

When the King is a Bramble...

Judges 8:33-9:21.

Sunday afternoon, May 29, 2011.

I. The aftermath of Gideon's death.

The writer of Judges summarizes this aftermath for us in three points:

- A. "As soon as Gideon was dead the children of Israel played again the harlot with the Baals, and made Baal Berith their god."
 1. With the death of Gideon, presumably the ministry associated with wearing the ephod Gideon had made also came to an end.
 2. Israel had played the harlot with this ephod (vs. 27). This means that they had given their hearts to their own inventions with regards to seeking and serving the Lord, rather than doing so in the ways and in the place of God's own appointing namely the tabernacle and its appointed ministry.

Application:

How easy it is for us to give our affections to our own inventions in the worship and service of God, based on what we like better, rather than worshipping the Lord in the ways of His appointment. Is not this the reason why the altar has become the stage in so many churches, and the reason why we look to be entertained in church?

3. Notice that it happened as soon as Gideon died. Gideon and his ministry pass away, and right away the people invent a new ministry according to their own liking. Had not Gideon's ephod and associated ministry been according to his own liking? This was only another step on the pathway of worship according to our own liking.
4. Still there were some differences worthy to note:
 - Gideon served the right God in a wrong manner; he took liberties in the worship and service of God he shouldn't have.
 - Now Gideon is dead, and the people apply this principle of doing their own thing in worship to gods of their own making and liking, and so they go astray from the Lord God altogether.
- B. The children of Israel did not remember the Lord their God who had delivered them from the Midianites and given them rest for forty years.
 1. "Not remembering" does not mean that they knew nothing about Him anymore, or that no one could remember the days that Midian oppressed them, or that no one ever had told them about their past days of slavery in Egypt and their miraculous deliverance under Moses.
 2. Rather it means that this knowledge stopped informing and influencing their decision making process. Despite knowing these things, they felt free to worship and serve gods of their own liking and according to their own liking.

Application:

1. Faith is not faith unless it informs and influences our decision making process.
Hebrews 11.
2. How does your faith inform and influence your decision making process in terms of

making discriminating choices in life between what is important and what is not important, or plain wrong?

- C. Israel neglected to show kindness to the house of Gideon for all the good he had done for Israel. Ch. 9 shows us the outworking of that neglect.

Application:

The Scriptures forbid us to worship and deify God's servants; they are mere men, and not infrequently the Lord will allow his servants to stumble, falter and fail, to remind his people of their frailty and (fallen) humanity.

On the other hand the Scriptures teach us to esteem the leaders God has given us highly for their work's sake. That is, the work God is pleased to undertake through them.

II. Abimelech.

- A. Gideon had 70 sons by many wives who lived with him in Ophrah. He also fathered a son by a concubine who lived in Shechem, and he had named Abimelech ("My father is king").
- B. Upon Gideon's death Abimelech goes to his mother's relatives in Shechem to influence the city fathers to set him up as ruler over them now that Gideon is dead. This as opposed to Gideon's other sons; after all he is their flesh and blood.
- C. The argument "he is our brother" prevails, and Abimelech is given money to hire worthless men in order to deal with Gideon's other sons in order that Abimelech alone may rule in Gideon's place.
- D. Abimelech kills all of Gideon's other sons except the youngest, Jotham, who manages to hide himself.
- E. The competition having been eliminated Abimelech is now installed by the men of Shechem, not merely as "ruler," but now the word "king" is used.
- F. The installation festivities are however interrupted by Jotham addressing the town from Mt. Gerazim.
- G. The point of Jotham's parable lies not so much in the good trees refusing kingship as it lies in the fact that a bramble accepts it. Two things stand out:
 - 1. The stupidity of the people in appointing one like Abimelech as king.
 - 2. The uselessness of the bramble except for causing havoc.
- H. Jotham's words would prove prophetic; both Shechem and Abimelech would be judged by God for the way they dealt with the house of Gideon.

Application:

People have a strange tendency to appoint and accept brambles for leaders; people with the biggest mouths, or the biggest wallets, or with a certain charisma are easily appointed as leaders. "The thoughts he expressed often seemed ridiculous to me, but that week in Nuremberg I began to see that it did not matter so much what he said but how he said it." William L Shirer on the Nazi party's appointment of Hitler as Fuhrer in Sept. 1934.

The Lord Jesus said: "I have come in my Father's Name, and you do not receive me; if another should come in his own name, you will receive him." John 5:43

And what is true in nations and communities is also true in the life of churches. Do not look for bramble leaders but seek and pray for those whom God has called.