

Editorial

We are responsible for the people we elect!

The popular saying goes, "each people has the government it deserves". In other words, each people is responsible for the authorities it elects. Good or bad politicians do not get into government on their own. They come to power by the vote of the population. That vote in many cases was cast without proper knowledge of the candidate's profile and character and without having known his or her policy proposal or party background. There is no doubt that it is difficult to know the contenders given the existence of so many parties. Faced with such a dilemma, we should follow Paul's advice, "examine everything carefully, hold fast what is good" (1 Thess. 5:21). This discernment is imperative in Guatemala because several politicians are being questioned about their nominations. In the current political scenario, it is difficult to find political options that represent the interests of the nation. In the same way, we face the challenge of not allowing ourselves to be deceived by propaganda that uses religious phrases or symbols and by offers that are forgotten after the campaign. In this reflection we propose some criteria to guide the opinion of Christians, in order to cast a conscious and responsible vote. With the appropriate differences, we base our reflection on the story of Abimelech who became king of Israel at the time of the judges (1200 and 1020 B.C.).

Analyze politicians' motivations (Judges 9:1-2)

Behind Abimelech's deeds there is a clear motivation: Ambition for power. He was the son of Gideon and a concubine who lived in Shechem. He convinced his mother and uncles to promote his leadership in order to be elected king of Israel (9:1). After making his proposal known, he asked his relatives to pass it on to the leaders of the city. He asked, "Which is better for you, that seventy men should rule over you, all the sons of Gideon, or that one man should rule over you? Remember that I am your bone and your flesh" (9:2). To begin with, he put the choice of his own person first, disregarding the 70 sons of Gideon who were the rightful heirs to the throne [Abimelech was a brother only by father, but not by mother to the rest of Gideon's sons]. Beyond the right of his brothers was his ambition for power. Secondly, he proposed his choice on the basis of his filial relationship: "remember that I am your relative". He did not say: "I am the most capable, the one who has the knowledge and experience to govern or the one who has served the people". His basis was in kinship with the family. He exposes an ambition for power that his father Gideon did not have. Gideon rejected with all his might the proposal of the elders who wanted to make him king of Israel after he had delivered them from their enemies. On the contrary, he asserted that it should be Jehovah who would rule over them (8:22,23). Gideon did not go after power nor was he seduced by its offer. He assumed his leadership at God's call and delivered his people at God's instruction.

What do we perceive in Abimelech's actions? A deep ambition for power. Overnight he wanted to become the king of Israel without having a calling from God, without having the qualifications to rule, and without having an ethical and moral character. It mirrors in some ways the practices of some politicians inside or outside Guatemala. In general, they appear at election time and then disappear from the map. They do not bring behind them a history of community service, a transparent curriculum vitae, or the necessary political knowledge. Their ambition for power predominates, and they base their campaign on political propaganda. This propaganda seems more like a photo contest. Serious debate of political ideas or programmes is rare. What you see in the media is propaganda that sells the image of the candidates. It is therefore essential to analyze the slogans, phrases, or songs that try to convince voters. We must underline that we not only need politicians who are not corrupt or who are good people, but who have political training, a life of service to the people, a vision of a national project, and political figures with experience in favor of the common good. We need to discern the propaganda and speeches of the candidates, in order to not be misled. It is necessary to unmask the use of religious symbolism and to be aware of politicians' resumes and moral ethical character.

On the other hand, it is noted that Abimelech used his relatives as a springboard to power in Israel. He was not a recognized leader and had no letters of introduction to rule. He used the influence and contacts of his relatives to promote his nomination. It reflects a practice that many politicians engage in today to achieve political power. They use their interpersonal, work, family or religious relationships to gain a foothold in politics. Not a few politicians have to stand next to the picture of politicians of the past because no one knows them. Others seek the support of religious entities or groups to make their candidacies count. Cronyism, friendliness, or political clientelism predominate in the electoral arena. It has to do with the nepotism of current politicians who place family members in key government positions without the necessary professional qualifications and political experience. On the other hand, it is necessary to confront the influence peddling

that allows officials to reach public positions through their connections, and not necessarily because they are the best professionals or politicians. Examples of this abound: Not a few members of congress, civil servants, or mayors have neither the training nor the political experience required for public management. So we must be on our guard against candidates who use slogans, religious symbolism, give away mirages, or use Christian language as a political springboard for their own ends. At the same time, Christians involved in any party or civic committee must be careful not to use any means as a political springboard, or allow themselves to be used as a springboard for party ambitions to channel their ambitions for power.

Convenience elections should be avoided (Judges 9:3-6)

After the uncles were convinced by Abimelech's proposal they, presented it to the elders of the city. The text says that their hearts were inclined in favour of Abimelech. The fundamental reason, their family relationship: "he is our kinsman". Again, it is noted that it was not his kingly qualities, his curriculum vitae, or his suitability. They did not discuss or evaluate his profile to be king. Nor did they grasp his ambition for power, which would later become an instrument of violence and death against the people of his own village. No doubt they thought of the benefits of having a relative of theirs as king, or perhaps they thought it was in their interest to have Abimelech and not the sons of Gideon for fear of reprisal. There will always be godfathers of politicians seeking a share of power. People looking for personal gain. After leaning towards his candidacy, the village leaders gave him money to raise a small army of idle and vagabond people (9:4). What did they do? Empower him to remove every obstacle that stood in his way. With these men Abimelech went to his father's house in Ophrah and slew all his brothers with the exception of Jotham, who escaped. What was the most obvious mistake? That the people chose his kinsman Abimelech as king, knowing that, in order to take the kingship, he would have to eliminate the sons of Gideon (9:6).

The murder of Gideon's sons was a repugnant and cruel act as a result of the lust for power. It is a danger that threatens the people when the interest of personal power overrides the common interest. The people sinned with actual knowledge and consent of Abimelech's sin. Above all, because they had good examples of leaders like Deborah who was a wise and prudent judge who imparted justice in Israel, but they did not take that example and experience into account (Judges 4:4-5). The leadership and the people proceeded wrongly in appointing Abimelech; they revealed their own ambitions by letting him become their king, even though he was a bloodthirsty one, and they did not foresee that their ambition for power would turn him against them. The leaders and people of Shechem resemble many political godfathers in today's democracy. They support politicians and political parties out of convenience. They finance their campaigns because they seek quotas of power. Others, knowing that their candidates have committed acts that are against the law or have sentences against them, support them, and the worst thing is that they consider them their heroes. Shame on them! We the people are to blame for the fact that it is the same people who govern us. Quite a few politicians of the past committed misdeeds in office, disappeared, and then appear again in the media announcing themselves as heroes, and the worst thing is that they are elected again. We forget their past sins. Let us not sin in historical ignorance. Let us not forget what the prophets remind us: Woe to those who call evil good and good evil; who turn light into darkness and darkness into light; who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! (Is. 5:20). Let us remember, every people gets the government it deserves. So, we should know as much as possible about their record and service, in order to vote with knowledge and discernment.

Advising on the dangers of making the wrong choices (Judges 9:7-22)

The narrative states that Jotham [Gideon's only son who escaped the slaughter] heard that Abimelech had been appointed king. So he went up to Mount Gerizim and, exposing his life, confronted the people about the choice of Abimelech. To make them reflect, he told a parable illustrating the wrong action of the people and Abimelech. The parable tells how the trees decided to appoint a king among themselves. They proposed the olive tree, the fig tree, and the vine, but these rejected the idea of becoming king of the trees. In the end they asked the bramble to be their king. It accepted the nomination. The bramble said: "If indeed you anoint me king over you, come and take refuge in my shadow". Its offer was false. The parable shows the absurdity of naming the bush as king because it did not have the qualities of a tree. Jotham underlined in this way the wrong attitude of the people and the arrogance of Abimelech to be king (9:7.15). The story shows the foolishness of the leadership and the people in appointing a person who was not suitable, capable, and because he was a murderous man: he had killed the sons of their top leader, Gideon. Jotham denounces their sin: "you have rebelled against my father's house... and killed his sons...". What did he do? He denounced his complicity in Abimelech's deeds. Jotham's courage and discernment are a great challenge to Christians. We have not pointed out the unsuitability of candidates, nor have we pointed out those actions that are contrary to the law and values of the ethics of the kingdom of God. Indirectly we become accomplices to corruption when we remain silent. Let us not forget, the wrong choice of candidates brings fatal consequences for the people.

In his confrontation with the people Jotham, asserts that the choice of Abimelech did not do justice to the descendants of Gideon who fought on their behalf. He fearlessly stresses that they should have proceeded with "truth" and "integrity" in the choice of the king (9:16-17). In other words, he states that they proceeded foolishly and wrongly. In the end, he points out the evils that will come upon them from their wrong choice. If you have proceeded in truth and integrity with Gideon and his house, let them rejoice with Abimelech, and let him rejoice with them. In other words, he warns them, if they did the right thing it will go well for them, but if they did not act according to truth and integrity Abimelech's, reign will be for their evil. The later verses show that Jotham was right. The wrongdoing of Abimelech and the people brought misfortune to all. God himself brought judgment on the inhabitants of Shechem and on the life of Abimelech. Three years later Abimelech captured the city of Shechem, killed many people, slaughtered the chiefs, razed the city to the ground and sowed it with salt (9:45-49). Abimelech suffered the rebellion of the people and was killed by a woman who threw a millstone on his head from a tower (9:50-57). God brought back the wickedness of the men of Shechem and thus God repaid Abimelech for his wickedness in murdering his 70 brothers (9:55-57). What do we learn and how do we apply it to ourselves? It is a call to the people not to elect disreputable candidates.

This implies getting to know the candidates, their parties and the people behind them. It is essential to reflect and reason the vote. We should not vote only on the basis of propaganda. It is necessary to discern the words, images, and lifestyles of politicians, and at the same time, to be prepared to ask for an account from those who are elected.

Finally, the three trees that Jotham mentions in the parable represent in Israel the Shalom of God [integral well-being of the Jew with God, with his neighbour and with himself]: Olive, fig, and life are the essential products in the economy of the Israelites. According to Peruvian politician Tomas Gutiérrez, these symbols represent the qualities of a good government: it seeks the kingdom of God, it seeks prosperity and security, and it promotes justice.[1] The symbols represent the qualities of a good government. In terms of the democracy in which we live, it could be said that we should vote for those candidates who opt for the integral well-being of the population and the development of the human potential of its inhabitants. This demands knowledge of candidates and parties. In other words, candidates must be people who set an example of life, align themselves with the values of the kingdom of God such as truth, justice or honesty; and who respect the Constitution of the country. This demands knowledge of candidates, proposals and parties, and not being misled by propaganda impregnated with religious symbols, unfounded promises, or phrases without social content. Especially with the existence of 30 parties that show the fragmentation of ideas and the pursuit of very particular interests. Let us not be afraid, let us confront politicians or officials who do not conform to justice or truth, and at the same time, let us collaborate with government authorities in favor of the common good; and let us be vigilant in calling them to account when necessary. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to guide us to understand and choose wisely. I would like to affirm that change will not necessarily come through politicians, but through the work of God, and responsible Christian citizenship.

Dr. Israel Ortiz, Director
Centro Esdras

[1] En Saber Elegir La Parábola de Jotam Mayordomía del voto Responsabilidad política y electoral del cristiano (Perú: Ediciones AHP, 2006). 23.

Programme of Childhood, Adolescence, and Family

A workshop on Sexual Violence and Human Trafficking was given to young people from Compassion's ELIJO programme, as well as two virtual sessions on the subject, in order to resolve doubts and go deeper into some of the issues.

On Saturday March 18th, we participated in the Seminar on Christian Education, organized by the Central American Theological Seminary (SETECA), with the workshops: Preventing Child Violence and Strong Children in Difficult Situations.

The School for Parents Programme Team continues to meet and make progress on the development of the facilitators' manual, writing the content and methodology to be used.

Karen Sipac
Coordinator of Programme



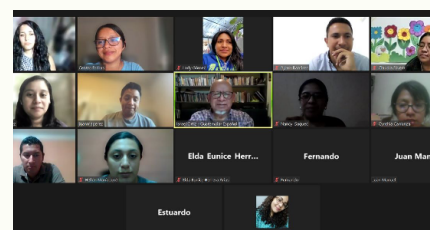
Theological Studies



International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES) leadership training.

Our director Israel Ortiz gave the biblical presentations on Daniel, and the workshop "A Biblical Perspective on Violence" at the Leadership Training Encounter of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students of Mexico and Central America from January 6 - 12 in Guatemala City. We thank God for contributing to the advancement of the gospel in universities and the discipleship of student leadership in the region.

The Diploma course in the Pedagogy of Jesus and Contemporary Education began the first week of March with the attendance of 18 students from different nationalities such as: Guatemala, Panama, Peru, Mexico, and Honduras. At the end of the first module "Pedagogical Principles of Jesus," we have appreciated the depth of the teaching and accompaniment of the students through the asynchronous activities as well as the virtual conversations. In these spaces we have generated comments such as: Jesus' pedagogy informs, forms, and transforms, it transcends generations. Jesus teaches through his own life and example, and in order to improve as a teacher I must learn from him being the teacher of teachers".



Jeison Rodríguez
Coordinator of Programme

Programme of Creation Care

In February and March, we had the joy of sharing workshops on "Stewardship of Creation" with a focus on vermicomposting with families and churches in the west of the country. This was done through the Roca Guatemala Network, of which our brothers from Saq B'e (in Retalhuleu) and AMI San Lucas (in Sololá) are part of. It was a valuable time to deepen the foundations of Christian faith that underpin why we care for creation and also to identify the current conditions that underpin the why and how of our actions as sons and daughters of God. At the same time, these bases can be translated into practical actions, in this case, how, through the management of our plant waste, opportunities can arise to have substrates for the soil and thus improve the structure and nutrition of our gardens, orchards and crops; reduce costs for the purchase of agro-inputs and other benefits. As a Network, throughout the year we will be following up and monitoring each family's vermicomposting efforts, praying that these will be the seeds of something that will grow into the habits of more local churches that make a difference.

Benita Simón
Coordinator of Programme



Biblical workshops with AMI San Lucas in Santa Clara la Laguna



AMI San Lucas in Santa Clara la Laguna and from Saq B'e, community Caballo Blanco, Retalhuleu,



Biblical workshops with Saq B'e in Caballo Blanco, Retalhuleu.



Programme of Wholistic Health

During the first quarter of 2023, the integral health programme was invited to develop videos and methodological guidance based on "Preventive health from a biblical perspective" for a health organization working throughout the Latin American region. Although this invitation came as a surprise, God's hand was seen in opening this door. It is expected that later on (this year) pilots with this methodological guide will be carried out in various departments of the country. Within these trainings, the aim is to create bridges between pastors/leaders and local health personnel.

The focus with pastors/leaders is to inspire them to see that holistic community health is part of holistic mission from a biblical basis. The focus with health personnel is to help them see how pastors/leaders can be key allies in promoting holistic health throughout the community. We pray that the Lord will continue to open these amazing doors for His glory, the good of the church and the country!

Robert Reich
Coordinator of Programme



Ezra Centre's Extraordinary Assembly Session

On March 18th, the Extraordinary General Assembly of founding members of Ezra Centre was held with the participation of various members of the assembly. We thank God for each one of the attendees as it was a beautiful time of sharing and learning.



Ezra Centre Blog



What kind of air do we breathe every day? What kind of air do we want to breathe? We invite you to read the latest article published on the Centre's blog with the theme "The air we breathe" written by Robert Reich, Programme Director of Ezra Centre.

https://centroesdras.blogspot.com/2023/05/el-aire-que-todos-respiramos_16.html

Gratitude:

- Recording of two broadcasts on the radio show Fijando el Rumbo of the Seminario Teológico Centroamericano about the Seminario Los Cristianos and La Política.
- Taking part in the workshops for Sunday School teachers organized by the Central American Theological Seminary.
- For the organizing team of the seminar Christians and Politics.
- Videos for health organization on "Preventive health from a biblical perspective".
- Conclusion of the external audit report.

We thank you dear brothers and sisters inside and outside Guatemala for your spiritual accompaniment and support in the journey of the ministry

Please, PRAY about the following:

1. For the signing of an agreement to carry out the "Theology for Life" diploma course in the city of Tecpán.
2. For the process of validating the content of the core workshop for the School for Parents manual.
3. For the proposals for financial support that Ezra Centre has submitted to partner organizations, and the provision of the Lord for the support of the Centre's budget.
4. For the graduation of the ELIJO programme (diploma for potential leaders) on May 26 in the city of Quetzaltenango.
5. For the dissemination of the videos of the Seminar Christians and Politics. May they be useful in the orientation of God's people.
6. For the workshop "Playing we strengthen ourselves" to be held in June.

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- *Esperanza para toda la Creación* Q.60.00
- *Reinventando la Misión en América Latina* Q.150.00

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select "support a project" then in the arrow select "Ezra Centre" and follow the instructions.



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