

Israel's Cycle

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[0 : 00] Let's turn to the Word of God.

And while two teams are battling it out on the gridiron, we'll study God's Word here tonight. The book of Judges, and go ahead and locate chapter 10, and actually here in a little bit, I'm going to start with verse 6, chapter 10, verse 6, so you can go ahead and find that.

We've come now to the next judge in the list of judges, deliverers that God raised up to help His people.

And his name is what? Jephthah. All right, Jephthah is next on the lineup, and really, we don't hear anything or read anything about Jephthah until we get on into chapter 11.

In fact, the story runs through all of the story of Jephthah, really begins at the beginning of chapter 11, but this is kind of the precursor to the time, kind of setting up the reason for the need for Jephthah.

[1 : 35] And so we're going to be looking at chapter 10 tonight, but his story runs through chapter 11 and on into chapter 12, ending in verse 7. And we're going to take a few Sunday nights to deal with those passages that tell us about this judge.

And so we're going to read then tonight, starting with chapter 10, as I've had you turn to it, starting with verse 6. And I want to read all the way through to the first half of chapter 11, verse 1.

We're going to stop right there in our reading tonight. So starting with verse 6 of chapter 10, So there's that broken record again.

We're going to deal mostly with that issue here tonight. So here it comes.

What we've learned to expect. What we've learned to expect, the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel. And he sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the people of Ammon, the Ammonites.

[3 : 03] From that year, they harassed and oppressed the children of Israel for 18 years. All the children of Israel who were on the other side of the Jordan in the land of the Ammonites in Gilead.

Moreover, the people of Ammon crossed over the Jordan to fight against Judah also, against Benjamin and against the house of Ephraim.

So that Israel was severely distressed. And the children of Israel cried out to the Lord, saying, We have sinned against you, because we have both forsaken our God and served the Baals.

So the Lord said to the children of Israel, Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians and from the Ammonites and from the Ammonites?

Also the Sidonians and Amalekites and Mayanites oppressed you, and you cried out to me, and I delivered you from their hand.

[4 : 06] Yet you have forsaken me and served other gods. Therefore, I will deliver you no more. Now that's something we've not seen before. Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen.

Let them deliver you in your time of distress. And to the children of Israel, said to the Lord, We have sinned. Do to us whatever seems best to you.

Only deliver us this day, we pray. So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the Lord, and his soul could no longer endure the misery of Israel.

Then the people of Ammon gathered together and encamped in Gilead, and the children of Israel assembled together and encamped in Mizpah. And the people, the leaders of Gilead, said to one another, Who is the man who will begin the fight against the people of Ammon?

He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead. Now, Jephthah, the Gileadite, was a mighty man of valor.

[5 : 15] So we're going to stop right there. So we've kind of introduced Jephthah, though we're not going to really talk about him at all here tonight. I think what we've got to look at here in chapter 10

will be sufficient for tonight.

Besides, you know, some of you might want to get in on maybe the last quarter of the game. I don't have any idea. Some of you are probably recording it. All right, now, when I was studying this passage, I got to thinking, you know, and not just this passage, but just kind of bringing into my mind all that we have studied this far and all that we already know about the rest of the book of Judges and kind of just thinking about the entire book of Judges and God's people and what they did and so forth.

I got to thinking, you know, God is not like us. That's a real profound thought. No, it just finally occurred to me.

No, really. But he's not like us in this way. God is linear. He's linear in his relationship with his people, with his creation.

What I mean is he is always moving forward in a straight line toward his predetermined goal for his creation. There's no backing up and so forth.

[6 : 38] And the Bible itself should, I think, help us to understand this about God because the Bible is the record, the recorded history of God's plan of redemption from beginning to end.

In fact, that's one way, the best way, the only accurate way that we should look at the whole of Scripture, that it is God's plan of redemption working out its predetermined goal determined by God. And so there is no stopping it, no altering it, no digression in it along the way, you know, moving back and then moving forward and maybe taking a detour here or that way, no doubling back and starting all over.

It's linear, determined, the determinant will of God. And that's God. He's linear. He never changes. His plan never changes. It never is rearranged. But unlike God, man is circular. Circular in his relationship with God.

[7 : 50] And not just one big circle, but a series of circles, typically. It's more like a spiral, really.

And we see this so vividly in the book of Judges, don't we? Kind of a spiral. The life of Israel is like one continuous spiral in their relationship with God.

I mean, one minute, one moment it's devotion, and the next moment it's rebellion and disobedience, and then Israel. Then it's followed by God's retribution, and then we have Israel's contrition, and then that's followed by God's mercy and deliverance, and then Israel's devoted again to God, and then what?

Well, right, the rebellion again. And it's just kind of a spiral, one continuous spiral, one circle after another.

And how does it happen? And that's the question. Maybe this is the lesson we ought to consider here, even before we look at what happens in the life of Israel that we just read about.

[8 : 58] How does it happen? And it happens to all of us as well. There's always the potential for that. And we all experience digressions and setbacks and going forward and then backward, and we come around, and then we get away, and then we come around.

And it happens to God's people. And strangely, it happens because we simply forget what God has done in the past in our behalf.

Not only are we short-sighted and not able to see what God is doing right now, but we even forget about what He has done in the past on our behalf. And that's what Israel did over and over and over again.

They just forgot God, forgot what He did. But now, how can we forget what God has done for us? Well, the answer to that is we just kind of lose a hunger for God's Word.

It's not important for us anymore. So therefore, we kind of get comfortable. We get confident, overconfident. We get kind of complacent. And gradually, Satan then gets a deeper and deeper foothold into our lives.

[10 : 12] And it's almost, at some point, even imperceptible to us. And one day, we wake up and realize that God is just nowhere to be found in our life and in our devotion.

And this can happen. And rather, He has been replaced by self. And self-interest and self-desires and affections and sin and all of that.

And all because we no longer care very much about what God has said in His Word. We just don't care about that anymore. It's just not interesting to us anymore.

We've heard it all already before. I think some of you who have flown a lot will, I think, relate to this. But what happens when you get on an airplane?

And I mean, after you, you know, find your correct seat, sometimes that's difficult. Sometimes you go, you get in there, and you're looking at your little boarding pass, and somebody's already sitting in your seat.

[11 : 13] But after you find your seat, and you, you know, get your stuff up into the carry-on rack or compartment, and you sit down and put your seat.

I'm talking about after all of that. And before you finally take off. Okay. Some of you are way ahead of me here. And then the flight attendant stands up there, and what?

She delivers a sermon. You ever thought of it as a sermon? It's kind of a sermon. And so she begins to say, you know, please take the Bibles located in the pouch in front.

No. I shouldn't take Bible. I didn't say Bible, but she said, you know, take, you know, take that card out. Take out that card that's located in the seat in front of you.

And then she delivers. Really, I've kind of boiled it down to a four-point sermon. And, you know, how to find the emergency exit, how to operate the seat belts as if, you know, you're some kind of idiot, don't know how to put the seat belt on.

[12 : 24] Also, how to use the oxygen mask in case the cabin pressure goes down, and how to locate, where to locate, the flotation device, which is underneath your seat.

But basically a four-point sermon. Now, I must confess to you that I don't pay any attention whatsoever to the airplane sermon there anymore.

I just don't. I might have it first, but I don't anymore. In fact, I force myself not to pay attention to it. And why?

Because I don't want anybody to think I'm not a veteran flyer. You know, for me to be watching, that's just an admission that you're some kind of greenhorn on an airplane, you know.

And I don't want anybody to know that. I want to be looking at something else and just not paying attention or reading a paper or something like that. Like all veteran frequent flyers, you know. The point is, you know, we don't listen to it because we already know it.

[13 : 24] And if you've flown very much, you've heard it over and over and over again. We already know this. All right, now, this gross oversimplification, to be sure, but this is what happens often to God's people.

Sitting in the pew, just like you are here tonight. We've heard it all before. We can get to thinking that way.

We've studied God's Word before. We've heard hundreds and thousands, maybe thousands of sermons, perhaps. And what else can I learn? And so, bit by bit, we kind of get away from it.

And God, because He is gracious, sends some corrective in our lives. And we repent. And then we get back on course again and develop again a hunger for God's Word.

And we are devoted to Him. But for how long this time? And sadly, that's the story for many of God's people. That certainly was the story of God's people Israel.

[14 : 29] And so, we see that here. It's a spiral. But for them, it is a downward spiral. And that's where I'm leading us here tonight as we kind of look at this passage in chapter 10.

Because, you know, it seems that Israel has now hit rock bottom. By the way, we're squarely in the middle of the book. This is dead center in the book.

And now we have this description of Israel's rebellion, sin. And it's one of, if not the longest description of it. And there's some things that we need to learn about that.

Because it just seems that when we understand what this passage is telling us, that, you know, Israel is down for the count. It just, it kind of seems that way.

They have presumed upon the mercy of God once too often. And so then, before we actually get to Jephthah, then let's just see once again this sad commentary on the people who just kept forgetting about God and His Word.

[15 : 42] They just kept getting away from Him. All right, so I've got to have six points. You're not in a hurry, are you? I wasn't here last Sunday. And so I have a right to take my time.

No, it won't take that long, surely. But here's number one. And this is just kind of following what we're seeing in this passage, leading up to describing the life of Israel, leading up to Jephthah.

And so, first of all, we see Israel's relapse. Once again, there it is. We've seen this now, how many times?

Several times. We've seen it every time just before God raises up another judge. We have Israel's relapse. But this time, it's a little different.

And it's much more severe in the way that it's described here. And so, what we have then here in verses 6 through 18 of chapter 10 is, again, the longest description of Israel's apostasy.

[16:51] And so, let's look at verse 6 and how it begins, how it states this relapse, Israel's relapse back into sin and rebellion and idolatry.

Verse 6, Then the children of Israel did, or again did, evil in the sight of the Lord. Now, we've heard that before. There's nothing new here. We've heard it repeatedly in this book.

But there is something different here. Because the narrator then includes a kind of complete, really a complete list of the who's who of Canaanite gods, Canaanite deities.

And so, look at it. And serve, this is what they did. They served the Baals There's seven mentioned here.

Now, that's quite a list. It's the first time we've had this. Now, I mean, each time we have, you know, a description or some statement about Israel's relapse back into idolatry, and some god, some false god is mentioned, but here we have seven things mentioned here.

[18:19] And what a list. And here's the idea. The list is complete. It's complete.

That is, all of the Canaanite nations and their deities are represented here in this list. Every one of them. And so, I think the point is pretty obvious.

This highlights the total Canaanization, not canonization, the Canaanization of Israel. The complete Canaanization of Israel, which God, by the way, expressly warned against back there in Deuteronomy 7, verse 1.

In fact, really the list there of the Canaanite nations, all you have to do is a little research, and it corresponds exactly with the list that is of deities and nations that are given here in this passage in Judges 10.

And that's the point. This points us to this reality, the total spiritual corruption of Israel. And that's pretty serious.

[19:34] Israel then had exchanged the devotion, their devotion to the living God, exchanged that for the lifeless gods of the Canaanite nations.

Israel's relapse, relapse. Second, I told you we'd go a little faster here than you might expect. God's retribution. All right, that naturally comes next.

We expect that to come next. Every time Israel relapsed back into sin, we have God's retribution. It happens every time. But this time, it's a little bit different and more extensive and much more serious.

Verse 7, So the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel. Now, we have not seen that every time. In fact, this is only the second time we have these words.

The first time came just before God raised up the very first of Israel's judges, is Othniel back there in chapter 3, verse 8. And so here we have this repeated again.

[20:36] But now notice, God's retribution matched the depth of Israel's sin and rebellion. That's why we have such a description of it here, an expanded description of it.

Because His retribution was commensurate with Israel's sin, the depth of their sin, the total spiritual corruption of Israel.

And we see that in a number of ways. First of all, the two enemies that God used to punish Israel this time were located geographically on opposite sides of the nation.

And so it kind of graphically pictures God putting them in the vice grip of punishment and judgment. Verse 7 says, And He sold them into the hands of the Philistines on one side and into the hands of the people of Ammon.

So He puts them in the press between the two. And that just helps us understand how serious it is this time. Now, serious every time.

[21:43] And God sends punishment every time. Israel gets off away from Him and begins to serve false gods.

But this time, the depth of their sin was much more serious. And God's judgment is much more pronounced. He puts them in the press.

Second, the severity of the punishment is described, in this case, by using a couple of very rare words, or in this case, verbs.

Look at verse 8. From that year they harassed. That's the word that we have in the New King James. But it's literally a word that means shattered. Which is interesting.

From that year they, these enemies, they shattered Israel. And oppressed. So here's the second verb. Very unusual verb.

[22 : 46] Oppressed. Doesn't sound very unusual. That's how it is rendered in the New King James. But it literally means crushed. Crushed. And some translations bring this out.

Shattered and crushed the children of Israel. Now, those are strong words. We've not had this before. Not described in just this way.

God's punishment this time is much more intense. And serious. And it's interesting that this second word, by the way, I said it was rare. It appears only one other place.

And it's in Judges, chapter 9, and verse 53. We looked at this, I believe, last time. Remember Abimelech? And he's standing by the wall.

Very stupid place to be in the time of battle. And there's this woman up there. And she throws down a millstone. And it hits Abimelech's head. And it crushes it.

[23 : 41] It's exactly the same word here. So the people are under severe persecution or punishment by God.

Third, and all these just kind of line up to tell us how serious and severe the punishment is. And it matches the severity or the depth of their sin.

Third, the duration of the punishment also pointed to the depth of their sin. Verse 8. Israel was crushed and shattered for how long? 18 years.

18 years. That's a long time to be under God's punishment. And then fourth, and finally, because Israel's sin went to the very core of their life and devotion.

That's the idea. I mean, it just permeated their lives. It went to the very core of their life and devotion. Because of that, God's punishment struck at the very heart of the nation.

[24 : 41] Verses 8 and 9. All the children of Israel who were on the other side of the Jordan in the land of Amorites in Gilead. Moreover, that's where the oppression was.

Moreover, the people of Ammon crossed over the Jordan to fight against Judah, also against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was severely distressed. So, you see, the enemy was allowed by God to bring judgment to the very heartland of Israel.

Of the land of Israel affecting all of these tribes that were at the very heart of the nation, geographically. All right, so all of these line up to clue you in, let you know that God's very serious. Of course, we always know that God's very serious about sin. And in this case, Israel had lapsed back into the deepest and the most egregious of sins against God.

Taking in all of the Canaanite deities. And so God's judgment, His retribution was just as severe. So, Israel's relapse is God's retribution.

[25 : 58] Third, we come back to Israel, Israel's response. All right, they responded to this, just like they always did. But this time, it's a little bit different. Verse 10, And the children of Israel cried out to the Lord, saying, We have sinned against you.

Oh, really? We've sinned against you because we have both forsaken our God and served the Baals. And what else?

That's it. That's all they said. Now, I'm kind of making fun of this. It sounds like a pretty good confession at first glance.

But there's something missing. It's a confession, yes, of a sort. But there is no obvious repentance. No repentance here. Not even any words to that effect. Also, there's no plea for forgiveness.

[27 : 09] And no plea for God's grace here. And deliverance. Nothing about that. It sounds more like self-pity.

Kind of self-pity, you know, which is something we're pretty good at. You know, I'm just a sinner. Or, I might even say this, and I think this is more to the point.

It smacks of manipulation. Have you ever been guilty of trying to manipulate God? Manipulation.

Or, rather, an attempt to manipulate. You can't manipulate God. You know, their confession, really, this is what it is. It's only for that moment.

It's only, a confession is only kind of directed toward their current situation. Now, they're suffering.

[28 : 17] Oh, we've sinned. But that's it. It's only kind of for the current situation. And so, all, you know, all this, the fact that this is not real.

And there's no depth to this. And that it's lacking anything of substance, real substance. Anything that would suggest true repentance. The fact of that is made clear by how God responds to that.

And so, we go then from Israel's response here to now, we're back to God, God's rebuff. His rebuff. He rebuffs them.

Verse 11. So, the Lord said to the children of Israel, did I not deliver you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites and from the Amorites and from the Philistines? Didn't I do that?

Also, the Sidonians and the Amalekites and the Mayonites oppressed you, remember? And you cried out to me, just like you're doing right now. And I delivered you from their hand.

[29 : 26] By the way, this is the first time we have a suggestion that God is speaking directly to them. He's spoken through a prophet before. Now, he's saying no mention of a prophet here.

But God is saying this. This is, in effect, what he's saying. We've been here before. Remember? Let me refresh your memory.

Do you remember all of those other times that you blabbered? And I had mercy and delivered you? And what did you do? Verse 13. You have forsaken me and served other gods. That's why he's saying this is an indication that their repentance, their response was not true repentance.

Their confession, it was a confession of sorrow, but it was shallow. Their repentance was really nonexistent. And so God says, therefore, I will deliver you no more. Based upon this, you can just forget it.

[30 : 35] That's it. You're done. I'm not going to... You've presumed upon my mercy once too often. I'm not going to listen to this.

You made your own bed, now lie in it. That's pretty serious, isn't it? In fact, God becomes real sarcastic about their pitiful confession.

Verse 14. You know, God can be sarcastic sometimes. Verse 14. Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen.

Right? You've got your gods. You've chosen them. You've made your choice. Go cry to them. Go ask them for help. Let them deliver you in your time of distress.

All right. So we have Israel's relapse. God's retribution. We have Israel's response.

[31 : 38] And then God's rebuff. And then fifth, Israel's repentance. We're back to Israel now. It's kind of back and forth here. Israel's repentance.

Repentance. And this time, I believe, though there are some scholars who disagree. I guess who am I to say. I really think this is true repentance.

True repentance. I mean, there's some weakness in it. And even the truest of repentance has some flesh in it and some doubts.

But I think this true repentance. And I think so by what they said. That's never enough. But also by what they did. What they did.

And so verse 15. And the children of Israel said to the Lord, We have sinned. Do to us whatever seems best or good. That is, or good to you. Only deliver us this day, we pray.

[32 : 38] I think this is true repentance. See, they acknowledged in this prayer that the oppression of these enemies, the punishment coming through these enemies, that first of all, it's God's doing.

They're acknowledging that. And second, they're acknowledging in their confession or their repentance, they're acknowledging that it was good, it was right. Not only, God, are you the one judging us through these enemies, but you're right to do it.

Do whatever seems best or good. We acknowledge that. All right, so it was right and it was good.

And then they prayed for mercy. Deliver us this day, we pray.

That's a prayer for me. They didn't say that before. They didn't even acknowledge in that first kind of confession, they didn't even acknowledge that God was doing this and they had every right to because of their sin and their rebellion.

They're saying that here and they're also crying out for mercy. And that's okay. It's right to do that. Deliver us this day, we pray.

[33 : 52] But their repentance was also, it also included action. And true repentance always does. They took steps to rid themselves of these false gods, their false worship.

Verse 16, So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the Lord. I don't think they were trying to manipulate at this point.

I think their eyes were open, they got it. This is true repentance. Turning to God, turning from, from sin, rebellion, and taking steps to remove yourself from that, to remove those things from you.

And so they put away, put away the foreign gods. Now they're going to return to them. There's going to be another relapse. In fact, several before we're done with the book of Judges.

But this is genuine. And so then that brings us to the final kind of movement here. And that is God's response. We've had Israel's response earlier. It was not genuine.

[35 : 01] But God's response is. And this is wonderful. I think it's very gracious. Very gracious. Verse 16, And his soul, listen, his soul could no longer endure.

Literally, his soul grieved for the misery of Israel. He had compassion upon them. His anger could not endure forever.

He only endures for a season. He could not endure forever. And so he's about to raise up a deliverer for Israel. And that's what we have really at the close of the chapter. And introduced on into chapter 11.

Verse 17, Then the people of Ammon gathered together and encamped in Gilead. We're coming down to the showdown here. And the children of Israel assembled together and encamped at Mizpah.

And the people, the leaders of Gilead, said to one another, Who is the man who will begin the fight against the people of Ammon? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.

[36 : 06] And who is that man? Verse 11, chapter 11. Now, Jephthah. Now we begin with the story of Jephthah. Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor.

Then we're going to get his story. This is God's response. And that's how he's responded every time thus far. But he did not respond until Israel's repentance was genuine.

And their actions, the fruit of the repentance was evident and obvious in their lives. Amen.

Interesting. And I think we can, if we'll allow ourselves and be honest with ourselves, we can see this kind of thing playing out in the lives of God's people today.

And even in our own lives, we can see some of these very same struggles and tendencies and propensities toward getting away from God and rebelling.

[37 : 13] And we see those things in our own lives. And yet also beside that, side by side with that, we also have experienced God's gracious mercy and forgiveness and deliverance.

Thank you.