

# The Lord's Patience Calls for Our Repentance

"If I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times: Don't do that!" Most of us who are parents have said something like that to our kids. Parenting is often an exercise in patience. Sometimes you feel like what you say goes in one ear and out the other. Sometimes it seems that your children do the same thing over and over and over again. It doesn't seem to matter how frequently you tell them that what they are doing is wrong; they still do it! Parenting is an exercise in frustration and patience!

Did you ever consider that maybe God gets frustrated us as well? We try God's patience just as much as children test their parents' patience. Judges chapter ten reveals the frustration and patience of our heavenly Father. Today we will see how terrible it is to test His patience, but how gracious it is to experience His patience.

Listen as I read the first five verses of chapter 10:

## Judges 10

**1 Now after Abimelech died, Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar, arose to save Israel; and he lived in Shamir in the hill country of Ephraim.**

**2 He judged Israel twenty-three years. Then he died and was buried in Shamir.**

**3 After him, Jair the Gileadite arose and judged Israel twenty-two years.**

**4 He had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys, and they had thirty cities in the land of Gilead that are called Havvoth -jair to this day.**

**5 And Jair died and was buried in Kamon.**

Let's pray together . . .

You have heard the saying, "History repeats itself." The book of Judges is evidence of that. We have witnessed the repeating historical cycle among the Israelites in Judges. First, when they have a godly leader the people enjoy a period of rest and national peace. But after the leader dies, they turn away from the true God and worship the false gods of the nations around them. God allows other nations to oppress Israel so that they will return to Him. In their distress they cry out to the Lord to save them. God responds by raising up a judge who delivers them from their enemies. Again there is peace in the land. Then the judge dies and it starts all over again. As we start chapter 10, we have seen Israel cycle through this five times already.

In chapter 10 verses 1-5 we briefly meet the judges Tola and Jair. We don't know very much at all about their stories. At the end of chapter 11 we're going to meet three more minor judges, each of whom gets a verse or two. These stories help to introduce the story of the man Jephthah, the next major figure we're going to consider next week.

The peaceful times of Tola and Jair did not prevent the people from sinking lower and lower. Listen how the cycle of sin continues in verse 6:

**6 Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the sons of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; thus they forsook the Lord and did not serve Him.**

Just as they have done in the past the people of Israel have abandoned the Lord and turned to the Gods of the land. This is the most powerful indictment in the book. Both earlier and later we're told that the Israelites forsook the Lord, served the Baals, and suffered for it. But here we're given the names of seven specific idolatries. Seven is a

number indicating completion in scripture; this is a full-blown and active rebellion. And three times in this verse the author points that they abandoned the Lord. First verse 6 says they **“did evil in the sight of the Lord.”** Then it lists the seven pagan gods they served. The conclusion is that **“they forsook the Lord,”** and they **“did not serve him.”** Their rebellion was repeated, widespread, and whole-hearted.

So as the Lord had done before, He sells them into the hands of their enemies to oppress them:

**7 The anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the sons of Ammon.**

The apostasy in Israel was bad. But their oppression was even worse. God “sold” them (verse 7) into the hands of not one, but two attacking nations. The nation of Ammon attacked them from the east, and the nation of Philistia, along the Mediterranean Sea, attacked them from the west. Chapter 11 will deal with the Ammonite threat, and later Samson in chapters 13-16 will deal with the Philistine threat.

Besides overtaking the tribes on the east side of the Jordan River, the Ammonites continued to attack and plague the tribes on the west side of the Jordan for eighteen years. Look at verses 8 and 9:

**8 They afflicted and crushed the sons of Israel that year; for eighteen years they afflicted all the sons of Israel who were beyond the Jordan in Gilead in the land of the Amorites.**

**9 The sons of Ammon crossed the Jordan to fight also against Judah, Benjamin, and the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was greatly distressed.**

That’s what it took for Israel to finally “cry uncle.” Verse 10,

**10 Then the sons of Israel cried out to the Lord, saying, "We have sinned against You, for indeed, we have forsaken our God and served the Baals."**

We have seen Israel at this point before. Their oppression gets so bad that they cry out to the Lord. They confess their sin. They want the Lord God to save them. Next in the cycle we would expect God to raise up a judge to deliver them. But that’s not what happens. Instead, look at God’s reaction in verse 11:

**11 The Lord said to the sons of Israel, "Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians, the Amorites, the sons of Ammon, and the Philistines?"**

**12 "Also when the Sidonians, the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you, you cried out to Me, and I delivered you from their hands.**

**13 "Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods; therefore I will no longer deliver you.**

**14 "Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your distress."**

So this time when Israel says, "Oh, Lord, deliver us. We're sorry, we've gotten ourselves in this mess again. Oh, gosh, we've really stepped in it this time. Please come and deliver us." Only instead of sending a deliverer as before, what does the Lord say? "You've chosen another god. You've appealed to the Baals, Molech, Ashtaroath, Dagon, and the gods of the peoples around. You said that they were the ones you would serve. Well then, let them get you out of the trouble you're in. Are they strong enough? Where's the deliverance from them?" He reminds them of his acts of deliverance in the past, "Go back to the exodus from Egypt, to the period of wilderness wanderings, to the times of earlier judges. Over and over again you've abandoned me, gotten yourselves in

trouble, and called out for help. And over and over again I've delivered you. Enough is enough. What would make you presume on me that I should do it again?"

On seven previous occasions—even more than the ones selected and recorded to this point in Judges—God bailed them out of the messes they had created. Now the patience of their heavenly Father had run out! How chilling to hear God say something that almost sounds unthinkable: "I will no longer save you." How terrible! How terrible to test the patience of God! They discovered firsthand that his patience for their pathetic pagan flirtations had expired.

Do you think God gets impatient with us? Do you think God loses His patience with the unchristian, back-biting gossip that buzzes through churches? Do you think God gets tired of the constant criticism we unleash at others while we hold ourselves to a different standard? Do you think God's patience runs dry when he sees you running back to that particular pet sin again and again and again, that sin that you think that no one else knows but you—as if we can hide our guilt from an all-knowing God?

Do we assume, like ancient Israel, that God's patience will never run out? Do we act as if the gospel of grace is an excuse for unrepentant sin? Do we ignore the warnings of Bible verses like Hebrews 10:26-27: **"For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries."**

If we assume, like ancient Israel, that God's patience will never run out, then we are playing with fire! He finally told Israel, "Have it your way!" Will the time come when he finally tells us, "Have it your way! You want to play with fire? You can live in it for eternity!"

I don't think Israel was really repentant the first time they turned to God and asked for his help. They needed to move from simple remorse to true repentance, from outward show to inward sincerity. I don't think the Lord God was much impressed at all with the quality of their repentance. He rejected the first statement of repentance in verse 10. But they came back to him later and said in verse 15,

**15 The sons of Israel said to the Lord, "We have sinned, do to us whatever seems good to You; only please deliver us this day."**

**16 So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the Lord;**

This is a lot more like what true repentance looks like. They called their actions sin, they accepted whatever consequences God would give them, and they pleaded for his deliverance with humility. Then they demonstrated their change of heart by a change in their actions: They put away idols and false gods and worshiped the Lord.

Then comes the most unexpected statement at the end of verse 16, **"and He could bear the misery of Israel no longer.."** There's a part of me that reads that and thinks, "What?!?" They had insulted God six ways to Sunday with their idolatry. His patience with them had long run out. And now, after all that, "He could bear Israel's misery no longer." They didn't deserve that! They deserved to take a long walk off a short pier. But that's the point!

God didn't react that way, because He couldn't stand their misery. He loved them too much. That is some of the best news that we can read--it doesn't even matter ultimately if our motives are mixed, if we don't understand ourselves very well, if our weakness is greater than we're even able to describe. That's the amazing testimony of Romans 5: **"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."** He died for us not because we were good, nor because we sought

Him out, nor because we deserved it, but for no other reason except that He loves us. Again Romans 5 says, **“but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”**

Grace is the undeserved love of God. The fact that God would even listen to their second plea for help was an act of grace. But the fact that his impatience with their sin was changed into patience over their suffering was an act of grace times ten thousand! How gracious of God to set His impatience aside and answer their plea! How gracious to experience God's patience!

Perhaps sometimes you want to say, "Lord, I hate to bring this up again. I know we've been over this a lot of times, but I need help. I'm still weak, frightened, and burdened." Or we say, "Lord, this time I really mean it! This time for sure I'm going to turn over my life to you; it's never going to be the same again. This time I'm serious." And as much as we know ourselves when we make such statements, we're telling the truth. But we don't really understand very much about ourselves at all.

Yet, thankfully, the quality of our repentance is not the basis on which we're forgiven. It depends on the heart of God, which cannot bear the misery of His people, and so He acts to save. Our hope is anchored in His loving heart, for before we ever thought to seek Him out, He sought us out.

We read earlier Jesus' parable of the prodigal son. What a great illustration of the grace of the Father. Like Israel in Judges, the younger son had sinned greatly and repeatedly against his father. And when he finally returns home what does the father do? He throws a party! He adorns his wayward son in the best attire and serves a prime rib dinner for everyone, because his wayward son has repented.

That is such a beautiful reflection of our heavenly Father's patience. He could not bear to leave his wayward people in Israel alone. And he cannot bear to leave us, his wayward people today, alone either. He hears our cries to be saved from our spiritual enemies. He hears our plea to be rescued from the sin that tries to drag our souls into hell. And even though he would have every right to say, "My patience has run out," he sees our situation and becomes impatient with the way sin and Satan oppress our souls. And so he personally intervened for us—not by sending a Judge, but by sending Jesus.

When we were attacked on all sides by Satan's accusations, when we were cornered in every direction by sin's delusions, Jesus interceded for us, entered into our world, and battled sin and Satan on our behalf. Jesus' battle would take him from the temptations of the desert to the torture of the cross. But there at the cross, our sin is erased! There at the cross, the Father's impatience over our sin and justice because of our sin is satisfied. There at the cross our spiritual enemies were resoundingly defeated! There at the cross, Jesus' blood removes our sin and restores the gracious patience of God who went to such great lengths to love you and save you. How gracious to experience our heavenly Father's patience! His patience is entirely undeserved. But his patience is incredibly tremendous! And that leaves us incredibly grateful!

Parenting is an exercise in patience, but not even the most patient parent among us can compare to the patience of our heavenly Father. His patience extends far longer than we deserve. His patience graciously returns when we turn to him in repentance. His patience perseveres to keep us in the true faith. And one day his patience toward us will pay off major dividends—not with profits for him, but with blessings for us, blessings that will literally last forever!