

Jephthah's Rise From Rejection to Rescuer

Revival

By Tom Hill

Bible Text: Judges 10:6-12:15

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Over the last several weeks we have spent our times together studying the judges, that time period in the history of Israel when they did not have a king, they did not have a monarchy, they did not have one enduring leader, they had many leaders who led them, brought them out of their sinful ways and brought them back to God. And God would bless them during the time of that judge. Sadly at the death of that judge, at the end of his life, Israel would go back and repeat the same old sins all over again. And we looked in Judges chapter two where God told the people what was coming and he said one of the things that was coming would be continuous cycle of sin, repentance, sin, repentance, sin, repentance.

And so we have looked at the various signs when that occurred. And today we want to look at another one, another occasion in the history of Israel when they turned aside from God, when they rejected him, because of the lust of their own hearts and their own desires. We find it recorded in Judges chapter 10. We will read it section by section so that we can take a look at each section and see the cycle present in the life of Israel.

Judges chapter 10 we will read verse number six.

“The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtoreth, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines. And they forsook the LORD and did not serve him.”¹

The Scriptures tell us that we progress into sin, not by some outside force, but we progress into sin because it comes from within us. Our own lusts, our own desires and they bring about temptation and we yield to them. And as we yield to their temptation upon us, they entice us even further until finally it finds its result in the commission of sin. We find it in the life of Israel.

Because of their own lusts, they turned aside from God. And they failed to uphold the covenants that they had made with God that we would serve you forever. We will obey

¹ Judges 10:6.

everything you say. You alone will be our God. And they turned aside from that. They failed to remain faithful in their promises to God and the covenants that they had made with him. And they doubted God. When God said he would take care of them, they questioned it. They didn't believe him. And to further complicate their unbelief, they then began to believe a lie.

And, you know, one thing we don't fully understand is the total effect that sin can have upon our minds. It blinds our eyes. We think we see the truth when, in reality, it is false. It is error. And we begin to believe that which is false. True in the life of Israel. And we see it stated here.

On previous occasions we only saw that they worshiped the Baals and Ashtoreth, the male and the female gods of those days, thousands of them, by the way. But now we see added to it the gods of the nations about them, the gods of the Moabites, the gods of the Sardinians, the gods of Syria. Sin upon sin upon sin, blinding their eyes to the truth that they might believe a lie, a lie that the gods about them could sustain them and care for them and protect them.

Well, their unbelief brought them further into sin and brought them into iniquity and it just progressed downwards. It began with their insubordination against God. They rejected him. It says there that they forsook him and they did not worship him any longer. They rejected his authority in their lives. And they turned to intermarriage with the nations about them. They failed to destroy them as God had told them to do. And they began to intermingle with them and intermarry with them and he said, "Don't do that, because what they will do is they will lead you into idolatry." And what happened? Exactly what God said would happen. It led them into idolatry. The gods of the people with whom they began to intermingle and failed to destroy ended up destroying them.

Well, we see as they progress into sin that God remained faithful, because what he did is he became their enemy.

You say, "How was that faithful?"

Because he had warned them. He had told them. "If you turn aside from me and fail to follow me and to worship me, I will become your enemy. Instead of working on your behalf, I will begin to work on behalf of your enemies and your enemies will overtake you and they will suppress you and they will oppress you and you will become servants and slaves again.

God did exactly what he said he would do. It says there in verse number seven:

So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of the Philistines and into the hand of the Ammonites, and they crushed and oppressed the people of Israel that year. For eighteen

years they oppressed all the people of Israel who were beyond the Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead.²

You remember. There were three and a half tribes of the peoples of Israel who wanted their allotment to be in the east side of the Jordan River. That is those people here described that the Philistines and the Ammonites oppressed all of those peoples. And then it says:

“And the Ammonites crossed the Jordan to fight also against Judah and against Benjamin and against the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was severely distressed.”³

They were oppressed to the point of crushing, hemmed in by their enemies, 18 years they suffered. God did what he said he would do. He interfered in their lives. He prevented them from enjoying the good land that he had promised to them. He had promised to them safety from their enemies and a life full of joy and peace.

“But if you disobey me,” he said, “I will become your enemy. And they will come in and they will suppress you and they will treat you cruelly.”

We find in these verses, a description of exactly that happened to Israel.

Well, after a time, 18 years, the children of Israel began to think. This didn't turn out so well. We aren't doing so well. I remember when God said he would take care of us. I remember when God promised our forefathers that he would give them the land and we don't enjoy the land. We are slaves and servants here. I wonder if God would still do for us what he promised. And it says starting in verse number 10:

“And the people of Israel cried out to the LORD, saying, ‘We have sinned against you, because we have forsaken our God and have served the Baals.’”⁴

You know, God is not a jack in the box. He is not some magical genie that when you rub three times on his little canister he pops out and says, “What do you want? What do you want?” We find an interesting thing happen here between God and the children of Israel. He said to them:

Did I not save you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites, from the Ammonites and from the Philistines? The Sidonians also, and the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you, and you cried out to me, and I saved you out of their hand. Yet you have forsaken me and served other gods; therefore I will save you no more.⁵

² Judges 10:7-8.

³ Judges 10:9.

⁴ Judges 10:10.

⁵ Judges 10:11-13.

Ouch. God could do that, you know. When you reject God's call upon you and you put him off and you set him aside to satisfy your own desires and your own lusts and then you cry out to him, he could say to you, "No." The Bible teaches us that God's Spirit does not always strive with man. He says, "Today is the day of salvation," not tomorrow, not two weeks from now, not six months from now, today. You have no promise of tomorrow.

And God said to them, "You saw what I did for you. I defeated for you those very people who have now come upon you and suppress you. Don't you remember when I defeated those people?" And yet you turned aside from me.

Well, give credit in some respect to the children of Israel. They didn't quit. They came back. In verse number 15:

And the people of Israel said to the LORD, "We have sinned; do to us whatever seems good to you. Only please deliver us this day." So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the LORD, and he became impatient over the misery of Israel.⁶

He saw their misery and it grieved him. The people whom he had purchased, that he had brought out of Egypt with a strong and mighty hand, now suffering in servitude again. And then we read that he became impatient over the misery of Israel.

And then starting in verse number 17 we read further how the enemy began to oppress them even further.

Then the Ammonites were called to arms, and they encamped in Gilead. And the people of Israel came together, and they encamped at Mizpah. And the people, the leaders of Gilead, said one to another, "Who is the man who will begin to fight against the Ammonites? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead."⁷

We need a Savior. Where is he? Who is the man that God will use to deliver us and to lead us in battle against our enemies? Where is he? Starting in the next chapter I didn't record it all because it was rather lengthy, but starting in the next chapter, Judges chapter 11 through Judges chapter 12 we begin to read how God brought to them a judge, a savior, this one named Jephthah. Jephthah did not have the finest of pedigrees, born of a prostitute. His brothers rejected him, kicked him out of the family. You are not one of us. You get out of here. We don't want you messing with our family and somehow sticking your nose into our inheritance rights. Leave the country.

Jephthah left. He gathered about him a band of similar minded people as he and he became somewhat of a little rebel, well known for his abilities. At this very time when Israel looked for somebody, guess who they went to see? If you answered Jephthah, you

⁶ Judges 10:15-16.

⁷ Judges 10:17-18.

answered correctly. They went across the River Jordan hunting for Jephthah. Jephthah, where are you? And when they came to him he said, “Hold it a minute. Aren’t you the same people who kicked me out just a little while ago? You told me you didn’t want anything to do with me. And now you want me to come back as your leader. What is going on here?”

Jephthah had the spiritual insight and wisdom to say, “If God delivers our enemies into my hand, I will be your leader.” He put the emphasis on where it belonged, upon God’s deliverance on their behalf. And God delivered Israel from their enemies through the hand of Jephthah, the unwanted child.

After him came three additional judges in short succession after him so that there as a lengthy period of peace of the enemies, six years under Jephthah, seven years under the second one, 10 years under the third one, eight years under the fourth one. Now some of you are faster at math, but that is somewhere around 30 years, I would think, of freedom from their enemies.

God heard their cry. He responded and he brought a victory to the children of Israel. That causes a question. It begs a question. Why would God want the children of Israel to know this record? What purpose of God’s did it serve in his reminding later children of Israel of these events?

Well, these events describe for us very clearly the profound depravity and sin of the children of Israel. They did not have a good heart in just needing a little bit of a nudge in the right direction. Oh, no. Wicked at heart the Scriptures describe them, repeatedly turning back into sin, over and over and over again. Even after God proved himself mighty on their behalf, through judges, when those judges died they reverted right back into their sin again.

Idolatry, insubordination, intermingling and intermarrying with the occupants of the land whom God said to destroy. All in disobedience to God. And God wanted them to see the deceitfulness of their hearts, their depravity, their sinfulness. Inherent within them when left to their own choices, that is what they would choose again and again and again.

God would also want his children to see the revelation of his own character. The nature of God described for us throughout Judges, and in this passage as well, describes him for us as a being, a personal being, not some kind of ethereal spirit or power, but a person, a being like you and like me with personality, with attributes and characteristics that define him as a being, self contained, not needing the gods of the earth, self reliant, able to work mighty things on his own, self satisfied in and of himself, not needing the children of Israel, loving them, wanting them, but not needing them, self satisfied within himself. We find him described for us here further as just. The judgment that he brought upon the occupants of the land in Israel, they deserved. They deserved the punishment that the children of Israel brought upon them. And Israel deserved the punishment that God brought upon them for their sin and their disobedience and their unbelief.

God is a God of justice. God judges sin. He doesn't wink at it. He doesn't smile at it. He doesn't say, "Boys will be boys and girls will be girls." No, no, no. He judges sin and we need to understand that about him. He is not a mamby pamby God, but a righteous, just judge, judging in holiness and righteousness.

We also see him described for us here as a God of grace and of mercy. He told them, "Go worship your other gods. You left me. I gave you victory after victory after victory. You left me for the gods of the people about you. Go back to them. Ask them for help."

And we see God's mercy and grace. After watching them in misery provide for them as savior, a judge who would come and lead them in victory, an unlikely candidate, we might say all the more giving glory to God that it didn't come from Jephthah the unwanted one.

We also see God providing for us here his grace, his mercy, his love, his sovereignty. Just think. God controlled all of these events. He controlled the enemies. He controlled Israel. He controlled the weather. He controlled the battles. He controlled nations. He controlled individuals. The small band of people who went to hunt down Jephthah to see if he would come and serve them, to Jephthah himself God sovereignly at work in all regards and respects, nothing can escape his control. He controls all things.

Well, God would want his children to see his self revelation in revealing himself to his people intangible, impressive ways. Then he also would want them to understand through these events his plan of redemption for sinners.

The description that we read in the book of Judges runs absolutely contrary to the description we read in Genesis chapter one of how God created things. When God created them and spoke them into existence he spoke them in perfection, without fault, without error, functioning perfectly, a well oiled machine, we might say in our day. The norm, God created it that way. That is the standard. That is the norm. Not judges chapter 10. Judges chapter 10 is the abnormal. Genesis chapter one describes for us the normal, the way God created things. But even in that time Adam and Eve yielded to their own lusts for we read when the serpent came and tempted it wasn't the serpent's fault. The serpent didn't make Adam and Eve reach out and take that fruit, the forbidden fruit. It describes for us what went on within their hearts and minds. It looks good. It will make me feel good. It will make me just like God and God really has been holding back on me. Unbelief, failure to trust God even though God had provided for them abundantly during their lives up to this point. They set that aside and yielded to their own lusts and their own desires and it says their lusts and desires become sin and they disobeyed God in their unbelief and in their failure to obey him and to trust him. And they abandoned God and they rejected him.

Does that sound familiar to the description we just read from Judges chapter 10? Because it does describe Judges chapter 10 exactly. The exact same pattern, the exact

same flow, the workings of the lust driving them into sin, ultimately into unbelief and to disobedience, to idolatry. Their desperate need for a Savior began in the garden in Eden.

God in his grace and mercy came to Adam and Eve in the garden and said, "I have seen what you did. I will provide a Savior. This Savior will come as the seed of the woman and he will destroy the serpent." And in destroying the serpent that would then bring life to those deceived and under the dominion of the serpent. And God began to reveal progressively from that day forward his plan of redemption. And we come to this setting here and we find some things presented here that comprise part of the plan of God's redemption for sinners like you and me. We see the sinfulness of the children of Israel, just like the sinfulness of Adam and Eve. We see their need of a Savior just like Adam and Eve needed a Savior. And we see God in grace and in mercy providing a Savior.

The Savior, however, that God provided here does not match up to the ultimate Savior that God provided as he continued to reveal his plan of redemption. We ultimately come to the Savior of saviors, the final one, originally promised in the garden in Eden, fulfilled finally in Jesus Christ, the seed of the woman, also the Son of God, two natures, one person. Jesus the Savior, the Son of God, perfect, compared and contrasted to the imperfect, complete as contrasted to the incomplete judge, the one able to change the nature of sinners as contrasted to the saviors and judges who could not change the nature and, thus, they continued in their cycle of sin. They needed new natures. The judges of that day could not provide it for them, though they pictured the Savior, they could not provide that which they really needed, a new heart, a new nature. They couldn't do that.

Ah, the ultimate Savior does that, provides a new nature to sinners who desperately need it. Ultimately it will all consummate in another more grand and glorious garden of Eden, this time called in Scripture as the new Jerusalem, far surpassing the original garden in Eden, far superior to the rest enjoyed by the people of Israel during the times of the judges, far superior even to what we who trust in Christ experience today. We have in some small measure a garden in Eden with God's presence among us and with us and in us. We experience some of that reality. Oh, but it doesn't compare with what we will enjoy ultimately at the consummation.

Well, I have kind of branched into the next question. What bearing does that have on you and me? It has a great deal of bearing upon you and me, because we find ourselves originally in the exact same condition as Adam and Eve in the garden in Eden after their sin, just like the children of Israel described for us here: deceitful, depraved, sinful, in need of a Savior, in need of someone to rescue us from the oppressiveness of our sinful nature that continues to drive us back and back and back again and again and again into sin. We need a Savior to not only redeem us from our sinful nature and give to us a new heart, but to reconcile us back to God, to restore us back to what God originally designed man in his perfection. But only God can do that. And he has made provision for that in his Son, the Savior of saviors, the one whom if we believe and call upon him he says, "I will give to you eternal life, that new nature that you desperately need, I will give it to you. You don't have to earn it. You don't have to buy it. You can't some how make yourself better to deserve it because you can't ever make yourself good enough to

deserve it. Just come to me. Call upon me and I will give it to you.” That new nature that will restore you back and begin to work in you and to restore you back again to the normal image, the image of God in which he first created mankind.

Ultimately we will experience the finality of that restoration in the new Jerusalem together with other believers and with the Savior himself and experience the finality of that restoration in Christ.

Because these events so clearly describe for us our true condition without God, not just in the world out there, but for individuals like you and like me and of the Church today, the professing Church today finds itself in a condition just like we read here. Because it describes us so clearly we must follow the example that they give us finally, to call upon God, to call upon him, to repent and turn from their sinful evil ways and to come and to call upon God and for his provision for us in Christ and to trust him and to find in him all that we need.

How will you respond? Where has the Spirit of God identified in your life your unbelief? You know, it is possible for us to, in our lives, called upon Christ and trusted him and to become a follower of Christ but to along the way yield to our own temptations and to the pressures of the world about us to begin to water down God and to begin to create a god of our own design.

I like to think of God as... The God that I worship is like...

And those descriptions are always different from how he has revealed himself in the Scriptures. And it is so easy to fall into that trap. Perhaps that has happened to you. Perhaps you have never trusted in Christ. Where has the Spirit of God spoken to you today? And how will you respond to his urgings and promptings and his speaking to your mind and to your heart? Will you just reject it? Will you put it off until tomorrow? Both dangerous options. Or will you reexamine yourself in light of the truth? Rather than try and develop a truth that you like and feel good with the truths that you make up on your own instead evaluating your life against the truth of God's Word and upon reexamination realizing and recognizing your need of a Savior, a Savior to save you, a Savior to restore you, a Savior to make you new, a Savior to revive you and to bring about in you that newness of life that the came to give you.

I pray that the Spirit of God will so work in your lives today to give you the faith to call upon him, to trust him and to cry out to him again and again and again and to call upon him and to trust him to renew you and to give you that new nature that you so desperately need and God has promised to give to all those who call upon him.

I pray that God will work that in your lives today.

Let's close in prayer.