

“Through the Bible in a Year with Pastor Don and the FBC Family”
May 5, 2016

- ✓ **Judges 8:1-9:21.** Gideon subdues the Midianites (8); parable of the bramble (9).
- ✓ **Philippians 2:12-18.** Work out your salvation with fear: stop complaining!
- ✓ **Psalms 67:1-7.** God is praise for His righteous judgments.

COMMENTS:

Judges 8:1-9:21. This section begins with the Ephraimites criticizing Gideon sharply for not inviting them to participate in the initial conflict near the Hill of Moreh. There are two problems in chapter 8: the fractious nature of the Ephraimites (8:1-3) and the character flaws in Gideon (8:4-27). First, Gideon is to be commended on the diplomatic way he responded to their criticism (8:2-3). Following this we have more battles with the Midianites. We see flaws in Gideon’s character in 8:17: in his rage he went beyond the threat to tear down a tower and slaughtered all the men of the city. Gideon’s behavior could be justified if Penuel were a Canaanite city, but these were fellow Israelites! He is now acting like a general out of control, no longer bound by rules of morality, let alone national loyalty. The lack of virtue of Gideon is also revealed in 8:20 when he tells his son to do his dirty work and kill the Midianite kings, which puts his young son in an awkward position. The boy chooses to defy his father, not because his own sympathies were with the Midianite kings, but because he was afraid “for he was still a young boy.” Although Gideon is not put in a favorable light in this narrative, his countrymen were impressed with him and offered him rulership over the nation. Rightly so, he rejects offers of kingship (8:23). However, he proceeds to demand that each of his men give him a gold earring from their share of the spoils of war, which was not only a gesture of submission, it was also quite a treasure fit for a “king”: 1700 shekels of gold, which amounts to 43 pounds of gold (8:24-26). Then Gideon proceeds to make himself an ephod, which served as an object of pagan worship (8:27). Gideon ruled as Jerubbaal ben Joash from his own house and established a large harem and fathered numerous progeny (8:30). Note Gideon’s many wives and the Shechemite/Canaanite concubine. Note how Gideon’s death triggered Israel’s immediate return to idolatry (see 2:19). Instead of worshiping Yahweh with thanksgiving for all His deliverances, they set up Baal-Berith as their god, who had a central shrine at Shechem (9:3–4) where he was also worshiped as El-Berith (9:46). In Chapter 9 we have Jotham’s response to Abimelech’s crimes. Abimelech, born of a Shechemite woman, convinced the citizens of Shechem to make him king and to kill his half-brothers, the seventy sons of Gideon. Only Jotham escaped the slaughter. From Mount Gerizim, which overlooks Shechem, he taunted them by telling the fable of the “Bramble King.” Summary of the parable: *The tree is a common metaphor for Israel and is here used in a most creative manner. The trees that go seeking a king are not identified as a species until the end of the parable where they become the victims of the “bramble’s” treachery. Knowing the species of the trees desiring a king is necessary for a clear understanding of Jotham’s intended message. For the first tree approached is the olive tree, the second is the fig, third is a non-tree, the grape vine, and finally the bramble. All are significantly smaller than the cedar of Lebanon and thus incapable of fulfilling the request to “reign over” or “wave over” the cedar by virtue of their relative size. The olive and fig both refuse the request for advancement on the basis of a clear recognition of their calling and personal satisfaction coming from the product their service provides. The move away from the realm of trees addresses Abimelech’s*

*lack of formal son-status, which disqualifies him from service as the primary leader to replace Gideon. The vine, though not a tree, reveals wisdom common to both of the previous candidates. All three knew what they were created for and were not successfully tempted to covet a role that was not theirs in order to gain power and the glory of position. Thee bramble was a different sort of candidate. The bramble was lying in wait for an opportunity to dominate and rule. The bramble certainly has a legitimate purpose in the ecology of God's creation, but that purpose is not attended by the prestige or public honor that is granted to the olive, the fig, the vine, or the Cedar of Lebanon. The bramble is opportunistic and voracious in its quest for dominance. It can grow as much as 3 feet on a warm summer day and has the capacity to envelop and kill trees by dominating the source of sunlight so completely that the tree starves. The bramble (regardless of species) provides no possibility of symbiotic advantage to the tree. The bramble readily accepted the offer of kingship and just as readily followed with a threat of coercive dominance. This eager acceptance and subsequent threat are both empty and shelter a tragic lie, for the truth is that dominant coercive leadership brings decay and death. The tree that shelters under the bramble would never have suffered the promised fire, but it would have entered into a leadership relationship resulting in death. Abimelech ruled Israel for three years (Judges 9:22) but is appropriately not remembered as Israel's first king. He was betrayed and died at the hands of his own "flesh and bones" relatives—the Shechemites. Jotham, who escaped into exile, does not reappear thereafter in the biblical record, but his brief appearance and the parable of the trees provides a powerful testimony and insight into the danger posed by the self-centered leader who aims at ascending to power and position via dominance. **A self-centered leader is always destructive to a nation—hint, hint!***

Philippians 2:12-18. Paul begins by *commanding* them to work out their "salvation." This is the central theme that holds this section together. The Philippians were to make salvation work in their lives. Salvation is used in several different ways in the Bible. Paul described salvation as a past event (Eph 2:8–9) and as a future consummation (Rom 13:11). Here he spoke of working out salvation in the sense of sanctification. Note that it was to be done "with fear and trembling," which points to seriousness and reverence for God. In verse 13 Paul gives the reason for working out their salvation: because God works in them. Observe what follows this exhortation for progressive sanctification because God is working in them: stop murmuring and complaining. Note the negative effects of complaining and murmuring in the following verses with respect to witnessing to others.

Psalms 67:1-7. Note the praise of the Lord for His righteous judgments. As I have noted over and over God does not send evil suffering. He is altogether righteous, which is exactly why He is praised as per verse four. God is not the author of evil suffering or temptation. It is the devil who is called the tempter, not God. God is the source of nothing but good. In fact, the Bible teaches that His goodness is absolutely immutable (James 1:17)

Romans 11:36 For of Him and through Him and to Him *are* all things, to whom *be* glory forever. Amen.

Pastor Don