

The Cycle of Sin and Deliverance

Henry Blackaby once wrote, “Many Christians and churches seem to be in great despair over the spiritual and moral conditions of our nation and our churches. Conditions are desparate. Don’t be discouraged, however. Rejoice! Never have I seen a deeper or more profound hunger among the people of God for a spiritual revival than I see right now. God is at work stirring the hearts of His people to pray and seek His face.

Every might movement of God has been preceded by terrible conditions, a heart cry for revival, and a sweeping movement in united, concerted, extraordinary prayer. ... When God’s people have departed from a right relationship with Him, they need revival.”

You will find it is true in the Bible, in church history, and even in your own spiritual walk as a Christian: God’s people have a tendency to depart from Him. Christians don’t always stay in close fellowship with God. Churches don’t always stay in right relationship with God. And as we will see today this pattern happens in God’s people, the nation of Israel in the book of Judges.

Follow along with me as I read

Judges 2:10-23

- 10 When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel.**
- 11 Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals;**
- 12 and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the Lord to anger.**
- 13 They forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.**
- 14 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; and He said, "Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and has not heeded My voice,

21 I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died,

22 so that through them I may test Israel, whether they will keep the ways of the Lord, to walk in them as their fathers kept them, or not."

23 Therefore the Lord left those nations, without driving them out immediately; nor did He deliver them into the hand of Joshua.

This passage sums up the Book of Judges, and also the history of Israel for over four hundred years. It sounds the main themes of the story which follows. That story has four phases, repeated with dreary monotony over and over again. They are: Sin, Servitude, Supplication, and Salvation. Then it repeats in a Spiral downward.

In the time of Joshua and his generation the nation of Israel starts out serving the Lord (2:7), "So the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord which He had done for Israel."

Then Joshua and his generation died out and so did their godly influence. So the people forsook the Lord and plunged headlong into sin. Verse 11, they "**did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals.**" Verse 13, "**They forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.**"

So God sends them into servitude. Verse 14, "**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.**" God was against them and defeated them through enemies who enslaved them.

When this discipline from the Lord became unbearable, and they were in great distress, they cried out in supplication to the Lord. Verse 14, says they were "**groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed them.**"

Then God had compassion on them and raised up a judge to deliver them from their enemies. God saved them from those who were oppressing them.

As long as the judge was alive, the people served the Lord again for a while. But when the judge was dead verse 19 says, "**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.**"

So the cycle would start over again in a downward spiral of sin. We see it at least six or seven times in the book of Judges. They sin, they are reduced to slavery, they cry out to God in supplication, and God sends a judge to save them.

This cycle of departure and return to the Lord is characteristic of God's people throughout the ages. The way that God deals with His people in this cycle forms a pattern of how God works with His people.

The problem is not just an Old Testament problem for the nation of Israel. The problem of departing from a right relationship with God is a problem for New Testament churches as well. In Revelation 2 & 3 Jesus sends letters to seven different churches, New Testament churches. And in most of these, the church had departed from the Lord in some way or another. Jesus calls on them over and over again to repent and return to Him. It's also His message to our church and to Christians today.

Let's look briefly at the pattern:

1. Sin

Notice again verse 11. **"Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals."**

"Did evil in the sight of the LORD" is a phrase that is repeated in Judges - Jdg 2:11, 3:12, 4:1, 6:1, 10: 6, 13:1.

Why did they do evil? Verse 12, **"they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt."** The Israelites forgot all of the wonderful blessings given to them by God. The Lord had delivered them from slavery in Egypt. God gave them protection from Pharaoh's army in the crossing of the Red Sea. The Israelites forgot to thank God for guiding through the desert of Sinai. The leaders of the Jews forgot to remember that it was the Lord who sent them manna in the wilderness. The Israelites had forgotten to praise God for all His goodness and refused to obey His commandments.

We are in a Judges cycle when we have forgotten our past and what God has already done. Israel struggles with short term memory loss. When we stop thanking God and praising God for what He has done for us, we are in danger of plunging into sin.

When they forgot the Lord, they forsook Him. When they forsook the Lord, they began to worship and serve other Gods. Verse 13, **"They forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtoreths."**

Baal worship was bad wherever it existed, but in Canaan it existed in its rawest form. Everything about it—its view of God, moral standards, ethics and values, rituals—stood in absolute and total contradiction to everything God had revealed about Himself to His people. The Hebrew word Baal means to be master over another. Instead of allowing God to be their husband, His people followed "the Baals"

The Canaanite religion was based on the idea that you worship your god by behaving as he does. The result was Baal worship which was perhaps the most degraded and degrading form of worship ever practiced on earth. The Canaanites engaged in temple prostitution, fertility rites, drunken sexual orgies of the most debased variety, idolatry, snake-worship, homosexuality, and even human sacrifice.

How could a people who had seen so much of the power of God drift so far from Him? It did not happen all at once. It never does.

1. They lost fellowship with God by incomplete obedience. When Israel did not drive out the people as God commanded, they were sowing the seeds of their own spiritual failure.

2. They did not consciously remind themselves of the grace of God. They forsook God, when they forgot all that He had done for them. That is the reason we have

the Lord's Supper in the New Testament. "Keep on doing this in remembrance of Me," the Lord said; and every time we come to the Lord's table, we confront ourselves afresh with the great truths of what He has done for us.

3. They rejected the Word of God. Israel began to look at life the way the Canaanites did. Instead of being controlled by the truths of Scripture, they were controlled by the opinions and impulses of their sinful natures.

So the cycle begins with sin. Then sin leads to slavery.

2. Servitude

When Israel forsook the Lord, the result is that were enslaved, they were in bondage to the Baals. They did not merely fall into sin and break some of God's laws. They threw themselves into idolatry, the sin of all sins. The greatest sin a human being can commit is not murder or rape or other despicable acts of atrocity. It is to turn his back on the living God to serve man-made gods.

God's response to this was to give them over to the consequences of their sin and rebellion. Verse 14, **"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."**

God's anger is not the petty anger of hurt feelings, but the holy anger of a righteous response to sin. It is the revulsion of a perfect God against evil, wickedness, and sinful rebellion.

The Hebrew idiom (lit., "sell into the hand of") pictures the Lord as the owner of his people who decides to sell them to another because of their unfaithfulness. God allowed them to be enslaved by their enemies.

Verse 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."**

Have you ever had the Lord's hand against you? Have you ever sensed that He was against you in everything you did? What you thought you were doing in dedication and sincerity was so opposite to what He had said that you discovered His hand was against you. This is what Israel discovered: Nothing seemed to work out right. They found themselves in bondage. One after another of the tribes around them was allowed to rule over them. These tribes came in and made slaves out of them, year after year after painful year.

I have learned that if my own heart wanders away from God, I can count on Him to fight to bring me back. If I become proud and self-assured, if reading God's Word and spending time in prayer seem like a waste of time, God will step in and deal with me. God will fight against us for our good.

Don't wait for God to fight against you before you seek His face. Return to Him today.

The people sin, they are reduced to servitude. Then thirdly, they cry out to the Lord in

3. Supplication

Verse 15 says, **And they were greatly distressed.** And in verse 18, **the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed them.**

God's discipline becomes more and more intense until His people cry out to Him. The Lord so much desires for His people to return to Him, to call out to Him. He is patient and long-suffering. Like the Father of the prodigal son, God waits eagerly for His children to return to Him.

When God's people cry out to the Lord in supplication, God sends

4. Salvation

The Lord raised up Judges verse 18 teaches us 3 significant facts about the judges:

(1) God raised them up. They were not appointed by men or elected. As an aside, this is also an example of mercy (not giving Israel what they deserved) and grace (giving them what they did not deserve) -- remember that whenever you study Israel and are tempted to point a finger of condemnation at them, there are four fingers pointing back at you. Flesh is always going to be flesh, and Israel is just a vivid picture of our fallen flesh!

(2) God was with them empowering them to carry out the task He gave them.

(3) God worked through the judges who were the channels of His presence.

The Lord is still the same here in Judges (circa 1100bc) as He was in Egypt (circa 1400 bc) when Israel groaned under Egyptian slavery. Truly God's mercies never cease! Hundreds of years do not cool the warmth of His compassions.

God is not a man and so He does not break His covenants, and He does not desert His people. In fact, as the people experience their richly deserved judgment, we read He "was moved to pity by their groaning." What a beautiful picture of God's heart of compassion!

Then the sad news is that the cycle repeats, over and over again in the book of Judges. Verse 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."**

What is the important lesson for believers today? These verses serve as a testimony and reminder that sin is always a serious matter to the children of God. If we do not deal decisively with sin in our lives, we will never experience the fullness of the Spirit and Christ's victory over sin. There must be no compromise and no peaceful coexistence with sin. If we try to go only part of the way in our commitment to the Lord Jesus, we will find ourselves bound up in a spiral that inexorably takes us downhill spiritually. The cycle of disobedience, discipline, despair, deliverance is seen today whenever God's people turn away from His Word and go their own way.

Action Steps

1. Ask Jesus to deliver you. When God's people would cry out He would send a deliverer. They would do alright while the deliverer was alive but then they'd slide right back into sin. Likewise, you and I can't do it on our own. Sin is too strong. Our wills are too stubborn. We need a deliverer who will never die. Matthew 1:21 says that Jesus will "save [or deliver] His people from their sins." Colossians 1:13: "For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves." Jesus is both Judge and Deliverer. Have you ever asked Him to deliver you from judgment? You can do so right now.

2. Identify your spot on the cycle. What pattern do you normally follow? Stop the cycle now and ask the Holy Spirit to break the bondage. How would you rate your relationship with Christ right now?

3. What “enemy” have you allowed to remain in your life? It’s time to recover some ground. Don’t let the “ites” move into your inheritance. If you don’t deal with disobedience now the cycle will last longer and grow more intense and the consequences will become more severe. Get rid of anything that’s tripping you up. Call out to God with a sincere heart and expel those enemies of your soul; that will begin to break the cycle.

4. Allow the Lord to occupy every area of your life.

God will never put you on hold...and He wants you to call out to Him right now. Jeremiah 33:3: “Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.”