

The Consequences of Forgetting God

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[0 : 00] Dating the narratives of the book of Judges is a very difficult thing to do. Most scholars don't agree on exactly when all of these narratives fit together in a chronological arrangement.

And the author doesn't really clue us in much to that. But it is safe to at least assume that nearly two centuries, if not more, have passed between the time that the settlement of the land of Canaan began after the Joshua generation to this time of Abimelech and Shechem and this whole scene in chapter 9.

And I want you to think about that for just a moment, how quickly things can change, let alone change over the course of 200 years. Our old nation is nearly 250 years old, 250 years almost, at least since the Revolutionary War.

And we would say our nation today looks very different than it looked 250 years ago. The culture is very different. The way we think about God is very different.

The way we live, the amount of people is very different. Now, put yourselves now in Israel's shoes. It's been probably a couple of hundred years now since the very beginning.

[1 : 11] A couple of hundred years of degrading as far as their spiritual lives are concerned. And the condition of Israel couldn't be more different at this point in chapter 9.

It is a far cry away from where we began the book of Judges. In the beginning, the nation is unified. They're united together.

The people were concerned to seek the Lord's will and counsel in the way that they were going to go about actually settling the land. Remember all the leaders in the very first verse of the book. They've gathered together to pray, to seek the Lord's direction. That's what's happening in the beginning. They flourished under the leadership of Judah.

Judah, the ones that God seemed to have been using, even prophesying, would be leading the nation moving forward. And they were committed to worshiping and serving the Lord their God.

[2 : 11] But the Israel of chapter 9 doesn't resemble the Israel of chapter 1 at all. They're not unified as God's people.

They're acting actually independently of one another. All of these stories that we're reading, all of these narratives, it's using the term for Israel, but it's not really referring to the nation as a whole.

It's these little pockets of conflict. These pockets where people are just not united as a nation anymore. Everybody's doing their own thing now. They're acting independently of one another.

There's no concern for God's plans among the people. Not a single mention of going to the tabernacle in Shiloh to seek the Lord's direction on what they should be doing.

They're not concerned about that anymore. They've completely turned away from Yahweh to serve the Baals instead. And rather than following Judah's leadership as a united nation, regional groups, as we see in chapter 9, are now anointing kings of their own.

[3 : 19] They're mimicking the pagan tribal groups that are around them. And then finally, there's no more talk of settling the land.

Have you picked up on that? The further we get into this book, the more distant the whole concept of a land of promise becomes. Nobody's talking about it.

Nobody seems concerned about it. The thought of a promised land flowing with milk and honey seems to be a distant dream that no one really cares about or believes in anymore.

They've mingled with the people of the land. And God's people have been thoroughly Canaanized. And on the surface, this narrative that follows Abimelech, it fills out a place in the book.

At least at first. There are hints of this cycle of apostasy that characterizes the book. But the story is missing some key components of that.

[4 : 21] We find that the people have turned away from God, as we typically see stated. But there's no outside enemy oppressing them in this story. The enemy actually comes from the inside, not the outside.

There's no cry for help to God regarding their condition. There's no deliverer chosen by God to save the people.

There's no period of rest that follows. The wheels have essentially fallen off of even the cycle where Israel's apostasy seems nearly complete.

So what exactly is this section here for? What's it meant to teach us? The chapter is about what happens when we live as if God isn't there and as if his instructions do not matter.

What does it look like when God's people actually abandon God? What is the nature of their lives? What characterizes what happens to them? What is the outflow of that?

[5 : 31] And what we find in Judges is that when the people were faithful to Yahweh, they flourished. They enjoyed intimate fellowship with God through the means of worship that he had ordained.

They received the blessings from his hand. But they became more attracted to the bells. They became more attracted to the life that was lived by those who worshiped Baal rather than God. They forsook the Lord. And while they might have enjoyed a season of pleasure during that time, as Hebrews 11 tells us, there is indeed pleasure and sin for a season.

We get to chapter 9 and they're discovering very quickly, at least the people around Shechem, that life under Baal is not as great as they had imagined. That's what this chapter is about.

Instead of a life of blessing, they're surrounded by death and destruction. And this passage is a warning for all who are being drawn away from God to pursue a life without him.

[6 : 42] And the lesson is that true flourishing derives from faithfulness to God, while the ways of this world will only bring about death.

That's the big picture. Now, the details of the narrative are tied together by three specific texts that help us understand and apply the story as a whole.

So what I want to do is I want to start by just working through, really just quickly, just working through the whole story all the way through the end of chapter 9, okay? Kind of like what we do with the scripture readings. In fact, you'll be pleased to know that I actually wrote no manuscript for this part of the sermon, so we won't be here for three hours just on this one part.

But I do want you to at least see a sketch of the outline of this story. We need to understand what's happening. And then once we do that, we're going to come back, and we're going to look at three key texts that kind of tie it all together and give us the purpose of our study for the day, okay?

So let's look at this structure. The first thing that we find is in verses 1 through 6, we find Abimelech's conspiracy. And these are in the screen. If you'd like to keep a note of them, you can. This is Abimelech's conspiracy.

[7 : 55] Let's read it again. Now Abimelech, the son of Jerobel, went to Shechem, to his mother's relatives, and said to them and to the whole clan of his mother's family, Say in the ears of all the leaders of Shechem, which is better for you, that all 70 of the sons of Jerobel rule over you?

Or that one rule over you? Remember also that I am your bone and your flesh. I mean, it's pretty clear to see what he's saying here, right? We are introduced to Abimelech earlier in chapter 8 in verse 30.

Now Gideon had 70 sons, his own offspring, for he had many wives, and his concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, and he called his name Abimelech, okay?

So we're introduced to Abimelech there. We find out that his mother was a concubine of Gideon's, that she belonged to the people of Shechem, and now not wanting to share any possible power or rule with his 70 brothers, he goes to his mother's relatives in Shechem, and he says, listen, do you want all of these guys ruling over you, or do you just want one king?

And by the way, if you think it's good to have one king, wouldn't one of your own people make a great king? I am yours. What an honor it would be for you Shechemites if somebody from Shechem was the king and was the ruler who was ruling over us, and that sounded pretty attractive to them.

[9 : 22] Look at verse 3. His mother's relatives spoke all the words on his behalf in the ears of all the leaders of Shechem, and their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, he is our brother.

Isn't that such a foolish way to choose a ruler? There's no talk of qualification. There's no talk of competency. It's just, he's one of us. Sure, he can be king.

And then they were complicit in what he had plans to do. They gave him 70 pieces of silver out of the house of their false god, Belbereth, with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless fellows who followed him.

And he went to his father's house at Ophrah, and he killed all of his brothers. Now, there's irony in that, isn't there? He goes to his supposed relatives in Shechem, and he says, I'm your brother. Let me be your king, and I'll deal with my other brothers by killing them. Okay, there's a bit of foreshadowing here, right? Right? Like, surely, somebody in Shechem thought, if he's willing to murder the other brothers, at what point is he going to turn on us as his brothers as well?

[10:36] But they're not thinking like that, are they? They're thinking so carnally at this moment. He kills all of his brothers, but Jotham, the youngest, was left, and he hid himself. And then the leaders made Abimelech their king.

So, Abimelech's conspiracy. Here's the next part of the outline. Jotham's curse. Jotham's curse. In two parts to this, first we see the fable told.

Look at verse 7. When it was told, Jotham, he went and stood on top of Mount Gerizim, and he cried aloud and said to them, Listen to me, you leaders of Shechem, that God may listen to you. And he tells this story. The trees once went out to anoint a king over them, and they said to the olive tree, Reign over us. But the olive tree said to them, Shall I leave my abundance, by which gods and men are honored, and go hold sway over the trees?

So the tree said to the fig tree, You come and reign over us. But the fig tree said to them, Shall I leave my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go hold sway over the trees?

[11:42] So the tree said to the vine, You come and reign over us. But the vine said to them, Shall I leave my wine, that cheers God and men, and go hold sway over the trees?

Then all the trees said to the bramble, a bush, You come and reign over us. And the bramble said to the trees, If in good faith you are anointing me king over you, then come and take refuge in my shade.

An irony, because a bramble has no shade. But if not, let fire come out from the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon.

So you can imagine, Abimelech and the people of Shechem, and of Beth Milo, which is probably attached to Shechem in some way, they're gathered over here at the Diviner's Oak, and they are in the process of anointing Abimelech as their king, and then they hear this voice crying out from a distance on Mount Gerizim, and he tells this weird story about trees that they're desperate to find the king, and it becomes clear what this story is about.

The trees here are the people of Shechem. They're trying to find a king, and they're trying to find their king, but none of the qualified people want to be their king. And so what do they do? They find the bramble.

[13:01] The bramble represented by Abimelech. Abimelech who has no shade. A bramble who provides no fruit. Thorns and thistles is what he is represented by here, and that's who they make their king.

And he says, if you do this in good faith, great. If you don't, if you turn on me, fire will come from the bramble, and we'll destroy you. This is an interesting story. Now, we need to at least acknowledge the problem here is not that they want a king.

That's actually a good thing. It's actually a necessary thing in the themes of judges. Dale Ralph Davis says, the fable does not stress the worthlessness of kingship, but the worthlessness of Abimelech.

The concern is not that the worthy candidates depreciate the offer of kingship, but that the bramble accepts it. That's the emphasis here is on the bramble, right?

Okay, then we find the fable interpreted or explained. Verse 16. Jotham says, Now, therefore, if you acted in good faith and integrity when you made Abimelech king, and if you have dealt well with Jerobel and his house and have done to him as his deeds deserved, for my father fought for you and risked his life and delivered you from the hand of Midian, and you have risen up against my father's house this day and have killed his son, 70 men on one stone, and have made Abimelech the son of his female servant king over the leaders of Shechem, because he's your relative.

[14:31] If you then have acted in good faith and integrity with Jerobel and his house this day, then rejoice in Abimelech and let him also rejoice in you.

But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech and devour the leaders of Shechem and Beth Milo, and let fire come out from the leaders of Shechem and from Beth Milo to devour Abimelech.

And then Jotham does what any good preacher does. He ran away and fled and went to Beer and lived there because of Abimelech, his brother.

Jotham drops the bomb, and he hightails it out of there so that they couldn't get to him. I heard somebody say, I think it was on a Bible Talk podcast, they said sometimes ministry is like being the pilot of a Delta aircraft.

Everybody's happy to get on the plane and they get where they need to go and everything's good. And when they get off, they're clapping for the pilot. Thank you so much for such a wonderful flight. He said sometimes it's actually more like a B-52 bomber.

[15:34] You fly in and you drop the bomb and then you just try to get back to your wife and kids as fast as you can safely, right? We see a little bit of that with Jotham here. He proclaims his warning, he makes his prophecy, and he hightails it out there so that he can live.

All right, that moves us to the next big section, God's judgment. So three primary sections. We've got Abimelech's conspiracy, Jotham's curse, and then God's judgment.

And this is where we see fire come from all the people involved. First, there's fire from Shechem.

Verse 25, the leaders of Shechem put men in ambush against Abimelech on the mountaintops and they robbed all who passed by them along that way and it was told to Abimelech.

Then we're introduced in verses 26 to 29, this outsider named Gaal or Gal, the son of Ebed, he moves into Shechem with his relatives and in a night of drunken, false worship, he lifts up his voice against Abimelech.

He rallies the people of Shechem to his side. Everybody now wants to mutiny against Abimelech as their king, but Abimelech has an insider who informs them and that's what we're told about in verses 25 to 29, fire from Shechem.

[17:01] Then we get to verses 30 to 49, just a large section here. We see fire from Abimelech, fire from Abimelech. First against Gaal or Gal.

Notice verse 30, when Zebel, the ruler of the city, heard the words of Gaal, the son of Ebed, his anger was kindled and he sent messengers to Abimelech secretly saying, behold, Gaal, the son of Ebed and his relatives have come to Shechem and they are stirring up the city against you.

Now therefore go by night, you and the people who are with you and set an ambush in the field.

Jump to verse 34. So Abimelech and all the men who were with him rose up by night.

They set an ambush against Shechem and four companies. Gaal, the son of Ebed, went out and stood in the entrance of the gate of the city and Abimelech, the people who were with him, rose from the ambush.

And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebel, look, people are coming down from the mountains. And Zebel says, ah, it's just a shadow. Don't worry about it.

[18:07] 37, Gaal spoke again and said, look, people are coming down from the center of the land and one company is coming from the direction of the diviner's oak. And then Zebel speaks up, where is your mouth now?

You who said, who is Abimelech, that we should serve him. Skip down to verse 40. And Abimelech chased him and he fled before him and many fell wounded up to the entrance of the gate.

So first, there's fire from Shechem, then there's fire from Abimelech and it begins with this, this kind of external figure that has come in and has created this stir amongst the city, turning the people against Abimelech.

But then the fire moves on from against Gaal to against Shechem itself. Verse 42, on the following day, the people went out into the field.

Abimelech was told and he took his people and divided them into three companies and he set an ambush in the field and he looked and saw the people coming out of the city. So he rose against them and he killed them. Now the picture is changing now.

[19:11] First, it's against this guy who essentially has opened up his big mouth in a drunken stupor and has incited war with Abimelech. But now, on the next day, Abimelech sits outside the city.

He just waits for the citizens to come out and do their work in the field and as soon as they come out to go about their business, he kills them all. He just absolutely lays waste to the people. A few of them were told escape to a tower in verse 46.

All the leaders of the tower of Shechem heard of it. They entered the stronghold of the house of Bareth and basically, Abimelech and his men, they get a bunch of trees, they lay them up against the stronghold of the tower and if you skip down to verse 49, we see, so every one of the people cut down his bundle following Abimelech, put it against the stronghold.

They set the stronghold on fire so that all the people of the tower of Shechem also died, about a thousand men and women. Abimelech kills them all.

He raises the city, sows it with salt. It doesn't get rebuilt for a long time in the Old Testament narrative. Shechem now has faced the wrath of their king, Abimelech.

[20 : 19] But what's going to happen to Abimelech? Well, there's a final point. We see fire from this place called Thebes, which isn't mentioned up to this point in the text, but it's concluding for us what happens to Abimelech.

Verse 50, Then Abimelech went to Thebes and encamped against Thebes and captured it. But there was a strong tower within the city and all the men and women and all the leaders of the city fled to it and shut themselves in and they went up to the roof of the tower.

Abimelech came to the tower and fought against it and drew near to the door to the tower to burn it with fire. And a certain woman threw an upper millstone on Abimelech's head and crushed his skull. Then he called quickly to the young man his armor bearer and he said to him, Draw your sword and kill me lest they say of me a woman killed me. And this young man thrust him through and he died. It is quite funny, isn't it? It's actually a foreshadow I think of Saul. So much of this story points us to what Israel's going to do as a whole when they want Saul as their king.

[21 : 29] He's not God's man. He's Israel's man. And his life ends much the same way. It's not at the hands of a woman but he is about to die but he can't handle the dishonor of that so he asks for his armor bearer to take his life for him.

We see some foreshadowing but then perhaps the most humorous part is verse 55 also tragic.

When the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead everyone departed to his home.

This wasn't about God. It wasn't about Israel. This wasn't about what was good for the people. This was a wicked man who should have never been in leadership but somebody put him there.

And everybody knows it and they're going along with it because they're afraid of him and the second that they find that he's dead they just drop their weapons. They say, alright, we don't have to do this anymore and they go home and they live their lives.

Interesting, isn't it? Alright, well that's the story, okay? Let's look at three texts that kind of tie all of this together and help us understand what this is really about, okay? Number one, God was forgotten.

[22 : 38] God was forgotten. Go back to chapter 8, would you? And look with me at verses 33 to 35 again.

As soon as Gideon died, the people of Israel turned again and they whored after the Baals and made Belbereth their God. And the people of Israel did not remember the Lord their God who had delivered them from the hand of all their enemies on every side.

And they did not show steadfast love to the family of Jerobel, that is Gideon, in return for all the good that he had done to Israel.

This whole episode with Abimelech and Shechem originates here. We're told that Israel once again did not remember the Lord their God or all the times that he had saved them from their enemies. That doesn't mean that they literally forgot who Yahweh was or had some sort of amnesia about the ways he had delivered them. It means that as a people, they willfully rejected him despite all that he had done.

[23 : 58] They forgot him. They rejected him. They denied him. They attempted to live their life without him. Says Del Ralph Davis.

It means that what they knew of Yahweh exercised no control over them. It held no grip on their loyalties. They could answer the catechism questions about God, but that knowledge did not determine their commitment or keep them from adopting Belbareth as their God.

The nature of their forgetfulness is defined first in this text by their pursuit of the Baals, adopting Belbareth as their official, formal deity.

In the language that the author uses need not be missed. He writes that they hoard after the Baals, spiritually prostituting themselves to a false deity in hopes that they might receive some fortune, some good from that God in their dissatisfaction with Yahweh.

The language, it pictures God as a loving husband whose spouse has not forgotten who he is, but has willingly chosen to find life and love and security in another man.

[25 : 27] And that man isn't even capable of providing those things, but it doesn't stop his spouse from leaving him, from forgetting him to pursue this other person and pursue this other individual.

In other words, despite his steadfast love toward them, Israel was determined to live a life away from Yahweh and his love and his law.

But the text also defines their forgetfulness by a lack of love and loyalty to the family of God's servant, Gideon.

Don't miss the author's use of the name Jerobel here. Look again at verse 34 and they, or verse 35, and they did not show steadfast love to the family of Jerobel.

Now remember, that name, it's supposed to reflect Gideon as God's agent for fighting against the worship of Baal. The oppression from Midian that we've been studying for so many weeks now, it was God's judgment against Israel's idolatry and Gideon was used to bring about their salvation and this name was to remind them of all that God had done in fighting against Baal and the Baal worship to show his steadfast love for his people.

[26 : 53] So when we read the term Jerobel as a proper name for Gideon in the book of Judges, it's always there for a very specific reason. It's not there by chance. It should bring our thoughts to the issue of our worship.

Now the treatment of Jerobel's family, particularly the 70 sons, is the product then of forsaking God. It's the evidence of it. The root problem is that they've forgotten God. The fruit of that problem is that they are no longer showing steadfast love and loyalty to God's servant whom he used to deliver them.

They've completely forgotten God and they couldn't care less about being loyal and loving toward Gideon and his family. Therefore, when God returns the evil of Abimelech and Shechem against them, it is ultimately about them not remembering the Lord their God.

Now, the bottom line here is that Israel did not want to live in worship and obedience to the Lord. they wanted Baal and they wanted Baalism more.

[28 : 14] And their whoring after the Baals caused them to deal treacherously with Gideon's sons, which led to their judgment and death rather than life.

God So this story simply displays the consequences of forgetting God. What does it look like when God's people forget him and forsake him and determine that they're going to live a life apart from him?

This is what it looks like. Number two, God was in control. God was forgotten. God was in control. Flip to chapter 9 and look with me at verses 23 and 24.

God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem and the leaders of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech that the violence done to the 70 sons of Jerobel might come and their blood be laid on Abimelech their brother who killed them and on the men of Shechem who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers.

But look again at verse 23 at the very beginning. God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the leaders. Now aside from the opening statement of Jotham's curse, God is not mentioned at all in this narrative until we get here.

[29 : 42] We find he's forgotten at the end of chapter 8 but suddenly comes back to the surface here. And what is it that it's telling us? Oh God is still there. Oh God is actually in control of this whole thing.

He's still acting. He's still seeing. He's still being God here. Forgetting God always involves self deception.

Always. We think that if we insist God doesn't exist or choose to adopt a different God as our own that we can effectively remove God's power and authority in our lives.

That's self deception. We deceive ourselves into thinking that God needs our permission to judge or to act but in reality God is God whether we acknowledge him or not.

And Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem they were behaving as if Yahweh and his law no longer had any authority over them. It's as if the people of Israel were so foolish as to say you know what now we're going to make Belbereth our God which means that authority over us transfers now from Yahweh to Belbereth so Yahweh can't touch us anymore it doesn't matter what he says it doesn't matter what he thinks we're serving Belbereth now and so they do the things that are

characterized by false worship but just because you choose another God doesn't make God any less God he doesn't need your permission to act in your life he doesn't need your permission to be an authority in your life or to judge your life and God shows in verse 23 that he was sovereign over the events of Abimelech and Shechem's lives even though they did not acknowledge him as their God and he sovereignly allowed their sin to devour their alliance as a form of judgment against them and as a form of justice for Gideon's sons

[31 : 52] God turned their wickedness against them and he sent an evil spirit between them and I think there's echoes of this in Romans chapter 1 where Paul writes that sometimes God gives us over to the full out working of sin Romans chapter 1 verse 24 therefore Paul writes God gave them up in the lust of their hearts to impurity verse 26 for this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions verse 28 since they did not see fit to acknowledge God aka since they forgot God God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done when God gives someone up in their sin he removes all divine restraint allowing a person's sin to run its full course and in the case of

Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem God sovereignly gave them over to their wickedness so that their sin ran its full course resulting in their destruction their treachery toward Gideon's sons eventually turned them against one another and in the end they all died there is no good ending to this story for Abimelech or the people in Shechem there is no happy ending here it is all death why because God gave them up to their sin they deceived themselves into thinking that a life apart from God would be better but they ultimately proved that it's actually far far worse when it comes to living a life that forgets God God the worst thing that can happen to us is for

God to give us what we want the worst thing that can happen to you if you are being drawn to a life of forgetting God and abandoning God and his law and his will the worst thing for you is for God to say okay for him to throw up his hands so to speak and say fine if sin is what you want sin is what you can have and if you're trying to live a life apart from God and his ways you need to understand that there may very well come a day when he lets you when he lets you that sense of conviction the pleas of the Holy Spirit that you feel now in your life that feeling of guilt and shame for your sin that's gonna go away and all that will be left is an evil spirit that runs its course and destroys your life God is sovereign whether you believe he is or not and his sovereignty will eventually be expressed in judgment if you continue to forget him so God's forgotten but then we find God's actually still in control but he's in control at least at this point in judgment number three God was the final judge God was the final judge verse 56 and 57 thus God returned the evil of Abimelech which he committed against his father and killing his 70 brothers and God also made all the evil of the men of Shechem return on their heads and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerob Baal so after verse 23 God isn't mentioned again until the story's over and then we find that God is given the credit by the author for everything that happened reminding us that God is the final judge here now there's not much more to say here than what I've already said but we should at least acknowledge how the text concludes by emphasizing God's place as the final judge the woman in Thebes was an instrument of God's judgment but God was the judge he was the one working and acting and bringing all of this together he is the one that must be credited with Abimelech's fall which is a working out of holy justice for Gideon's sons it's also a working out of salvation for those like Jotham and the people of Thebes who were subject to the oppression brought on by wicked rulers like Abimelech so we find here what we find so often in the scriptures that God is glorified in salvation through judgment he judges

[37 : 36] Abimelech and Shechem for their sins and he does so in order to bring salvation to Jotham and the people of Thebes and anyone else who was underneath his oppressive rule and he is glorified in both things as the final judge God is ultimately glorified by both salvation and by judgment but could this have played out differently that's the question that I want us to conclude with could any of this been different for Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem even better for those who are here this morning that may be currently living apart from God is it possible for your end to be different from those in the text well I think we have to go to Jotham's curse once again to find that answer look with me at verse 7 when it was told to Jotham he went and stood on top of Mount

Gerizim and listened to what he cried aloud listen to me you leaders of Shechem why that God may listen to you now we know how the story ends we know what God was doing we know what the judgment ultimately ends up being but at this point as Jotham cries this out the door of repentance

is open Jotham's curse was a prophetic warning against Abimelech and Shechem that God fully fulfilled but we know that Yahweh is a God who does not delight himself in the death of the wicked who delights himself rather in giving mercy Ezekiel chapter 33 and verse 11 God says say this to them as I live declares the Lord God I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked but that the wicked turn from his way and live turn back this is the plea of God turn back turn back from your evil ways why will you die

O house of Israel can you imagine that same verse from Ezekiel being proclaimed to Abimelech and to the leaders of Shechem by Jotham turn back turn back why would you die turn back and then we go to Micah chapter 7 and verse 18 where Micah says who is a God like you pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance he does not retain his anger forever Micah says because he delights in steadfast love he delights in mercy if they had only turned at the warning and repented of their sin there's no reason for us to doubt that God would have been merciful because he is a God of mercy and we believe that ultimately because of the work of Christ on the cross

God proves his steadfast love toward us in that while we were sinners who were trying to forget him who were trying to leave him Christ died for us that's Romans 5 8 he took the wrath of God in our place so that we can receive forgiveness for every sin and be eternally reconciled to our creator against which we have sinned and this salvation is not something that we can earn simply by doing better with our lives this could not be earned by Abimelech for him just stopping for a moment just to say you know what maybe I'll go about this a different way it doesn't work no it is received by faith in who Jesus is and what Jesus did and what Jesus said if Abimelech and the Shechemites had turned from their sin back to God upon hearing

Jotham's warning their end would not have been destruction and we too can turn from sin back to God through faith in Jesus Christ and perhaps this sermon is your version of Jotham's curse it's a prophetic warning for you that the doorway for repentance is still open but if you continue forgetting God your sin will bring your death your eternal death but if you will repent and believe as Jesus said in John 8 if you will believe and hear his words God will give you eternal life eternal life we could simplify this whole section by saying there's two ways to live you can live for

[43 : 05] God and live a life that is blessed and flourishes in eternity or you can live for yourself and you'll die you'll be destroyed and you'll spend eternity in hell it really is that simple like Israel we often think of God's word and God's ways as a restriction on our freedoms as a burden to who we want to be and how we want to live our lives and indwelling sin it magnifies this indwelling sin that's in us it magnifies the attractiveness of a life apart from God it leads us to view the Lord as an oppressor someone standing in the way of our happiness and true fulfillment we think that a life outside of God's word and will will be ultimately freeing that it will allow us to be who we truly are and I don't mean any of that sarcastically

I mean that as that is the reality of how we think as people that is the mantra of our culture at this point and it probably exists in some of us that God is a problem he's an oppressor he's an egomaniac that's standing in the way of me being who I really am the problem though is that who you really are is a sinner whose sin is eventually going to destroy you that's offensive to us though we don't like to think of it that way we say no this is happiness this is fulfillment this is true life this is true love so on and so forth as the arguments go but the reality is who you really are is a sinner and that sin is going to destroy you Satan deceives us into thinking that a life apart from God is freedom it's actually bondage he tells us that it's life giving but in reality it's death God's commands are not for our harm they're for our good like a parent who can see and understand what will ultimately harm their kids God's law is a rule of love it's a rule of love love if you watch Bluey there was an episode recently where Bluey and Bingo they didn't appreciate that their dad was being so bossy in their life but by the end they realized that wait a minute dad's commands are actually for our good they're not always easy to hear because a lot of times they go against what we want to do but they're actually for our good right like a loving parent

God gives us his law for our good he knows what will harm us he knows that he is what is best for us and he pursues us he pursues us out of love so that in turning to him we will know what it truly means to live and to flourish and I think that's the best part of it I can understand that as a father that no matter how many times my girls push against or as they get older if they run I understand the desire to pursue them for their good is that not how the scripture pictures the Lord in his relationship to us we try to forget him we try to live without him what does he do he pursues us he

gives us his word he convicts us with his spirit he gives us a faithful church who will hold us accountable he pursues!

us out of his love for us! true life doesn't come from outside of his will it comes in submission to his will a lesson that Israel just couldn't seem to learn in the book of Judges and unless we have eyes to see and ears to hear the word of truth we will never learn it either a life and worship and obedience to God is the only life that's worth it it doesn't mean it's easy but man is it worth it and if you're at a point in your life where you really are trying to fight this tendency to move away from him please don't please don't it won't work out the way you think it will work out it won't be fulfilling like you think it will be fulfilling just turn and trust him and believe him and you'll find that his way is the best way and it's the fruitful way it's the saving way and!

[48 : 52] and go to to!!!