

Study 4 Judges chapter 10-11

The Danger of Mixing Christian Faith with Our Surrounding Culture

During the period of the Judges Israel continually mixed their belief in God with the beliefs of the Canaanites and of the nations living around them. The Canaanite gods Baal and Asherah were often worshipped together. Baal was the supreme god of ancient Canaan and Phoenicia. He was the storm god and was often shown holding a raised lightening bolt. His consort was Asherah who was the chief female deity. As the gods of fertility, worship of them often involved ritual prostitution. These gods also required human sacrifice. Abimelech is often most remembered for his foolish vow (Judges 11:30-31). He vowed to make a human sacrifice if God gave him victory. Perhaps there is no better example in the Bible of the strong negative influence surrounding culture can have on our worship of God. Instead of being a light to the world of who God is, the people of Israel absorbed the ways of the peoples around them and became like them. They followed the gods of the Canaanites, the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites and the gods of the Philistines (10:6).

The Israelites had not abandoned their worship of God for idols. They combined their worship of God with the worship of idols. Idol worship continues today. *“The gods have not changed, for human nature has not changed, and these are the gods humanity regularly recreates for itself. What does it want? If it is modest - security and comfort and reasonable enjoyment; if ambitious - power and wealth and unbridled self-indulgence. In every age there are forces at work which promise to meet our desires – whether political programs, economic theories, career options, philosophies, life options, entertainment programs - all having one feature in common. They promise that they can make our lives better than we can make them ourselves, yet at the same time they appear amenable to our manipulating them so we can get what we want without losing our independence... here is the enemy at work among us. We say we worship the Lord ... but the world has crept in and controls our heart.”* (p. 76, Judges For You).

Read Judges 10:6-16; 11:29-37

1. Summarize the reoccurring cycle we see in the Book of Judges according to 10:6-16.
2. Based on what we have already read in the Book of Judges do you think the people of Israel genuinely repented (see verses 15-16). Why or why not?
3. What do we learn about human nature and about God's character from Judges 10:6-16?
4. Why do you think Jephthah made the vow that he made (refer to 11:30)? How do we reconcile the vow that Jephthah made with the fact that in verse 29, sometime before making the vow, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah?
5. What do you think are some examples today of how culture has influenced what many Christians believe and how many Christians act?

6. Today how can Christians form a correct understanding of who God is and what God requires of His people?

Timothy Keller writes: "... we are far more affected by our culture than we think. It is easy for us to see how Jephthah ignored the Scriptures that he had (the first five books of the Bible) and what they told him about who God is, and about how sacred human life is; and how instead he listened to pagan culture about God and about life. But surely many people at other times and places will be astonished [at some of the things we Christians do today]." (p.120, Judges For You).

We live in increasingly difficult times. The church today is being influenced by the political ideologies, economic values and social morals of the world we live in. If we follow the world, we will lose our salt and no longer be a light. The world is not looking for a church that reflects the values and morals of our culture, but for people who genuinely follow Jesus who is the way, the truth and the life.

Notes:

In 11:31 we read about the vow Jephthah makes to God: "If you give the Ammonites into my hands, whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the Lord's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering." Jephthah ends up sacrificing his only child. Jephthah follows through on his vow despite the fact that God despises human sacrifice (see Lev. 18:1; Deut. 12:31; Deut. 18:10).

Question 3: Note God's amazing grace. God knows His people Israel will return once again to their sin and worship the gods of the cultures around them, and yet He again and again raises up Judges to rescue His people.

Question 4: God's Spirit comes upon people, but this does not mean that those people are automatically sanctified (become perfectly holy, godly people). Unlike God's people during the era of the Old Testament, Christians today have the Holy Spirit within them, not just "upon them". This is one of the main differences between the two Covenants, Old and New.

All believers have the Holy Spirit. At the same time we are all in a process of being sanctified by God. There is a difference between being made righteous in Christ and the process of sanctification. We are made righteous the moment we put our faith in Jesus and trust that his death on the cross is sufficient and is a just punishment for all our sins. By asking God to forgive us our sins, God by His Holy Spirit enters us and dwells within us. But we still sometimes sin. We are in the process of being sanctified, of becoming more and more like Jesus Christ. This process of sanctification will continue until the day we meet the Lord Jesus face to face. Even though Jephthah was anointed by the Spirit of the Lord, he was still susceptible to sin and to the sinful ways of the cultures around him.