

JUDGES SESSION #4

As we complete our look at the Thematic Introduction, we need to turn now to the 3rd element in the pattern:

3. The **EVALUATION** of the Lord

- this involves two sections which we will examine shortly:
 - a) the principle of the **slavery-deliverance cycle**
 - b) the explanation as to **why the Canaanite nations were allowed to remain** in the land
- God who delivered them *out of* slavery (in Egypt) now **sells** them (it's an awesome term used here in vs. 14) *back into* slavery (in Canaan!)
 - since they had become *slaves* of the Canaanite **gods**, it was only appropriate that they become *slaves* of the Canaanite **cultures**
- Shakespeare's King Lear said: "God doth of our pleasant vices make instruments to scourge us" – yes, sometimes our **sins** become the very means God uses to discipline His children
- Psalm 106:15, in the Message translation, puts it this way:
"He [God] gave them exactly what they asked for – but along with it they got an empty heart"
...it can happen to us when we follow the gods of secular society instead of the God of heaven – the result is 'an empty heart', 'leanness of soul', a captivity of mind, a weakening of will, a cooling of spiritual love ... ZAP! – **slavery!** ...It's what sin does!
- ...consequently, for Israel, we have another sad summary:
compromise, complacency, complete disobedience = **spiritual failure**

So, let's look now at one of the most critical elements in the Judges' story:

The **Painful Pattern** of Slavery-Deliverance (**2:14-20...**)

And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel. So He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. ¹⁵ Wherever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for calamity, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn to them. And they were greatly distressed. ¹⁶ Nevertheless, the Lord raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them. ¹⁷ Yet they would not listen to their judges, but they played the harlot with other gods, and bowed down to them. They turned quickly from the way in which their fathers walked, in obeying the commandments of the Lord; they did not do so. ¹⁸ And when the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed them. ¹⁹ And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn way.

²⁰ Then the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel...

- there are 5 **elements** in a cycle which repeats 7 times in the stories of Judges:

1. Sin – a turning from God and putting their trust in idols

- before writing yourself out of the picture here consider this definition of “idolatry”: “to invest our ultimate hopes, dreams, and faith in something or someone who is **less than God**”

2. Suffering in Slavery or Bondage

- by turning away from God they condemned themselves to defeat & bondage

3. Supplication

- this chapter doesn't say anything about them crying out to God, perhaps because the emphasis here in chap. 2 is **not** on the **people** but on **GOD** and His love towards such a disobedient people

- however, we do know that “supplication” – a crying out to the Lord – is part of this cycle because it shows up in the subsequent stories

- nevertheless, this crying out to God was very superficial because they soon reverted back to norm after each crisis, as vs. 19 makes abundantly clear:

“And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved **more corruptly than their fathers**”

How did these people treat God/think of God?

...apparently, as just an emergency first-aid station

- and don't we often do the same?! – after all, when do we pray the most, the hardest?

...when we're in trouble, facing a crisis; but once it passes, then how is our prayer life?

- but to me, the most astonishing thing here is that **God heard them!**...the love & grace of our God is truly amazing!

4. Salvation

- or ‘deliverance’ – God provides political/military ‘salvation’ through a series of ‘judges’ whose stories are told in the next 14 chapters

- ‘salvation’ in Hebrew means “to bring out into a wide, open place”

...no longer hemmed in and restricted by slavery to sin; but liberated!

- it's what God loves to do for **us** – unconfessed sin will hem us in like a big brick wall and drain our souls; but when we confess our sin, God forgives (He delivers);

He brings us out into an open place of freedom, and surrounds us with His liberating love

- for wonderful expressions of these great truths take a look sometime at Psalm 32

Why does God do this?

- Deut. 32 teaches us that there are **3 major reasons** why God's grace intervenes in our cycles of sin:

a) God is concerned about His reputation among the ungodly

- let me read Deut. 32:26-27 from the Living Bible:

God says, “I had decided to scatter them to distant lands, so that even the memory of them would disappear. But then I thought, “My enemies will boast, ‘Israel is destroyed by *our own* might; It was **not the Lord** Who did it!”

- so God did not punish them as severely as they deserved, out of concern for His own great reputation

- and God will sometimes extend a special measure of grace toward **us** in our disobedience in order to preserve His reputation among those who do not know Him yet

b) God has compassion especially on His suffering people

- Deut. 32:36 says,

For the Lord will judge His people
And have compassion on His servants,
When He sees that their power is gone,
And there is no one remaining, bond or free.

- God does not take delight in punishing us

- no, His holy sin-hating nature is matched by His incredible compassion & love for His people...and He will therefore do what is both right & loving in your life & mine

c) God desires His people to know that God is truly God

- Deuteronomy 32 again, verse 39:

Now see that I, *even I, am He,*
And *there is no God besides Me...*

- an increasing understanding of what a mighty, wonderful God is ours is crucial to right living; and His gracious interventions in our lives – sometimes in the **midst** of troubles, sometimes at the **end** of them as He carries us through – reminds us that He is alive and there is no god beside Him

Let's finish up the repeating painful pattern or cycle in Judges...

5. the 5th stage was Silence or peace

...this entire cycle repeated 7 times and was characterized by a downward spiral as each cycle took the nation of Israel lower & lower

- this meant that each subsequent judge had less spiritual impact, until Samson found himself unable to bring rest to the people even though he was the most powerful of them all!

God's Purposes in Testing Israel (3:1-6...)

Now these *are* the nations which the Lord left, that He might test Israel by them, *that is*, all who had not known any of the wars in Canaan ² (*this was* only so that the generations of the children of Israel might be taught to know war, at least those who had not formerly known it), ³ *namely*, five lords of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites who dwelt in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal Hermon to the entrance of Hamath. ⁴ And they were *left*, *that He might* test Israel by them, to know whether they would obey the commandments of the Lord, which He had commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses.

⁵ Thus the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁶ And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons; and they served their gods.

- Israel compromised by not driving out the Canaanites

- so now, the scourge for sin was the continued presence of the Canaanites among them!
(remember God's earlier prediction that they would be "**thorns** in their side"!)

- but even in this situation, **God had some purposes** to work out
 - 1) daily **test** for Israel: would they obey God or not? (mentioned 3x - 2:22, 3:1,4)
 - How did the people do on God's test?
 - ...verses 5 & 6 tells us that they didn't do well at all!
 - They "dwelt/lived among the Canaanites"
 - ↳ married among them
 - ↳ "served their gods"
 - 2) a second purpose was to keep the land **habitable**; in other words, leaving some Canaanites there would prevent parts of the land from suddenly being left **desolate** or overrun by wild animals
 - 3) when Israel disobeyed, these nations were then used by God to **punish** His people
 - 4) Israel would gain the **benefit** of warfare experience
 - 3:2 tells us the new generations "might be taught to know war" and that these experiences would test their faith in God, as 2:22 indicated
 - ...for Israel, **warfare** and **faith** were closely connected
 - they must know *that* there **was** a war – making compromise with the wicked enemies of God impossible
 - and then they must know **how** to wage war
 - God taught them this in their very first war – a battle with Amalek, recorded in Exod. 17, when two of the leaders held up Moses' hands toward heaven while Joshua led the army in war
 - ...Israel learned there that victory was only possible thru trust & dependence on God

One final area of serious failure should be noted again here from vs. 6: **Relational Failure**
 - they intermarried with the Canaanites, thus denying their identity as a distinct & peculiar people of God

How might each of Israel's failures show up in a *modern* believer's life?

- **materialistic** failure might be in evidence when we value gadgets & gizmos more than ministry & missions
- **spiritual** failure can be seen when God's people settle into spiritual apathy or show only a lukewarm love for God
- and **relational** failure for some could be having a greater concern for what others will think or want than being concerned to find and do God's will;
 - for others, it might be in compromising God's standards by marrying a non-Christian

Don't let any of these failures mark or mar your life!

In our next session, we'll plunge into the **narrative** section of Judges and begin to follow the remarkable stories written there.