



James Tissot – “Abimelech murders his brothers

MESSAGE: “FOLLOWING DESIRES RATHER THAN INTEGRITY”. JUDGES 9:14-15

Gideon died around 1162 BC. He had been a successful leader of Israel. Weaving his way through the complex political landscape at the fall of the Bronze Age. Likely to most powerful cities in Israelite territory were Shechem, Jebesh, and Hebron. Shechem was a mixed Israelite and Canaanite city, Jebesh [Jerusalem] was still a predominantly Canaanite city and Hebron was mostly an Israelite city.



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Gideon had 75 sons due to his large harem, he also had a concubine [1/2 wife] from Shechem, likely an attempt to reach out to this powerful city-state. With this woman he had a son who was not considered legitimate – Abimelech. Abimelech convinced the leaders of Shechem to assist him with a coup against Gideon’s sons. They gave him money to hire a band of mercenaries. He marched to Ophrah, Gideon’s capital and killed all his 75 brothers except the youngest Jotham who hid.



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Jotham standing on Mt. Gerizim challenged the misplaced loyalty with an extended parable called the “Parable of the Trees”. After his challenge and request to God to judge the loyalty of Shechem and Abimelech he fled to Beer, a small city in Judah’s territory, likely under Philistine protection.

One of the dangers of a relativistic world is misplaced loyalty based not on justice or truth but on relationship or feelings. As Christians we need to establish a standard for our loyalty that promotes justice and truth.



Modern Nablus the site of ancient Shechem. On Mt. Gerizim the ancient site of the Samaritan temple is lit up. In the foreground are the ruins of the temple of Baal-Berith dating to the time of Judges. The other is Mt. Ebal. The bowl between these 2 peaks forms a natural amphitheater so a person standing on either mountain can be clearly heard on the other and in Shechem.

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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!*'



Ramesses III [1186-1155 BC]
Pharaoh during much of
Gideon's Judgeship

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Ramesses III reigned 31 years most of which was constant warfare and unrest for the country of Egypt. He ultimately would be assassinated by one of his wives trying to get her son placed on the throne instead of the crown prince.

In 1170 the greatest threat to Egypt came. It is the year that marks the point of no return for the Bronze Age...after this everything was over. A massive invasion of the Sea Peoples hit Egypt. It was likely a migration associated with the destruction of Troy which had been one of the last standing ancient cultures in the north.

Massive migrations of peoples throughout the Mediterranean area began sometime around 1200. The process that followed was that ancient civilizations would be attacked by looters, then roving bands of displaced people would move in to either complete the plunder or settle.



Above, John and Maureen Dean in 1973 at the Watergate hearings. Side: Jim Hougan, investigative journalist who in 1982 challenged the Dean and Washington Post Narrative on Watergate.

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John Dean had promoted Nixon and others in the White House as the primary drivers in the Watergate Break-in in 1972. Jim Hougan through Freedom of Information request to the FBI detailed that Dean’s account of the Break-in was faulty. The Washington Post attacked Hougan’s account because it also questioned the Post’s account.

In 1992 building on Hougan’s research Len Colodny and Robert Gettlin in their book *Silent Coup* went further to implicate both John and his wife Maureen as the reason for the break-in to recover information implicating Maureen as part of a prostitution ring servicing major politicians in DC. She was at the time Dean’s fiancée. G. Gordon Liddy confirmed that Dean had given the orders. Slander law-suits by the Dean’s [ending 2007] were unsuccessful.



Above, John and Maureen Dean in 1973 at the Watergate hearings. Side: Jim Hougan, investigative journalist who in 1982 challenged the Dean and Washington Post Narrative on Watergate.



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Chuck Colson and others stated in the early 2000's that the reason he and others were willing to participate in the “cover-up” was their loyalty to Nixon whom they thought had ordered the Break-in. Liddy confirmed this.

Nixon appears to have started the cover-up in the mistaken belief that his closest staff had ordered the Break-in.

Hougan believes that the prostitution ring was a CIA operation to collect incriminating information on politicians and that 2 former CIA operatives were moles inside the Nixon Administration, who intentionally set-up and sabotaged the Break-in to cover-up the covert prostitution ring.

In either case Dean's account is highly questionable.

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James Tissot [1836-1902] did two paintings based on Judges 9. James Tissot in his early life was quite a libertine in the very libertine artistic community of Paris. In 1870 Prussia and France went to war, Tissot fought as a regular in the French army, but when France was defeated he joined the Commune of Paris which was an anarchist movement that ruled Paris from March through May of 1871. They murdered 2 French generals and pillaged Paris. The Commune was deeply antichristian and stripped churches of their property and punished religious leaders in Paris. Tissot is believed to have joined the “Commune” to protect his considerable wealth from being looted by the mob.





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When the French government re-established control, many of the leading and notable people in the Commune fled France for England and other countries. In England, Tissot shifted his loyalties again and became a well-paid fashion and portrait painter to the wealthy. His mistress was a divorcee Kathleen Newton who died of Consumption in 1882 after a 7-8 year relationship with Tissot. Her death deeply shook James Tissot and he turned back to his Christian roots. From 1886 to his sudden death in 1902 he would exclusively paint Biblical and religious themes.



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Two of those painting from his Old Testament collection which was never finished revolve around the young man Abimelech. In one you see Abimelech sitting with his back to you on a blood soaked block of stone. Around the base of the stone lie the bodies of his brothers, his face in profile looks with disdain on them and on you the viewer. The other painting is of a young woman standing atop the walls of a tower of Thebez lifting a mill-stone above her head preparing to launch it onto the enemy below. Smoke wafts its way up the wall. Other terrified women look on as she prepares to act...not knowing her stone will find its mark and lay low Abimelech, the first titled king of Israel.



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Loyalty is a wonderful yet dangerous thing. Chuck Colson spoke about the danger of mis-guided loyalty. It can be easily betrayed or abused. We can become convinced that what we are doing is OK because after all we are doing it for a friend. Often such loyalty is co-dependent, enabling great evils.

Abimelech could not have murdered his brothers without the financial support and backing of the leaders of Shechem. They of course they were getting an Israelite king who would bend to their desires or so they thought. Jotham’s parable of the Trees exposes this evil for what it is loyalty built on relationship and mutual interest not justice and truth.

When they and their sister city of Thebez began to harbor bandits who harassed merchants traveling the road Abimelech came down hard on them. **James 3:13-18**



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James 3:13-18

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct *that* his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.

14 But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth.

15 This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.

16 For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.

17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

18 Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.



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The ruins of the “temple of Baal-Berith” in Shechem where the final residents of Shechem took refuge from Abimelech’s army and were suffocated by smoke

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The people of Shechem lead a revolt against Abimelech. Abimelech takes the city and kills everyone. The final survivors retreat to the temple of Baal-Barith where over 1000 are suffocated by a massive fire laid around the tower complex using green wood. So he bramble did indeed send out fire to burn down the Cedars of Lebanon [Elders of Shechem]. Later Abimelech would die as a result of trying to burn down the tower of Thebez a town allied with Shechem when a millstone was thrown on his head by a woman on the parapets above. He probably did not see the stone because of the smoke from the fire his soldiers were trying to light.



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Matthew 6:21-24

21 “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

22 “The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is **good**, your whole body will be full of light.

23 “But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

24 “No one can serve two masters; for **either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.**



Sunday School Illustration

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Misplaced loyalty is a matter of unclear values and muddled perceptions. The things that muddy our perceptions are often those things or people we value but have not taken the time to honestly evaluate.