

The Cycle of Apostasy

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Preacher: Jared Blankenship

[0 : 01] We've mentioned over the last couple of weeks how the structure of this particular book includes, if we were thinking of a musical score, there's the overture, there's the variations, which is the main section of the book, and then there's the coda, when things are kind of summarized in two major stories at the end of the book.

And we're coming to the end of this introductory section, this overture, where the author is presenting to us some patterns and some ideas and some narrative that we're going to find repeated throughout the rest of the book.

And when we get to this particular section, we see a more detailed narrative describing this cycle that the nation of Israel is going to continually find themselves falling into over and over and over throughout the rest of the book.

We would call it the cycle of apostasy. And this pattern is, though it does vary in some places from judge to judge, it largely remains intact as we get through the book.

And before we look at what that cycle is, let me just remind you what we mean when we say cycle of apostasy. We're not dealing, at least at this point, the scripture isn't dealing with a group of people who are pagan or completely outside of the knowledge of God's truth.

[1 : 22] He is addressing here God's people, those who have been set apart, at least in a national sense. He has set apart Israel to be his people at this point.

They are not behaving as his spiritual people, but yet they are his covenant people in a national sense and a physical sense. That's who he's dealing with. These are people who know the truth of God. They're not ignorant of it.

They're not ignorant of Yahweh. They have, in some cases, seen or at least heard the witness of their parents as they've described the wonderful works of God. They're not completely ignorant to who God is and what God's plan is.

They actually know it. Apostasy is not living your life simply in rejection of biblical ideas and of the biblical God and of Christ.

It is knowing those truths first and then willfully turning away from them. Does that make sense? This is different than your neighbor who's never actually heard a biblical gospel before and has no clue about the scripture.

[2 : 21] This is your neighbor who actually knows as much as anyone else knows about the scripture and about Jesus and about the gospel, and yet they still willfully turn away from that and reject it. That's where the nation of Israel is at this point.

That's why we call it apostasy and not just unbelief. This is a cycle of willful unbelief from what they know to be true. They have been presented with the truth about God, and yet they continue to reject it.

And so it's a specific application to us as well for those of us who at least are familiar with the truths of God. Are we actually still willfully walking away from those things? And we find ourselves in a big mess if we're like Israel in that sense.

Let's just briefly talk about the cycle real quick. I think we have a graphic that I can show you that may help you. Here's how the cycle generally works, the pattern that we're going to find repeated. First, the people of Israel reject the Lord.

They rebel against him and against his law. Then after that, they provoke the Lord to anger, and God delivers them into the hands of their enemies. After that, sometimes, not all the time, but sometimes the people cry out to the Lord.

[3 : 26] This is not so much a cry of repentance. It's a cry of misery. And God looks on their pain, and he looks on their misery, and then he responds. That's the next part of the cycle. God, in

response, raises up a judge.

And by judge, we're not talking about the skilled lawyer who sits on a big stand in a black robe and a white wig. That's not the sense of this. This is a deliverer, a military person, generally speaking, who is a savior of the people.

He is a savior who leads the people out of bondage to physical national enemies at this point. So God would raise up a judge who would then deliver the people, and then the judge would die, and the people would turn right back to the rebellion.

Except the rebellion is not the same as it was before. The rebellion always gets worse and worse and worse. And so the nation of Israel, throughout this book, it just continues on this repeated cycle. They rebel.

God delivers them into the hands of their enemies. They are really upset about that, and they finally get to the point where they just can't take it anymore. God responds by sending them a judge, a deliverer, and then the deliverer dies, and they go right back to it again, into the rebellion.

[4 : 38] This is what we're going to see over and over and over, and the author begins to give us a glimpse of this cycle here in this particular text. But my goal today is not to dig into the cycle itself.

We're going to have lots of time over the next few months to look at this cycle. That's not what I want to do today. What I want to do today is I want to look at this text and present to you some larger truths as it relates to Israel's sin and to God's response to their sin.

Okay? Those are the two major things that I want you to see. I want you to see the nature of Israel's sin, and I want you to see God's response to their sin.

The text teaches us so much about the true nature of our own sin, but it reveals some facets about the character of God that, in the end, should provoke our love.

It should provoke our worship. That's the key here. So, if I'm going to lay it all out for you here at the beginning, what I hope will happen for you and with you by the time we get to the end of this study this morning is that you might feel some conviction if there needs to be conviction felt because of your sin.

[5 : 48] But what I really hope happens is that by the end of this, you'll have a view of God's character that will produce nothing in you except worship. Who is a God like this?

There is no God like this. And that's what I hope to point out to you. Here's the first thing that I want you to see if you're keeping notes. I want you to see the root of Israel's apostasy. The root of Israel's apostasy.

Look with me again at verse 11. The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals. And they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt.

They went after other gods from among the gods of the peoples who are around them and bowed down to them. And they provoked the Lord to anger. They abandoned the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth.

Now, do you remember over the summer we had that series through the seven churches in Revelation? And does anybody remember what the literary structure was of those seven churches? Do you remember what it was called? Anybody remember?

[6 : 51] Josh, tell us. It's a chiasm, right? A chiastic structure. A chiasm is basically, it's a literary technique that has a particular movement or series of movements or statements that are meant to convey a central idea.

Okay? There's a narrowing and broadening function. So, if you remember back in that particular study, chi is a Greek letter. It looks like a capital X in English. And so, if you kind of think of this half of the X, the way that a structure like this works in literary terms is it starts broadly.

It moves in, narrows in to its central focus, and then it works itself back out. And it mimics where it starts. Okay? Now, I want you to see what's happening here in this text in verses 11 through 13 is a chiasm.

It's another chiastic structure. And I just want you to look at it with me. I think I have it on the screen for you to see, actually, so you can visualize this. In verse 11, we have Israel served the bells.

In verse 12, they abandoned the Lord. Again, in verse 12, this is the central focus. They went after other gods and bowed down to them.

[8 : 02] And now it begins to work its way back out. They, in verse 13, abandoned the Lord. Verse 13, they served the bells and the astros. Do you see the narrowing effect?

How it starts out and it narrows? Now, what the author's doing here, this is very common, especially in the Old Testament literature. This is very common. He's taking a series of statements or a series of thoughts, and he's arranging them in order that we might see what is at the heart of this issue. And what is at the heart of this issue with Israel, in verse 12, right in the middle, is that they went after other gods and they bowed down to them. And what is that? It's worship.

At the heart of Israel's apostasy was the issue of worship. Worship. In fact, the word behind this phrase, bowed down, is used in the scriptures to indicate the biblical notion of worship.

We don't always understand it that way. We don't always use that term that way. Typically, when we use the term worship, we are referring to the process of singing praises to God, right?

[9 : 10] We would come and churches will have worship teams, and what the worship teams are is just the singers, right? Because we say, well, let's stand and let's worship together. What we really mean is let's sing together.

Typically, we have a very narrow view of what worship is. But the biblical notion of worship is actually much different than that. Indeed, exaltation is really what we mean when we say worship in that other sense.

But an exaltation is a crucial element to expressing worship. But it's still only one piece of the pie, okay? The biblical idea of worship is generally actually quite different than jubilation.

The word itself, it pictures a royal courtroom. The king is on his throne, and his subjects have come in to give homage to him. And what they do is they bow down low.

That's why it's often translated bow down. Or when we say worship, the word behind it in the Old Testament, it really means to bow low. But we're not just talking about getting on our hands and knees. When we think about bowing in worship, that's what we think, right?

[10 : 15] We think we get down on our hands and knees, and we plead with someone, will you please marry me? There's a reason we get on our knees. Because we have to beg for women to do that, right? It goes further than that.

This word, the picture here, it is to lay prostrate on the ground. It's to get as close to the ground as you can possibly get. Julie's going to get mad at me for doing this. My clothes are going to get dirty. It's to lay down.

It's to lay down, hands forward. You're as low as you can possibly get to the ground. Now, why would someone do this as a form of worship? They're making themselves as low as they can possibly make themselves, in order that the one who is the object of their worship is lifted as high as that person can be lifted up.

It's a sign of worth, of value. I'm expressing so much value to this person or to this thing that I am bringing myself low in submission as far as I can go.

And here's the idea of what it expresses. It's a statement. It says that I am submitting all of my love and my loyalty and my service.

[11 : 24] I'm committing to this object or this idea or this person or whatever it may be. It's what it means to bow down here in this text. Now, this is what the author intends for us to understand.

It's what he's communicating when he says that Israel bowed down to the bells and to the Ashtoreth. Not only physically, but spiritually, they were pledging all of their loyalty and service to Baal, the Canaanite god, rather than to Yahweh, the god of the Hebrews.

That's what's at the core of their evil. Their worship was wrong. Their loyalty was wrong. The one they were surrendered to was no longer Yahweh.

The one they're surrendered to now is the god of the culture in which they lived. And of course, the act of worshiping the gods of Canaan were very different than worshiping Yahweh.

Baal was the Canaanite god of storms and fertility. The worshipers in Canaanite theology stated that the rain that was necessary for the ground to be watered and fertile and fruitful in its bearing of crops would only come if Baal and Ashtart or the Ashtoreth, which in their theology was Baal's female consort or his queen perhaps if you want to think of it that way.

[12 : 51] The only way that the ground would be fertile and that the rain would come and that the fruitful crops would come is if they too copulated together. But this couldn't just happen because it happens.

They had to be coerced into doing that, which meant that the worshipers had to coerce them. And the way that Canaanite theology taught this is that the only way to coerce Baal and Ashtoreth to have this intercourse together is if humans had intercourse together in a public way as a form of

worship.

So they created these cult prostitutes that would make themselves available in places of worship of Baal and individuals could go and they could engage with these cult prostitutes in order to hopefully coerce Baal and Ashtoreth into doing the same thing.

And that if they would do that, then the rain would come and then the ground would be fertile and then the fruitfulness of the crops would come. And this eventually evolved into all kinds of other immoral practices, including eventually, probably the worst of it would have been sacrificing their children to appease these gods.

You see, the fundamental difference here between pagan gods and Hebrew worship was that pagan gods had to be coerced.

[14 : 13] Yahweh just says, trust me, believe me, follow me. Pagan gods have to be coerced because they don't actually want to help you.

They're not interested in helping you. That's not the picture of pagan theology that we find. They have to be coerced. You have to do all these other things. You have to sacrifice your own children just to try to plead with them to come on your behalf.

But God says, no, trust me. Yahweh is simply to be trusted. But instead of trusting the promises of God, Israel abandoned him to pursue the gods of the land.

Their worship then was not motivated by truth. It wasn't motivated by righteousness. It wasn't motivated by love. Their worship was motivated by the flesh.

Israel was seduced by what they thought would secure them happiness and wealth. They didn't abandon Yahweh because he had somehow failed them, but because they thought that what Baal offered was so much better.

[15 : 25] The worship that came along with worshipping Baal and Ashtar, the promises of the fertility of the ground, all of those things, they found that to be far more desirable.

So they didn't leave Yahweh because he was bad to them or that he had harmed them in any way. He had been only good to them. They left because they found some other God to be more desirable.

Canaanite religion appeals then to man's basest desires of the flesh. Pleasure and prosperity. Pleasure and prosperity.

And such is true about the modern equivalence of Baal worship. The gods of this world and of our culture and the ideas of it, they do not appeal to us on the basis of truth and righteousness and eternal purpose.

They seduce us with promises of prosperity that never live up to the expectations that we have for it. And they seduce us with promises of pleasure that are ultimately fleeting.

[16 : 32] They're here for a moment and then they're gone. And then you're left alone trying to pursue that same pleasure all over again. But what God offers us is so much greater than sex and wealth.

It's far different than that. He promises us truth, peace, not merely peace among ourselves, peace with Him.

He promises us incomprehensible joy that will never come to an end.

But like Israel, we regularly settle for less than what God actually offers. It's a bad trade. Here's what C.S. Lewis had to say about that.

It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not to be too strong but to be too weak. We are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us.

[17 : 39] Like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at sea. We are far too easily pleased, he says.

I find that really helpful. Sometimes we think that our sin is the result of strong urges that are in us but it's actually weak urges. We are not looking at the truth of what it is that God offers us and what Christ offers us in the gospel.

We're looking for something that's far less than that. Something that's immediately gratifying to us or something that brings pleasure however it may be fleeting to us and at least pleases us in that particular moment or it comes with the promise of prosperity or at least what we hope will end up being prosperity.

prosperity and we've actually set our sights and our desires far too low. The fact is that we all worship something. The question is what is the nature of that worship?

Are you submitted to the God who offers life and peace or are you bowing before the God of self fiddling around with anything that might fulfill your basest lust?

[18 : 51] You see here's the thing this is what we saw in James chapter 4 as well. You can't have it both ways. That's the problem. We try to. Those of us who are Christians from time to time we try to bring these two things together as much as we can and it just doesn't work.

Jesus tells us that plainly. He says you can't serve two masters because you're either going to love the one and hate the other or you're going to hate the one and love the other. You can't serve God and mammon or money was the context of what he was saying but the sense was you can't serve God and this world.

In another place he says that the path to prosperity and pleasure and joy and all of these things life that we have is not a path of self-fulfillment it's actually a path of self-denial.

Deny yourself. Take up your cross. Follow me. Because whoever will save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for my sake in the gospels he will save it.

It's upside down isn't it? It's backwards but only for us. It's the true way of righteousness. It's the true way of salvation. It's the true way of true joy and peace and lasting hope.

[20 : 00] And then of course we must remember that it's entirely possible to identify with Christianity in some sense while not actually worshiping the Christian God.

isn't that where Israel is? They weren't renouncing their identity as Israelites. They probably didn't even put away everything that was recorded for them to do as far as the law was concerned.

There was probably some syncretistic tendencies that they had where they would still maybe do some of the Yahweh things but they were also going to do the Baal things as well and there was this kind of mixture they're trying to bring together.

They were trying to have it both ways but it doesn't work. It doesn't work for us either. You can try to identify as a Christian but if you're not worshiping the true God you're not worshiping Christ I don't know what you mean when you say that you're a Christian.

Israel's apostasy was a matter of worship so was ours. Second thing I want you to see the wonder of the holy God. The wonder of the holy God.

[21 : 11] So there's the heart or the root of Israel's apostasy it's an issue of worship here they're serving Baal rather than serving God but now I just want you to look at God. All throughout the scripture we find people standing in awe and wonder over the glory of God.

Let me just give you a few examples of that. Moses in Exodus chapter 15 says who is like you oh Lord among the gods? Who is like you majestic in holiness awesome and glorious deeds doing wonders?

How many times do your prayers sound like that? I wish I could speak the language of Moses and David and some of these guys. How many times have you fallen on your knees in prayer and private worship just because you got a glimpse of some unique characteristic of God's nature and you just say who is a God like you?

There is nobody like you majestic in your holiness. But it wasn't just Moses Solomon said it in 1 Kings 8 oh Lord God of Israel there is no God like you in heaven above or earth beneath keeping covenant showing steadfast love to your servants who walk before you with all their heart.

Micah said it who is a God like you pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever because he delights in steadfast love.

[22 : 31] Paul said it in Romans 11 oh the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God how unsearchable are his judgments how inscrutable his ways.

Over and over when you get a glimpse of who God is even if it's just a small one what it's going to produce in your life is worship. Who is a God like you? And how do we get to that?

How do we get to that point? What is it that these people saw and understood that produced this kind of worship? Nothing produces this reaction more I think than seeing God's righteous anger and his infinite mercy presented alongside one another and that's what we have in this text right here.

The subject of these verses verses 14 and 15 the subject is God not Israel and what is conveyed about God's character should move us to worship and there's two facets here that the author points out.

The first thing I want you to see is the anger of the Lord. The anger of the Lord. Verse 14 So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel and he gave them over to plunderers who plundered them.

[23 : 45] He sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. Whenever they marched out the hand of the Lord was against them for harm as the Lord had warned and as the Lord had sworn to them and they were in terrible distress.

By abandoning Yahweh to serve the bells Israel provoked the Lord's anger and the consequences were calculated and severe.

Notice how intent the author is on emphasizing God's action in this. It was the Lord who quote gave them over to plunderers.

It was God who sold them to their enemies. God's hand had not merely been removed from them for good but it was quote against them for harm.

All of this divine action resulted in the people of Israel being in quote terrible distress. They pursued Baal hoping to receive pleasure and prosperity and protection but all they got was the wrath of God.

[24 : 56] God the same will be true for us. Sin never follows through on what it offers. We can pursue it. We can pursue sin.

We can pursue anything that may line up in rejection to the truth of the gospel of Jesus and we're going to think it's going to make things better for us. Things are going to be more freeing. We're going to be happy.

We're going to God. And I think the author is intent for us to see that God is a wrathful God.

But we don't like to think of that. Our culture is so opposed to authority and punitive action that we often as Christians we feel like we have to get God off the hook for bad things that happen or we got to get God off the hook for things that come as the consequences of our sin.

We don't like to talk about God's wrath so we water down biblical language hoping to make it more palatable. We emphasize God's love rightly but we emphasize it sometimes in such a way that to think that God judges sinners or that God has any kind of wrath or anger to people seems unthinkable.

[26 : 19] Well I thought he was a God of love. We emphasize his love so much that we end up diminishing a anger with sin. We say things like God doesn't send people to hell they choose to go there which is not true.

We do everything we can to get God off the hook. We do everything we can to soften thoughts of this but the fact is that God is perfectly holy. He is just and everyone who rejects him as Israel did become his enemies and they face his divine wrath.

Think of Hebrews 10. For we know him who said vengeance is mine I will repay and again the Lord will judge his people.

And then the author of Hebrews summarizes it this way. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. It is a fearful thing.

And it's the reality for anyone who does not belong to him through faith in Christ. But his wrath, his holiness, his justice is something to be worshipped.

[27 : 32] That's why we must not diminish it. For him to be anything less than just would mean that he is not a good God. He must judge sin.

And we must not view God's wrath as an uncontrolled! temper. That's how we think about that term because that's how we respond in wrath. We respond as if we're sinful things in the midst of our anger and our wrath but that's not what we're to understand about God's wrath.

Think about it here. The author reminds us here in verse 15 that God's anger was in faithfulness to his word. Look at it with me verse 15. Whenever they marched out the hand of the Lord was against them for harm as the Lord had warned he told them long before Joshua 24 he said if you do not obey if you do not worship me if you do all of these other things my hand will be against you I will not bless you in the land I must judge your sin he's just acting in faithfulness he plainly told them that turning to the gods of Canaan would result in this divine!

wrath I like how Barry Webb puts it God had shown himself to be true to his word by fulfilling the promises he had made to his people and he would also be true to his word in fulfilling the warnings he had given them there's nothing capricious about that he says the God of the Bible gets angry but he does not throw tantrums that's a significant difference his anger is righteous anger holy anger it's just I think that's the first thing the author wants us to see here as we're examining the character of

God we have the anger of the Lord but then it gets better now we have the mercy of the Lord mercy of the Lord verse 16 then the Lord raised up judges who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them verse 18 whenever the Lord raised now remember what we're doing we've seen Israel sin we've seen the root of it it's an issue of worship now we're taking our eyes off of Israel for a moment and we're looking at the God that they should have been worshiping what is he like well on one hand we have to acknowledge in the context of their sin and unfaithfulness he is a wrathful God there's the we can't take that away from God that's who he is but on the other hand because of the backdrop of his anger we see his infinite mercy that's the real wonder here is his divine mercy we can easily comprehend a God who punishes disobedience that's easy to do right easy we can only marvel at a God who shows mercy for no apparent reason no apparent reason at all is given here that's exactly what's on display in this chapter the one who sold them into the hands of plunderers is also the one responsible for saving them from those plunderers the hand that was against them is simultaneously for them indeed part of the reason for

[31 : 09] God's wrath is to provide a context for which we are to understand his mercy I told you in the introductory lesson one of the themes of this is to understand a theme of the entire Bible which is that God's glory he is glorified in salvation through judgment you can't understand salvation without understanding judgment and we find it clearly here his anger and his wrath and his judgment being poured out on his people while at the same time he is emphasizing and highlighting his loving compassion in salvation for his people and what's more is that God's mercy here is based on nothing but his own compassion notice with me the author conspicuously leaves out anything on Israel's part that might be construed as deserving or earning

God's mercy it's not there even later on in some of the cycles of the judges when we're told that they cry out to the Lord it's always a signal of their misery not of their repentance which is why the author says right here in this passage that every time they did not give up their stubborn ways they not only continued in them but they worsened in them there's nothing Israel is doing that might make a step back and say that's why God was merciful to them the only reason given is given in verse 18 and notice what it says at the end of verse 18 for the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them what is moving and motivating God's intervention not their cries not their earnest attempts at satisfying him according to the law simply their distress the fact that they were in distress motivated his mercy a statement of his measureless love and compassion says

Dale Ralph Davis here is the fundamental miracle of the Bible that the God who rightly cast us down to the ground should without reasons stoop to lift us up you see we can step back if all we see is the anger of the Lord we can step back and say okay that's like every other God I've ever read about angry at us we have to appease them but then when we see this we find now there is no God like that there is no!

person like that who in perfect justice delivers them to their enemies so that he might then save them from their enemies out of his pure love and compassion does this make you think of anything it should all of this you know what it does it points us forward points us to Jesus the way that God's character is displayed here prepares us for a true and better savior who would deliver us from sin once and for all God in his extravagant love sends his son to endure his own wrath so that we who deserve that wrath might be forgiven on the cross Jesus does what none of the judges in this book could ever do he perfectly satisfies God's wrath he appeases it propitiates it is how we would say it in

New Testament language not because we deserve it but because he loves us that's the point of John 3 16 right for God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life God's mercy isn't motivated by us it's motivated by his own compassion and love for us Jesus died for our sins because we needed him to not because we deserved for him to think about it in terms of Romans chapter 5 while we were still weak at the right time Christ died for the ungodly for one will scarcely die for a righteous person perhaps for a good person one would dare to die but God shows his love for us in that while we're still sinners Christ died for while we are sinning against him he dies for us while we're in the action of rejecting him he shows mercy since therefore we have now been justified by his blood much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of

[36 : 23] God God saves us from himself for if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his son much more now that we are reconciled shall we be saved by his life more

than that we also rejoice in God through the Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have now received reconciliation it's amazing you know what judges is meant to teach us the gospel the gospel it points us to Christ and as we see the character of God what else could we see than the perfect display of it through his only son here's the wonder of this text while Israel was pursuing Baal God was pursuing Israel same is true for you and for me he doesn't wait for you to finally get things right and get your head right so that you turn back to him and then he says okay now

I'm going to go after him no he comes after us while we're moving in the opposite directionNINGNINGNINGNINGNINGNINGNINGNINGNINGNING!

NINGNINGNING! demonstrated through his son. There's an old hymn called How Firm a Foundation. Maybe some of you know it. There's a question in one of the verses.

It says, what more can he say than to you he has said? I want to take that thought and ask you, what more must God do to motivate your worship?

What must he do? He can do nothing more. What more can he say than to you he has said? Look at the cross. Look at Christ.

[38 : 21] Look at the love that he has put on display. Look at the way that he woos us through the gospel. The gospel is his idea. We didn't even ask for it.

He provides it. Why would you continue to turn away from that? Why would you reject such love? What more must he do?

Be a half-hearted creature no longer, as C.S. Lewis said. Wonder at the glory of God. Turn to him. And you'll find, as James said, he's very near. Third thing, and we'll be finished. I want you to see the spiraling effect of Israel's apostasy.

The spiraling effect of Israel's apostasy. Look with me at verse 17. We would expect at this point that, wow, look at, they didn't even ask for it, and God sent all these deliverers that took them out of this big problem.

[39 : 29] Surely Israel will now say, okay, we got it. We messed up. We're going to be faithful now. But that's not what they do. Verse 17. Yet they did not listen to their judges.

They whored after other gods and bowed down to them. They soon turned aside from the way in which their fathers had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the Lord, and they did not do so.

Verse 19. But whenever the judge died, they turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them.

They did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways. You see, what's presented in judges is not merely a cycle.

It is a spiral. Despite everything that God had done to deliver them from their enemies, each successive generation spirals into deeper and deeper and deeper rebellion.

[40 : 30] They didn't turn back to God. Instead, they worsened, taking their parents' sin even further. Here's how Psalm 106 describes this particular generation.

They did not destroy the peoples as the Lord commanded them, but they mixed with the nations and learned to do as they did. They served their idols, which became a snare to them.

They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons. They poured out innocent blood and the blood of their sons and daughters whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, and the land was polluted with blood.

Thus, they became unclean by their acts. They played the whore in their deeds. Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against his people. He abhorred his heritage. He gave them into the hand of the nations so that those who hated them ruled over them.

Their enemies oppressed them. They were brought into subjection under their power. Many times he delivered them, but they were rebellious in their purposes.

[41 : 33] They were brought low through their iniquity. Now, here's my question. How is this even possible? How is this possible?

How could they continue in such a downward spiral after God provides over and over and over and over? It's like an addiction.

You've known people with drug addiction, I'm sure. There comes a point to where their life is so gripped by the addiction, they know the damage it causes, but they can't get free from it.

They're a slave. They're a slave. That's what's happening here with Israel. We need to understand the pervasive power of sin.

An unbeliever does not simply choose to sin. They're a slave to sin. That doesn't remove our culpability.

[42 : 36] Of course, our sin is still our own. But we're also incapable of changing ourselves. That's the thing. We need God's gracious intervention.

Otherwise, we'll always choose the gods of this world. Always. What Israel needed was a king who would not only deliver them from Canaanite enemies, but from their own sinful condition.

We desperately need new hearts. What Jesus called the new birth or being born again. And that's exactly what Jesus came to do for us.

That was the promise made from God through the prophets. That in the new covenant, one day, he was going to send someone. And this new covenant king was going to come. And he was going to provide a new heart.

And he was going to write his law on our hearts. And we would love him. And he would be our God. And we would be his people. And that's what Jesus came to do. The good news is that God provides this new heart and this new birth through the gospel of Christ.

[43 : 47] Hear his gospel. Come to Jesus. Turn from sin. Don't let what's meant to save you harden you even further.

Because that's what's happened with Israel. But you have no excuse. Christ has come. The king has come. The gospel has come.

A new heart is available. Come to Christ. In the end, what we end up finding is that this cycle really just outlines the gospel, doesn't it?

We're all guilty before God. We're destined to face his wrath. But in his love, God provides a way for us to be reconciled to him. Through the sacrifice of his own son.

And then Jesus, as our king and Messiah, beckons us to come back and to receive forgiveness through him. And we are responsible to trust him to turn from sin.

[44 : 51] It's the gospel. Believe it. The text, as I said at the beginning, it should humble us as it relates to our sin.

Because if we're struggling with sin right now, even as a believer, a true believer, at the heart of that is an issue of worship. At least in the moment of your sin, you find something that the world offers more desirable than God.

And in that moment, your worship turns away from Yahweh. And it turns to this thing, this fleeting pleasure. Or this empty prosperity or promise of it.

It should humble us. We don't sin just because, you know, we kind of blame something. Or we just kind of blame the fact, well, nobody's perfect. That kind of thing. That's true.

But it should humble us. What's really at the heart of that is we've forsaken true worship. But there's more to this text.

[45 : 54] It really should lead us to stand in awe of such an amazing God. Such love. Compassion. Such pursuit.

Despite our continual rejection. That's what's so amazing about it, right? Maybe some of you guys were like me and you were pursuing your spouse for a while. And over and over and over, they're thinking, no way.

Leave me alone, please. And eventually you broke them down, right? It doesn't work that way with God. We're the ones who keep saying, no way.

No way. Leave me alone. Leave me alone. Leave me alone. He's the one that keeps saying, no. I want you. I love you. Look what I've done for you. Turn to me. Have peace. Joy. Love.

Who is a God like that? There isn't one. It's only Him. Don't turn Him away. Come to Him. You'll find that He's everything and more than what He said.

[46 : 59] Well, that's better for you. Thank you.