

“Abimelech”

Sermon Notes

- **“Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.”**
-1 Corinthians 10:6, 11

**The death spiral of the judges warns God's people of...*

1. ...the horror of our rebellion without the gift of God's reprimand (8:33-9:25)

2. ...the increase of our recklessness apart from our repentance (9:26-49)

3. ...the justice of God's retribution instead of the grace of his rest (9:50-57)

Community Group Study Guide

For the Week of February 26th-March 4th

Getting Started

1. A couple of months ago as we studied Judges 3:7-11, we got our first sermon-length look at the cycle of the judges. Turn back to 3:7-11. Read carefully through these five verses. Though featured in the book of Judges, it is in no way unique to the book of Judges. In fact, if we're honest, we are all too familiar with this cycle in our spiritual lives: the horror of our *rebellion*, the gift of God's *reprimand*, the importance of our *repentance*, the wonder of God's *rescue*, and the grace of God's *rest*. Take some time to locate each of these steps in the cycle as represented in 3:7-11. What sorts of reflections do you have as you think about how this cycle works in your own life? What questions do you have about it, or what it looks like in the lives of others in your group?

Digging Deeper

2. While it's true that we have a lot of familiarity with this cycle as believers, it's also true that we want to be increasingly free from it. To what does Jesus call us in Matthew 11:28-30? Sounds pretty spectacular, doesn't it? So why is it so challenging for us to receive this from him, or to remain within it with him? Put another way, why do we rebel against this rest (see Isaiah 30:15 and following)? In what specific ways is the cycle of the judges a warning and a reminder for us to stay close to Christ, dwelling in the rest he offers, as well as inviting others into that rest?

Open Your Bible to Judges 8:33...

3. At first glance, it appears in 8:33 that the cycle of the judges is starting all over again. What marks the rebellion of God's people this time, according to 8:33-35? One of the master-images in Scripture of the sin of God's people is that of spiritual adultery (v.33).¹ While sin in the Bible is certainly described as idolatry, slavery, folly (and so on), this picture of our rebellion as spiritual adultery is an incredibly pervasive and powerful one (consider any of the Scriptures cited in the footnote below). Why does God describe our sin this way? As a result, is our sin (even the smallest of sins) ever a victimless crime? What difference does this make to you as a follower of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2-3; Ephesians 5:25-29; Revelation 19:6-10)?
4. The cycle of the judges is marked by the horror of our rebellion followed by the gift of God's reprimand. How is it that we might understand this step as an evidence of God's mercy (see Hebrews 10:5-11)? Do you have a personal experience of the Lord's corrective discipline in your life that you'd be willing to share with the group? If so, please share it. As we read through Judges 9:1-25, it becomes increasingly clear that the gift of God's chastening, corrective reprimand is nowhere to be found. What do we see instead (v.23)? How do we understand this activity of God? What is the purpose of it (v.24)? How do we discern the reprimand of the Lord from his retribution in the lives of people today?

¹ If you doubt this, consider Exodus 24:15-16; Leviticus 17:7; Numbers 15:39; Deuteronomy 31:16; Judges 2:17; 8:27; 1 Chronicles 5:25; 2 Chronicles 21:11, 13; Psalm 106:39; Isaiah 1:21; Jeremiah 2:20; 3:1-3, 6, 8-9; Ezekiel 16:15-17, 28, 34, 41; 23:3, 5, 19, 30, 43; Hosea 1:2; 2:4-5; 3:3; 4:10, 12-15; 5:4; 6:10; 9:1; Matthew 12:39; 16:4; Mark 8:38; and James 4:4.

5. At the end of the day, what distinguishes the cycle of the judges from the death spiral of the judges is one word: *repentance*. Therefore, it's not the presence of sin in our lives that's actually our biggest problem - it's the absence of repentance. Read through Judges 9:26-49. Notice the increasing recklessness among God's people apart from their repentance. This ought to sound familiar to us. Do you have a personal experience of this in your life that you can share with the group?
6. 2 Timothy 2:25 teaches us that it is God who grants repentance. Furthermore, Ephesians 2:8 and Philippians 1:29 affirm that God is the one who gives the gift of faith. If we find evidence that our lives (or the lives of those around us) reflect more of the death spiral of the judges (8:33-9:57) than the cycle of the judges (3:7-11), what ought we to do? What does it look like to seek true repentance? Ought we to take comfort that repentance and faith are gifts that are God's alone to give? Explain.
7. Read through Judges 9:50-57. Old Testament commentator Dale Ralph Davis observes: "Here lies a firm comfort for God's beleaguered people: God destroys the destroyers of his people... God does not abandon his people to their Abimelechs but keeps his people from utter destruction."² Not all will enter into the grace of God's rest, many will experience the justice of his retribution. On the other hand, those who come to experience the grace of God's rest only deserved the justice of his retribution. Conclude your time together as a group by reflecting on the wonder of your rescue in Christ, using Colossians 2:13-14 and 2 Corinthians 5:21 as a prompt for worship and prayer.

² Dale Ralph Davis, *Judges: Such a Great Salvation*. Christian Focus Publishers: London. (1990) 2021. p.126.