

1

(Series Overview Slide and Message Title)

TR: “Stop Throwing Hammers”



2

**That may not be what we say if we were at the Highland Games in our kilts,
-- but it certainly makes sense if we are throwing hammers up over our heads.
-- We may have “egg tosses,” but not “hammer tosses.”
-- We may encourage our kids to learn to toss a ball in the air and then catch it . . .
-- . . . but we don’t give them hammers for the same game.**

TR: Why not? Because what we throw over our heads will . . .

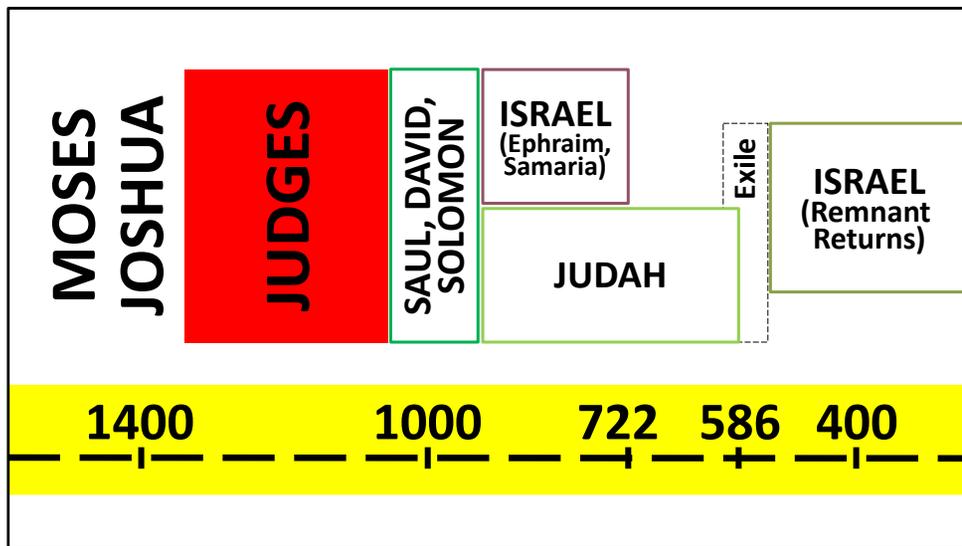
**. . . RETURN ON
OUR HEADS**

3

READ SLIDE

-- In the longest chapter in Judges we find lessons that all, but the most hard-headed, can learn.

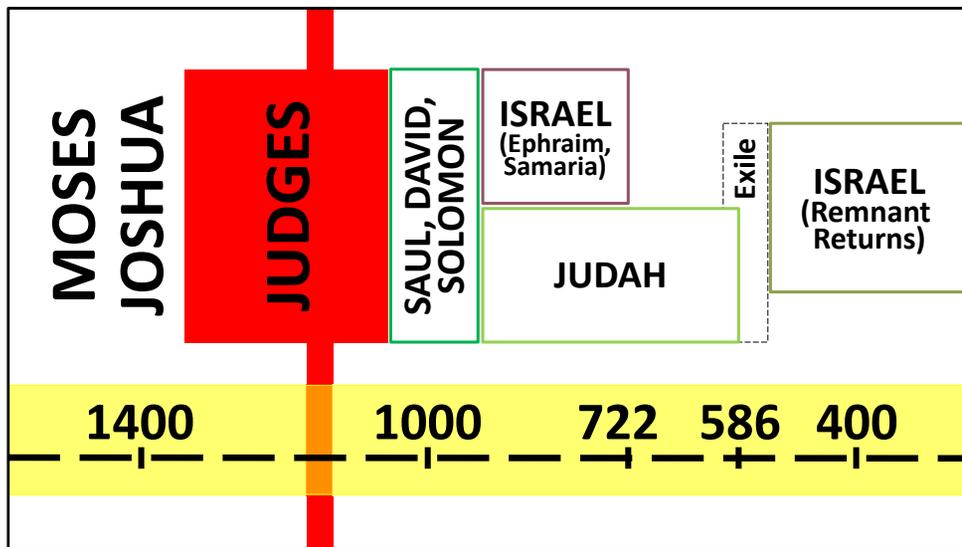
TR: Putting it into historical context . . .



4

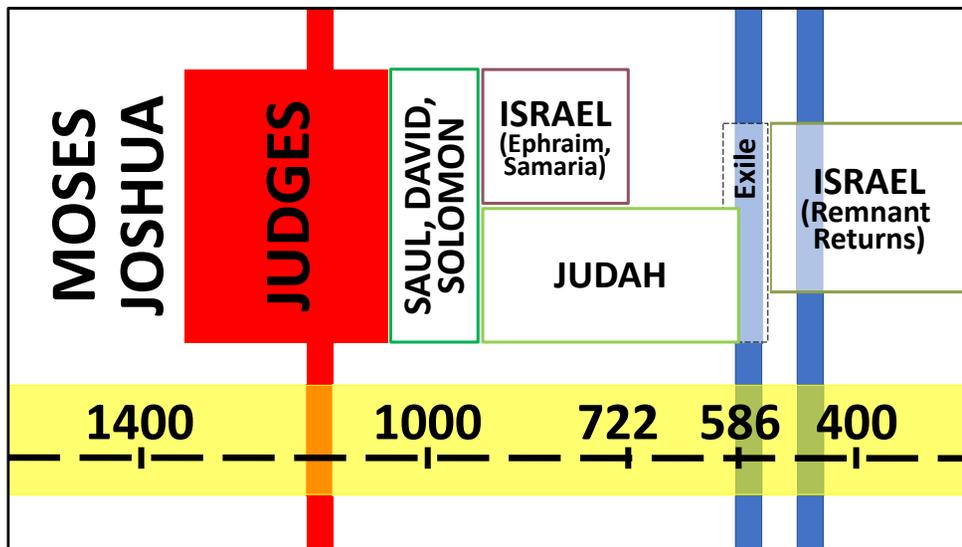
... we are talking the history of Israel, the time of the Judges,
 -- about the almost 350 years after Joshua
 -- but before the coronation of the first king, Saul.

TR: Judges 9 takes place . . .



... where the red line indicates.

TR: But the key idea from this chapter is repeated elsewhere in the Bible.



6

As indicated by the blue lines, there is a time from the 400's as captured in the book of Esther, -- and in the time of the Exile repeated a number of times by the prophet Ezekiel.

TR: What is the lesson? Why should we stop throwing hammers over our heads?

Esther 9:25

But when it came before the king, he gave orders in writing that his evil plan that he had devised against the Jews should **return on his own head**, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows.

7

In Persia, the remaining Jews who had not returned to the Promised Land were in great danger by evil Haman.

-- But in God's sovereignty, the gallows he built for the Jew, Mordecai, whom he despised . . . well, it returned on his own head.

-- We could say, "The hammer came down."

TR: In Ezekiel we read . . .

Ezekiel 9:9-10

Then (God) said to me, “The guilt of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great. The land is full of blood, and the city full of injustice. For they say, ‘The LORD has forsaken the land, and the LORD does not see.’ ¹⁰As for me, my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity; **I will bring their deeds upon their heads.**”

ESV

8

READ SLIDE

- The people of God lived like they had forgotten God . . .
- . . . and that God would forget about what they did.
- They imagined they could throw a hammer overhead and that it would not come down on their heads.

TR: A few chapters later . . .

Ezekiel 11:21

But as for those whose heart goes after their detestable things and their abominations, **I will bring their deeds upon their own heads**, declares the LORD God.”

ESV

9

READ SLIDE

TR: Again, in chapter 22 . . .

Therefore I have poured out my indignation upon them. I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath. **I have returned their way upon their heads,** declares the LORD God.”

ESV

READ SLIDE

- This sounds a lot like the often repeated, “A person reaps what they sow.”
- This chapter in Judges 9 is depressing. It does not cover a judge, but a king wannabe.
- There are lots of historical specifics that we could read into, but the compiler of this history makes it pretty clear what his main point is.

TR: Look at the end of chapter 8 . . .

Judges 8:33

As soon as Gideon died, the people of Israel turned again and whored after the Baals and made **Baal-berith** their god.



ESV

11

READ SLIDE

- The cycle starts up again.
- [Baal-berith] = god of covenant

TR: The people of God made covenant with a false god, and as verse 34 continues . . .

Judges 8:34-35

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, ³⁵and they **did not show steadfast love (HESED)** to the family of Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) **in return** for all the good that he had done to Israel.

ESV

12

READ SLIDE

TR: These verses make a powerful connection . . .

**FORGETTING
YAHWEH**



**NOT SHOWING
HESED**

*Covenant-faithful
GOD*

*Covenant-faithful
LOVE
(steadfast love;
loyalty)*

13

Forgetting the covenant-faithful God is linked to not showing covenant-faithfulness to people.

-- Cf. us wanting to be shown covenant-faithful love . . . and to be a person of their word . . . but we often miss this vital connection.

-- I want you to mark your Bibles with a bracket around 8:34-35

TR: The second set of verses to put a bracket next to is . . .

Judges 9:23-24

And God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem, and the leaders of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech, ²⁴that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal 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.

ESV

14

. . . Judges 9:23-24.

-- We will review the verses in-between momentarily, but for now, note that God may have allowed Abimelech to usurp authority for 3 years . . .

-- . . . but that doesn't mean God was not on His throne.

-- READ SLIDE (verse 23)

TR: Why did God send that evil spirit?

Judges 9:23-24

And God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem, and the leaders of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech, ²⁴**that** the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal 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.

ESV

15

. . . that, or so that . . . READ SLIDE (verse 24).

-- Hopefully, you've read the passage ahead of time and you know that the two key villains in the story are Abimelech and the men of Shechem.

-- Violence was done to the sons of Gideon, also known by his nickname, Jerubbaal.

-- But the hammer of violence came back and laid on Abimelech.

-- And, as well, on those who were indirectly responsible, the men of Shechem . . .

TR: The third set of verses I would like you to bracket as key to understanding the point of the history lesson is found at the end of chapter 9.

Judges 9:56-57

Thus God returned the evil of Abimelech, which he committed against his father in killing his seventy brothers. ⁵⁷And 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 Jerubbaal.

ESV

16

READ SLIDE

-- “Returned on their heads” – the same idea we found in Esther and Ezekiel, we find rooted in this early history.

TR: If we want just to do a quick overview of this chapter, we could conclude the lesson is captured in the Proverbs.

**If anyone returns evil for good,
evil will not depart from his house.**

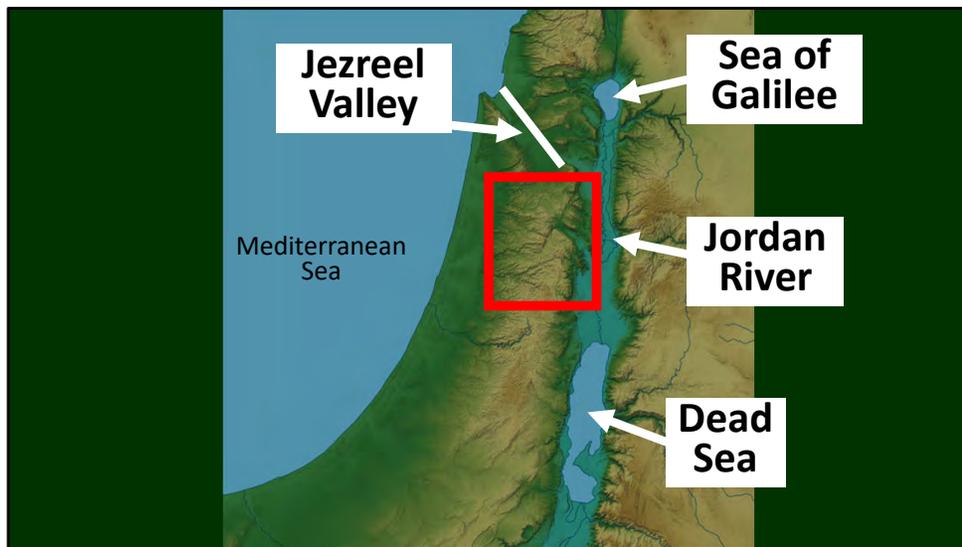
ESV

17

READ SLIDE

- Gideon had done a good thing, liberating Israel from Midian's oppression.**
- Yes, we saw that he didn't finish as well as we could hope, with some stomping around in prideful anger.**
- Abimelech, his son, and the people of Shechem, returned evil.**
- They threw a hammer in the air and it boinked them!**

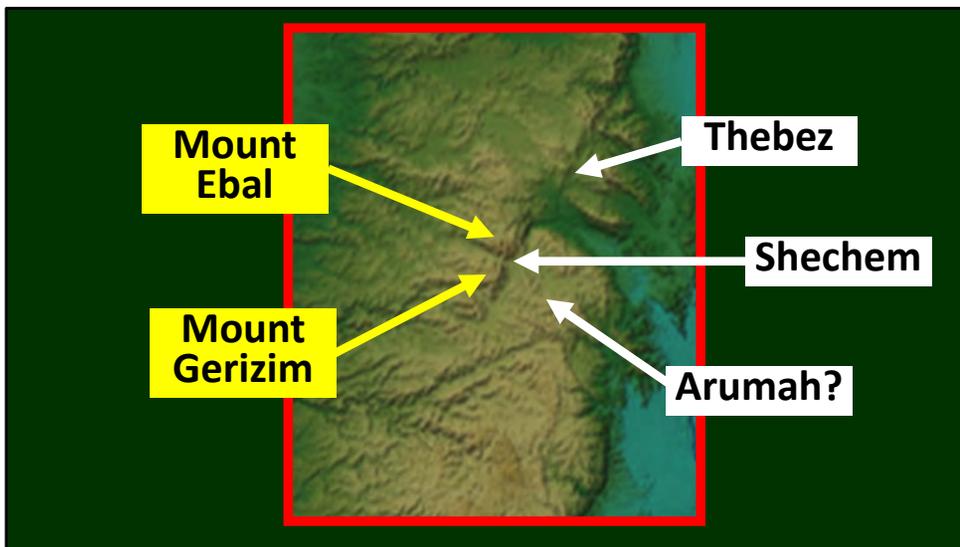
TR: We looked at the timeline context, now a quick look at geography.



18

**Ancient Israel fell on both sides of the Jordan River.
-- The events of Gideon happened in the fertile Jezreel Valley.**

TR: But now the events move southward to the more central mountain areas.



If we zoom-in we can see the two mountains, Ebal and Gerizim, with Shechem located at the base of the valley running between them.

- Abimelech, whose mother was a concubine from down Shechem-way, decides to play off his claim to being a “local.”
- Gideon was dead, and the question of who would lead was left unanswered.

TR: So, Abimelech, whose name means, “My father is a king” asks his relatives to start a whisper campaign . . .

Judges 9:2

“Say in the ears of all the leaders of Shechem, ‘Which is better for you, that all seventy of the sons of Jerubbaal rule over you, or that one rule over you?’ Remember also that I am your bone and your flesh.”

ESV

20

READ SLIDE

TR: The leaders of Shechem were persuaded and . . .

Judges 9:4-5a

And they gave him seventy pieces of silver out of the house of Baal-berith with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless fellows, who followed him. ⁵And he went to his father's house at Ophrah and killed his brothers the sons of Jerubbaal, seventy men, on one stone.

ESV

21

READ SLIDE

- [Baal-berith] = god of covenant, the idol Israel whored after.
- He goes back to the Jezreel Valley and kills his brothers, except for the youngest.

TR: Having thrown up the hammer of brutal violence, killing off the perceived competition for leadership . . .

Judges 9:6

And all the leaders of Shechem came together, and all Beth-millo, and they went and made Abimelech king, by the oak of the pillar at Shechem.

ESV



22

READ SLIDE

- Shechem . . . Beth-millo may be the Tower of Shechem.
- This oak of the pillar may be the Oak of Moreh, the terebinth, (not necessarily same as picture)
- Genesis 12:6 – God met Abram; Genesis 35:1-5 – where Jacob buried idols
- About 150 years earlier . . . Near Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, where blessings and curses were shouted (Deut 11, Josh 8)
- Where Joshua gave his last speech – Joshua 24:25-26

TR: The one remaining brother goes to the top of one of those mountains, staying away a safe distance.

When it was told to Jotham, he went and stood on top of Mount Gerizim and cried aloud and said to them, “Listen to me, you leaders of Shechem, that God may listen to you.”

ESV

23

READ SLIDE

-- **Seven Species: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, dates.**

-- **In Jotham’s parable we read of the OLIVE, FIG, and the GRAPES.**

TR: But the bramble is worthless. Comparing Abimelech to the bramble, Jotham (“Joe-tham”) said . . .

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, but if not, let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon.'

ESV

READ SLIDE

-- the irony is that the bramble offered virtually no shade
-- and when it dried out, it became a fire danger to even the great trees, like the famed cedars of Lebanon to the north.

TR: Jotham applies his parable with these conditional statements .

..

“Now therefore, **if you acted in good faith and integrity** when you made Abimelech king, and if you have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house and have done to him as his deeds deserved—

ESV

25

READ SLIDE

- Literally, “if in faithful-truth (EMET) and in sincerity”
- “What is complete and entirely in accord with truth and fact” (BDB)

TR: Verse 19 repeats the IF YOU . . .

Judges 9:19-20

if you then have acted in good faith and integrity with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, then rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you. ²⁰But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech and devour the leaders of Shechem and Beth-millo; and let fire come out from the leaders of Shechem and from Beth-millo and devour Abimelech.”

ESV

26

READ SLIDE

- in other words, “May you both burn each other up.”
- Abimelech “princed” over the area (probably not all of Israel) for 3 years
- It would be easy to think that the hammer wasn’t coming down . . . that he got away with such evil violence and betrayal.
- Sometimes it takes a while for the hammer to come down.

TR: As Longfellow wrote . . .

**“Though the mills of God grind slowly,
yet they grind exceeding small.”**

-Longfellow

READ SLIDE

- It may take time, but God’s justice will prevail.**
- The hammer will come down!!!**

TR: The author of this history book did not want us to miss that God was still sovereignly in control.

Judges 9:23

And God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem, and the leaders of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech . . .

ESV

28

Remember what we've already read . . . "God sent an evil spirit" -- Division and disunity may be the very judgment of God as He turns the grinding wheel.

TR: Down in verse 25 we read . . .

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

ESV

READ SLIDE

- Shechem was at the head of a fertile valley. It was at a crossroads of commerce.
- By hindering the trade routes, the leaders of Shechem were lining their pockets as they emptied Abimelech's.

TR: The evil spirit stirred further trouble through a newcomer to Shechem . . .

And Gaal the son of Ebed said, “Who is Abimelech, and who are we of 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?”

ESV

30

**In a likely alcohol induced moment of bravado . . . READ SLIDE
(Gaal = “Gail”)**

- He claims to be a REAL “local” . . . even more so than Abimelech.**
- How often worldly politics is a matter of personal interests, no matter how much it parades as a matter of principles.**

TR: The account tells of Zebul in Shechem giving Abimelech in Arumah counsel to attack and how to do so.

Judges 9:40-41

And Abimelech chased (Gaal), and he fled before him. And many fell wounded, up to the entrance of the gate. ⁴¹And Abimelech lived at Arumah, and Zebul drove out Gaal and his relatives, so that they could not dwell at Shechem.

ESV

31

With his troops divided into four divisions, the “Bramble King” attacked . . . READ SLIDE

TR: Having gotten rid of the chief troublemaker, Abimelech’s proud stomping in a spirit of vengeance can be heard as he attacks again . . . waiting to the people had come out to work their surrounding fields.

And Abimelech fought against the city all that day. He captured the city and killed the people who were in it, and he razed the city and sowed it with salt.

ESV

32

READ SLIDE

- [sowing with salt] is probably a figurative display of cursing the city and declaring with disdain that it is worthless.
- He was showing disdain for the city because they were disloyal to him . . . ironic?!

TR: More specifically, the battle moved within the city walls to . . .

Judges 9:46, 49b

When all the leaders of the Tower of Shechem heard of it, they entered the stronghold of the house of El-berith.

. . . and they set the stronghold on fire over them, so that all the people of the Tower of Shechem also died, about 1,000 men and women.

ESV

33

. . . the tower (probably Beth-millo) . . . and then to the stronghold of the temple of Baal or El-berith.

-- The folks were seeking the shelter of thick walls AND their god.

-- Abimelech had his troops gather firewood and then . . . READ SLIDE (second portion)

TR: But the Bramble King still wasn't done.

Judges 9:50a, 52-53

Then Abimelech went to Thebez . . .

And Abimelech came to the tower and fought against it and drew near to the door of the tower to burn it with fire.

⁵³And a certain woman threw an upper millstone on Abimelech's head and crushed his skull.

ESV

34

READ SLIDE (top part)

-- we don't know what Thebez did, being some 10 miles up the road.

-- The Bramble King tries a repeat of his previous strategy but with very different results . . . READ SLIDE

TR: An upper millstone is . . .



35

. . . what Kathy is turning in this picture.

-- It was the woman's job to grind the grain.

-- It was dishonorable to be killed by a woman, let alone by a stone.

-- This event becomes a parable of arrogance in battle, coming too close to a city wall, as seen in 2 Samuel 11:21.

-- The Bramble King knows he is dying and tells his armor bearer to run him through.

TR: What do we learn? The hammer comes down . . . and as we read previously . . .

Judges 9:56-57

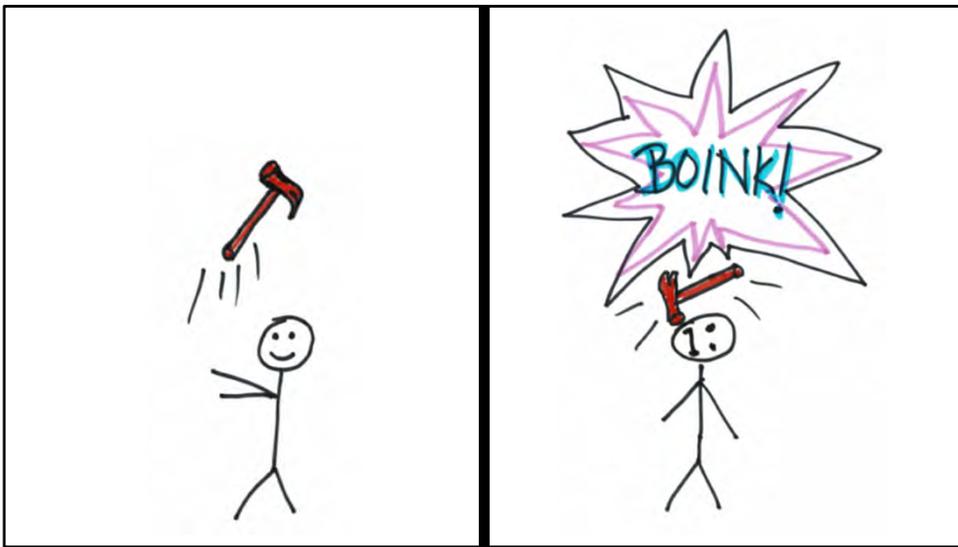
Thus God returned the evil of Abimelech, which he committed against his father in killing his seventy brothers. ⁵⁷And God also made all the evil of the men of Shechem return on their heads, and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal.

ESV

36

... God returned the evil of Abimelech on himself AND the evil of the men of Shechem upon their heads.

TR: In an overly simplistic picture, the point is ...



37

, , , when we throw hammers of evil opportunistic fickleness into the air . . .

-- . . . they will, in God's time, come back and BOINK us!

TR: I took some time to prayerfully ponder how to apply this historical narrative, seen through the filter of our three bracketed sets of verses. I came up with some proverbs.

**“He who shows no loyalty,
receives no loyalty.”**

- GdB

READ SLIDE

- Abimelech showed no loyalty to his father’s house or his brothers.**
- Shechem showed no loyalty to Gideon’s house either.**
- And then the hammer came down.**
- Amazingly thick-headed, Abimelech is angry at Shechem’s lack of loyalty!**

TR: Another proverb . . .

**“Beware of people
who jump on bandwagons,
they are probably looking
for a better one.”**

- GdB

39

READ SLIDE

- The people of Shechem rallied to Abimelech because he was one of their own . . . until another person was MORE “one of their own.”**
- CF. people who are quick to jump on the bandwagon of a church or organization . . . but are just as quick to jump off.**
- There still is a lot of opportunistic fickleness around.**

TR: Another application proverb warns that . . .

**“Power obtained by treachery,
is usually lost to treachery.”**

- GdB

READ SLIDE

**-- If the imagery of throwing the hammer up reminds us of a song,
“What goes up, must come down,” . . .**

TR: . . . then the next proverb may remind you of another song.

**“We cannot spit into the wind
and expect a shower of fresh water.”**

- GdB

READ SLIDE

- As has been said, “What goes around, comes around!”
- We all want others to be loyal to us . . . to have our backs . . . but do we have theirs?

TR: And then from those last verses in chapter 8 . . .

**“A person who keeps their eyes on God
will be a person who keeps their word.”**

- GdB

READ SLIDE

- When we take our eyes off God, our covenant-loyalty will slip by the wayside.**
- We will succumb to worldly politics and just vote for our own self-interests.**

TR: Beyond these GdB proverbs, I thought of more powerful insights from other parts of the Bible . . .


But as for those whose heart goes after their detestable things and their abominations, I will bring their deeds upon their own heads, declares the LORD God.”

ESV

43

Remember, we read in Ezekiel that God said He would bring their deeds upon their own heads?

-- The hammer will come down.

-- But is there hope, for all of us have thrown hammers in the air?

TR: The word “BUT” says there is a contrast. So what comes before this declaration?

Ezekiel 11:19-20

And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh,²⁰ that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

ESV

44

A powerful word of grace, looking forward to the New Covenant that we enjoy.

-- READ SLIDE

TR: If we are to audit the pain of the time of Judges and not make the same mistakes, we must . . .

Ask God for a new heart through Jesus

45

READ SLIDE

- We have all thrown hammers . . . (hold up various hammers and mauls)
- Only new hearts will deal with racism and all other forms of oppression.
- REVIEW THE GOSPEL

TR: Having asked for a new heart, you can now . . .

Romans 12:19

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

ESV

46

... stop throwing hammers and ... READ SLIDE

TR: Don't you hear God the Spirit calling you today away from the spirit of the Bramble King?

- Ask God for a new heart through Jesus
- Leave room for the vengeance of God

47

Where is He asking you to trust His mill of justice?

-- No one will get away with anything . . . forever.

-- Either we will pay for our sins OR we will ask Jesus to.

TR: Perhaps a smaller hammer than vengeance is the hammer of judgment.

Judge not, that you be not judged. ²For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.

ESV

READ SLIDE

-- Jotham's parable and his "IF" statements seems to have some sense of turning judgment over to God and not immediately assuming he was fit to be the judge.

TR: The hammer of the judgment of suspicion needs to be put down as we . . .

- Ask God for a new heart through Jesus
- Leave room for the vengeance of God
- Enlarge our judgment of charity

49

READ SLIDE

- Even in these days there is often the judgment of suspicion toward those who wear masks or those who don't.**
- We must be careful as we throw up the hammer of judgmentalism.**

TR: Do you remember this verse . . .


³¹Therefore I have poured out my indignation upon them. I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath. **I have returned their way upon their heads,** declares the LORD God.” ESV

... that spoke of God returning their way upon their heads?

TR: I see the “therefore” and look before it.

Ezekiel 22:30-31

And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none. ³¹Therefore I have poured out my indignation upon them. I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath. I have returned their way upon their heads, declares the LORD God.”

ESV

51

READ SLIDE (verse 30)

TR: When I think about hammers falling . . . I believe we are called to . . .

- Ask God for a new heart through Jesus
- Leave room for the vengeance of God
- Enlarge our judgment of charity
- Stand in the gap - pray for others

52

READ SLIDE

- My protectorate is my family, my church – especially the church leaders, my neighborhood, our missionaries, the pastors I mentor.**
- Who is in your protectorate?**
- Is the hammer going to come down on them, as they deserve it .**
- ..**
- . . . because you have not built up the wall and stood in the gap?**

TR: The references to HESED and EMET in our passage brought to mind this critical text . . .

Proverbs 3:3-4

Let not steadfast love (HESED)
and faithfulness (EMET) forsake you;
bind them around your neck;
write them on the tablet of your heart.

⁴So you will find favor
and good success
in the sight of God and man.

ESV

53

READ SLIDE

-- cf. texting an encouragement to our daughter and son-in-law on their anniversary about HESED . . . "I've heard that sermon before."

TR: People who have welcomed the core of this text desire to . . .

- Ask God for a new heart through Jesus
- Leave room for the vengeance of God
- Enlarge our judgment of charity
- Stand in the gap - pray for others
- Be a person whose ID tag reads
HESED & EMET

54

READ SLIDE

- Are we people whose word is our bond, because we have kept our eyes on God, Who is the Author of HESED and EMET?**
- Are we people who keep our word, even to our own hurt?
(Proverbs 15:4)**

TR: When we think about throwing hammers, don't make it too complicated. Remember how Jesus put it . . .

Matthew 7:12

So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

ESV

55

READ SLIDE

**TR: Paraphrased with the hammer imagery in mind, we could say .
..**

- Ask God for a new heart through Jesus
- Leave room for the vengeance of God
- Enlarge our judgment of charity
- Stand in the gap - pray for others
- Be a person whose ID tag reads
HESED & EMET
- “Throw into the air what we want to be hit
with in the head.”

56

READ SLIDE

- The answer for the problem of hammers coming down is **NOT** to put on a **HARD HAT . . .**
- . . . but to soften our hearts by remembering the **LORD**, by keeping our eyes on Jesus.
- People with their eyes on Jesus don't throw hammers.

TR: These 6 action steps, beginning with a new heart through faith in Jesus, will ensure that our prayer truly is . . .



57

... Thy Kingdom come.

-- Rather than, as Warren Wiersbe said, Abimelech's refrain was "My kingdom come."

-- May ours be ... "Thy Kingdom Come!" A kingdom of HESED and EMET!

DISCUSSION/REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Share a story of when you did a dumb thing, like throwing a hammer in the air, and it came back to hurt you. Why do you think you were blind to the consequences of your actions?
- Give some examples of covenant-faithful loyalty (love) that have made an impact on you.
- Without gossiping the details, share the impacts of when you or others were NOT people of HESED & EMET.
- Were the incidences that came to mind first in question 3 those committed BY you or AGAINST you? Can we learn anything from that?

DISCUSSION/REFLECTION QUESTIONS (continued)

- Which of Gary's proverbs best reflect lessons from the text? Are there any proverbs that you would like to add to the list?
- Which two Biblical Lessons are the ones the Lord most wants you to focus on right now? How can you practically apply the lesson this week?

**[LINK TO SERMON NOTES AND
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS](#)**