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| Week #: | 199 | Series: | God's Judgment | Title: | Israel Is Oppressed Again |
| Scriptures: | Judges 10:6-16 | | | | |
| Songs: | Stones – Kim Walker Smith (6:49) | | | | |
| | Nobody Loves Me Like You – Chris Tomlin (4:27) | | | | |
| | Prayer | Too Good to Not Believe – Brandon Lake (9:59) | | | |
| Videos: | Judges Song – What's in the Bible #4 (Time- 31:31-33:25) | | | | |

Israel Is Oppressed Again

The first five judges in our study have been:

1. Othniel: He was Caleb's nephew. Israel lived in peace after him for 40 years.
2. Ehud: He was known for the physical feature of being left-handed. Israel lived in peace after him for 80 years.
3. Shamgar: He was known for killing 600 Philistines with a farm tool, an oxgoad.
4. Deborah: She was a female prophetess, whom God used to free the people from Jabin [Yavin], King of Hazor, and his commander Sisera.
5. Gideon: Called God's valiant hero. Israel lived in peace for 40 years, until he died.
6. Tola: Lived in Shamir and judges Israel for 23 years
7. Jair: Had 30 sons who governed 30 cities; judges Israel for 22 years

This week we begin a 3 chapter series on the exploits of a fellow named Jephtha.

We finished up our last lesson by briefly discussing 2 of the 5 so-called Minor Judges, Tola and Jair. The main reason they're called "minor" is because almost nothing is recorded about them; so apparently as compared to the 7 Judges who have reasonably extensive narratives explaining their actions and purposes the 5 were simply not as important.

The 5 minor Judges lived either before or even possibly during the same time as Jephtha, and Jephtha's era of operation is actually towards the end of the almost 4 centuries period called the time of the Judges.

Hopefully it is becoming clear to everyone that the time of the Judges was a time of transition when Israel operated under a typical Middle Eastern tribal structure in which each tribe sought mainly to care for its own interests (the time immediately following Joshua) to the time when Israel would recognize their need for a king and thus would operate more like a nation-state. Transition periods within societies are invariably messy and uneasy times of turmoil and unrest. People instinctively feel a sense of instability and change.

Further we see that these various Judges operated only in specified regions of Canaan, with only some of the tribes involved in each case. Essentially God was raising up Judges to deal with local problems with His people (usually centered on idolatry and the oppression of a foreign government), not problems that faced all 12 tribes equally or simultaneously. We also see that the period of the Judges was one of Israel's steadily declining morality, values, and faithfulness to Adonai. It was a period when their dedication to following God's commandments was replaced by a dedication to following some evolving mix of Torah, pagan religious practices, men's doctrines, and then rationalizing it all to fit with whatever their current wants and needs and societal conditions dictated.

If we were to substitute American names and places for the Hebrew and Canaanite, we would more easily see that the time of the Judges was an eerie parallel to the state of the world in our day.

Judges 10:6-9

⁶ Again the people of Isra'el did what was evil from *ADONAI*'s perspective — they served the *ba'alim*, the *'ashtarot*, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the people of 'Amon and the gods of the Philistines. They abandoned *ADONAI* and did not serve him; ⁷ so the anger of *ADONAI* blazed against Isra'el, and he handed them over to the Philistines and the people of 'Amon. ⁸ For eighteen years, starting that year, they oppressed and persecuted all the people of Isra'el who lived beyond the Jordan, in the territory of the Amorites, in Gilead. ⁹ The people of 'Amon also crossed the Jordan to fight Judah, Benjamin and the house of Ephraim; so that Isra'el was greatly distressed.

Verse 6 gives us a statement of the general condition of ALL of Israel, of all 12 tribes, in the time immediately following the death of the Judge Jair. That condition is one of national apostasy and the adopting of other gods. We've discussed at length that what was occurring in Judges was the melding of Canaanite pagan beliefs with the religion of the Hebrews (some scholars have taken to calling this the Canaanization of Israel, an apt description). Sometimes it's easy to forget how we arrived at a certain destination when there was never intent to do so, and that was Israel's situation. Almost immediately upon Joshua's death Israel (somewhat imperceptibly) started to water down God's instructions to rid the land of Canaan of pagans and their gods. The Lord explicitly told Israel they were to drive out or kill all who were dedicated to the Mystery Babylon religions; instead Israel decided that peace and brotherly love was a better course of action and that meant that they should find ways to get along with these pagans and of course this meant they had to (at the least) show respect and tolerance for these gentiles' gods and customs.

It is interesting that the wording the Bible used to introduce each of the cycles of rebellion and apostasy that precipitated the need for a Judge was usually the same: "The people of Israel did what was evil from God's perspective." From "God's perspective" are the operative words. That is, there was quite a disconnect between how the people of Israel viewed their moral and spiritual condition and how God viewed it. I wonder if ever in mankind's history people or a nation viewed their own actions as evil? I wonder if Israel ever thought that what they were doing (while they were doing it) was wicked and ungodly? From their perspective they were doing right and good; but all too often from God's perspective they were doing wrong. Humans have an amazing capacity to deny and rationalize our bad behavior, or to even attribute to God things that we do, even though He specifically prohibits them. The way that happens is by slowly replacing or mixing God's Word with our own thoughts and opinions. If a lie is told often enough and loud enough, eventually it is taken as truth and few even challenge it. Once a tradition is practiced long enough, how it came into being and what it actually symbolized, and whether it's in harmony with God's will is no longer questioned. Those who might be so bold as to challenge established doctrines and customs are seen as troublemakers, people who are creating disunity, even heretics. So, there is always great peer pressure in communities and congregations of people to keep quiet, put your brain in neutral, and just go along with the flow.

Judges 10:10-16

¹⁰ Then the people of Isra'el cried to *ADONAI*, "We have sinned against you by forsaking our God and serving the *ba'alim*." ¹¹ *ADONAI* said to the people of Isra'el, "I saved you from the Egyptians, the Amorites, the people of 'Ammon, and the Philistines, didn't I? ¹² Likewise, when the people of Sidon, 'Amalekites and Maonites oppressed you, you cried out to me; and I

rescued you from their power. ¹³ Yet you abandoned me and served other gods; therefore I will not rescue you any more. ¹⁴ Go and cry to the gods you chose; let them rescue you when you're in trouble!" ¹⁵ The people of Isra'el said to *ADONAI*, "We have sinned! Treat us in whatever way seems good to you, but save us today, please!" ¹⁶ They got rid of their foreign gods and served *ADONAI*, and he became troubled by Isra'el's misery.

From God's perspective the main evil Israel was committing was worshipping other gods; and we get a list of the names of the other gods they were worshipping. Now interestingly this is NOT a hierarchy of gods, rather it is but a listing of the names of the chief gods worshipped by some of the nations that were located in and around Canaan. First, the people of Israel served the two main gods of Canaan, Ba'al and Ashtoreth. Second, they served the gods of neighboring nations including Hadoth, Ba'al, Moath and Anath (Syrian gods), the gods of Tzidon (Sidon), the gods of the Moabites (their main god being Chemosh), the gods of Ammon (Molech was their highest deity), and the gods of the Philistines (Dagon and Ba'al). This is not an exhaustive list it is simply representative. I told you that verse 6 was speaking of an overall condition of all of Israel. So, it's not as though an Israelite would worship all of these gods; it's that it depended on where a person lived within Canaan. If he lived in the north (by Syria) he would be inclined to worship the Syrian god Moath. If he lived next to the Philistines he would be exposed to Dagon, and so on.

We get another key statement in verse 6 that is easy to overlook: "They abandoned YHWH and did not serve Him". Do not get the idea that the Hebrews no longer worshipped Jehovah God of Israel; if you had accused them of such a thing they would have vehemently denied it. In their misguided minds they had in no way abandoned YHWH. Most still celebrated Sabbath, observed the Feasts, went to the Wilderness Tabernacle at the specified times, offered up Burnt Offerings and so on. Rather they worshipped the God of Israel AND the gods of the local pagans as well, because that seemed to make sense to them. The problem is that God makes it very plain that we cannot worship Him and something else. Any kind of mixing of our worship amounts to abandoning Him in His eyes. And His perspective is all that matters, isn't it?

The consequence was that God's anger blazed up and He turned the Hebrews who lived on the west side of the Jordan (in Canaan) over to the Philistines to be oppressed, and the Hebrews on the east side of the Jordan (in the Trans-Jordan) were put under the oppression of the Ammonites. Further the Ammonites crossed over the Jordan and fought against the southern Israelite tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and the northern Israelite tribe of Ephraim. In other words, this cycle of sin and apostasy of Israel led to the most widespread simultaneous oppression at the hands of gentile nations thus far.

Well, the people of Israel may have had short memories but they weren't stupid. So, in their misery, in verse 10, they decided to turn to their last resort and they cried out to Jehovah to save them from this awful situation. But the God who knows the heart condition of every man says that this time I'm not going to save you just because you ask.

This period of intense tribulation upon Israel had gone on for 18 years before Israel began to look to the God of Israel for help, and even when God's people finally looked to Him for help, He saw that they were not sincere. It is common among humans that we don't really want to change; we only want our circumstances to be different, more to our liking. So, God says that since you enjoy serving the gods of your neighbors then go to them and ask them to rescue you.

We have an interesting lesson here for every believer if we're willing to accept it; and the lesson is on the nature of confession and repentance. Crying out to God for help and mercy, by itself, has utterly no merit and God will not pay any attention. Our relationship with Him must be on firm footing or He closes His ears to our pleadings. If our relationship with Him has been severely compromised then action on our parts (real change) is required, not pitiful emotions or pious words. And the first action is to be confession; sincere confession.

What is confession? Confession is agreeing with the Lord that you have broken His commandments and thus sinned against Him. Confession is humbly admitting that He is right and you are wrong. Confession is telling God what He already knows about you. But confession by itself isn't sufficient either; it must be followed by repentance. Repentance is not a promise or intent to do better. Repentance is active change; but the change must be in accordance with God's laws not in accordance with our sense of goodness or morality. Repentance is ceasing to do what is wrong in God's eyes, and instead doing what is right in His eyes. How do we know which is which? Read His book, His ENTIRE book.

Israel's response to God's refusal to help them is actually kind of funny if it weren't so sad and typical: "Treat us in whatever way seems good to you but save us TODAY, please!" This statement is the biblical version of, "I'll gladly pay you Tuesday for a hamburger today". God save me now, and please accept this IOU; I'll start doing right later, at a more convenient time. But God is a God of tough love. He wasn't going to rescue them until they turned from their wicked ways, discontinued their love affair with the Canaanite gods and turned back to Him in full devotion. The sad reality is that when we abandon God, and we live a life compromised by evil, the day will come that we need Him. And the God-principle and pattern we see demonstrated here is that even after we confess our sin to Him, and even after we begin the painful process of letting go of the evil in our lives, we'll live with its earthly consequences (possibly for a long time).

Only AFTER Israel confessed, and then demonstrated true repentance by getting rid of their foreign gods AND returning to proper worship of Jehovah, did the Lord now look down upon His people in pity and respond. We cannot continue to wallow in the same sin whose consequence we want to be rescued from and expect God to act.

Do you think it was a simple matter for Israel to divest itself of those foreign gods? It would have created all sorts of serious societal problems and family divisions. Not every Israelite would have agreed; and not everyone would have approached this new path to the same degree or in the same enthusiasm. Not every person in a family would have been willing to change their theology. How do you suppose it went when a Hebrew man told his Canaanite business partner that he would no longer acknowledge his gods? What do you think happened when the Israelites who lived in the mostly mixed ethnic villages that formed the Land of Canaan announced they would no longer participate in the celebrations to the gods that were so much a part of their Canaanite friends' lives? Folks, once we've wandered down the path of tolerance to evil, it is difficult to turn around and climb back up to holy ground. We will be accused of hypocrisy, intolerance, unkindness, ignorance, even heresy.