said to the Lord, "We have sinned! Do to us whatever seems best to You; only deliver us this day, we pray." 16 So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the Lord. And His soul could no longer endure the misery of Israel.

17 Then the people of Ammon gathered together and encamped in Gilead. And the children of Israel assembled together and encamped in Mizpah. 18 And the people, the leaders of Gilead, said to one another, "Who is the man who will begin the fight against the people of Ammon? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead."

Now notice God's love in verse 16 after their final plea. God's soul could no longer endure the misery of Israel, and He will allow another judge to rise into place.

And we will meet Jephthah next week, but we see in verse 18 after the enemies gather against Israel, that it is the leaders of Gilead putting out an offer, and they are looking for a leader for hire.

This is a sad low for the nation of Israel as they are leaderless, they will manipulate someone, anyone, with promises of position and status if he will deliver them.

But non-the-less the idols are gone, and God's Mercy is in view, there is hope once again.

There are some good takeaways from this chapter for us today.

Sin can be enjoyable for a time, and it can take a while to realize the damage that it is causing in our lives.

In Luke, in the Story of the Prodigal Son, as he was watching the pigs fill their bellies full, while he starved.

It says in **Luke 15:17 "But when he came to himself..."**

He came back to reality, and realized what he left behind, and what he rejected at his father's home.

This is the core of genuine repentance.

We have to return to reality, and honestly assess ourselves.

Too many today, are like my 3 year-old when I catch him trying to hurt his sister.

While discipline is being given to him, he will have tears flowing and a howl coming from his soul.

I will make him apologize, and he forces out an "I'm sorry sissy."

Now, are his tears a sign of true repentance, or is he just sad that I caught him?

You see the fruit of genuine repentance over that of simple remorse will be determined when I leave the room.

True repentance will be sorry enough to quit, but often times, as soon as I am gone that little sinner goes back to tormenting sissy.

And today, many come forward with tears coming from their face, as they are remorseful over their sin, they are asking for forgiveness, but when they leave they return back to that which they were asking for deliverance from.

That is remorse not repentance.

True repentance realizes that we are hopeless in ourselves, true repentance is based in reality.

Repentance is linked with faith, and true repentance will appeal to the Grace and Mercy of God, and desire His strength to turn from the vice of bondage.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

You see He does not want you to be better with your sin, He does not want you to manage your sin better, He does not want you to follow a bloggers 10 steps to freedom from your sin.

Right now, there is power to save you from the bondage that sin has over your life.

Confess your anger to Him tonight, and ask Him to empower you to overcome it once and for all.

Confess your alcoholism, confess your marijuana addiction, confess your pornography addiction, confess, and come to Jesus and ask Him to cleanse you and free you once and for all.

That is what is offered to you tonight, its more than jus self-control, or rehabilitation, it is freedom.

Repent and turn from your sin, and turn toward your God.

He is here to help, I believe it will all my heart, if you sincerely come to God, He will come to you, and heal your life.

During the last song the Elders will be up here to minister to you, please come up and get prayer, whatever your struggle is tonight.

Let's pray.