



Week of June 17, 2019: Judges Series: Abimelech (Judges 8:30 – 9:57)

Discussion Questions Set #1

“He had seventy sons of his own, for he had many wives. His concubine, who lived in Shechem, also bore him a son, whom he named Abimelech. Gideon son of Joash died at a good old age and was buried in the tomb of his father Joash in Ophrah of the Abiezrites. No sooner had Gideon died than the Israelites again prostituted themselves to the Baals. They set up Baal-Berith as their god and did not remember the LORD their God, who had rescued them from the hands of all their enemies on every side. They also failed to show any loyalty to the family of Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) in spite of all the good things he had done for them.” (Judges 8:30 – 35)

We've seen the Judges cycle repeat itself six times through the narrative of the book. The sense is that the moment a key leader disappears from the scene, the people of Israel immediately return to the consumption of oppositional culture.

1. Why do you think the people of Israel are so quick to return to the worship of Baal?
2. What is it about a committed leader like Ehud, Deborah, or Gideon that seems to prevent the people of Israel from running to the Baals?
3. The language of Judges often indicates that the people of Israel “did not remember” or “forgot” God and His incredible works on their behalf. The sense here is not that the people of Israel couldn't recall the historical acts of God, but more so that His past actions and their past interactions with God had no bearing on their present actions. What happens when we allow God a key place in our past, but little influence over our present circumstances? What is the outcome of a purely historical faith?
4. Can you think of a way that God is currently given credit for past actions, but prevented from an active influence over present circumstances?
5. How do the concepts of remembering God and creating Godly culture interact? How are the concepts of forgetting God and creating ungodly culture related?

Discussion Questions Set #2

“Abimelech son of Jerub-Baal went to his mother's brothers in Shechem and said to them and to all his mother's clan, “Ask all the citizens of Shechem, ‘Which is better for you: to have all seventy of Jerub-Baal's sons rule over you, or just one man?’ Remember, I am your flesh and blood.” (Judges)
“We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations”. (1 Samuel 8:19-20)
“Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord”. (Zechariah 4:6)
“Woe to the obstinate children,” declares the LORD, “to those who carry out plans that are not mine, forming an alliance, but not by my Spirit” (Isaiah 30:1).

In sermon, we understood that instead of cultivating something godly in culture, Abimelech did precisely the opposite, setting a cultural snare based on an Israelite whim.

1. Abimelech is an incredibly crafty individual as evidenced by his ability to persuade his relatives to support him in an incredibly ungodly plan. We also learned in Judges 3 that Ehud too was an incredibly crafty individual, creating a unique weapon and using his perceived disability to his advantage. Discuss the differences between these two “judges” of Israel.
2. What does desiring to “be like all the other nations” eventually result in? How are this desire and a failure to create Godly culture related?
3. Though the people of Israel clamour for a king to reign over them, the strange reality is that they already have a King over them. Who is this King and why do you think the people of Israel fail to recognize His legitimacy over them?
4. How does a commitment to using power and might rather than operating by God's Spirit influence this narrative?



Discussion Questions Set #3

“One day the trees went out to anoint a king for themselves. They said to the olive tree, ‘Be our king.’ But the olive tree answered, ‘Should I give up my oil, by which both gods and humans are honored, to hold sway over the trees?’

“Next, the trees said to the fig tree, ‘Come and be our king.’

“But the fig tree replied, ‘Should I give up my fruit, so good and sweet, to hold sway over the trees?’

“Then the trees said to the vine, ‘Come and be our king.’

“But the vine answered, ‘Should I give up my wine, which cheers both gods and humans, to hold sway over the trees?’

“Finally all the trees said to the thornbush, ‘Come and be our king.’

“The thornbush said to the trees, ‘If you really want to anoint me king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, then let fire come out of the thornbush and consume the cedars of Lebanon!’

(Judges 9:8-15)

In his parable to the people of Shechem, Jotham indicates that they were substituting a strong, secure, fruitful king in God for a thorny, bramble king in Abimelech

1. At the core of every culture lies their “god”. In our story, the people of Israel were willing to exchange God for Abimelech and the Baals. Why do you think they were willing to make this exchange?
2. What is it that sits at the core of worldly culture right now? What is the idol of our culture in 2019? Discuss.
3. What are some “idols” that may still lie or threaten to replace God at the core of Christian culture in 2019?
4. What practical steps can we take to ensure that Jesus remains at the core of the culture that we are creating or cultivating?