

Monday Week 21 Israel's Cycles of Sin

Q 81 What did the children of Israel do after Joshua died?

A. They forsook the Lord and served false gods.

Bible Reading: Judges 2:11-19

An old man lived by himself on a piece of land. The government decided to build a road through the land and offered him a price for it. He would not take the money. So the government told the man that he had to leave and they offered him even more money. He told them he would not sell his land at any price and they could not make him leave. They finally sent a man called a “troubleshooter.” He was to find out why the man would not leave. He sat down with the man and talked with him. He asked him why he was so attached to the land. The old man told him that in his fireplace was a fire that had never gone out for generations. He had promised not to let it go out. Now the government was trying to make him break his promise. When the “troubleshooter” found that out, he told the old man that they could keep the fire going until he was moved into a different house. Then they would take the fire from the old house and carry it to the new one. This satisfied the old man. He was able to keep his promise.

When Joshua died, the people forgot about God. They didn't keep their promise to serve only the Lord. They turned to false gods. They got into trouble because of their sin. They should have kept their promise. We should learn from that example and keep our promises to God. “For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law” (Pr. 4:2).

Thinking Deeper

The book of Judges records the “cycles of sin” of the Children of Israel. When they forgot God, they would turn to idols. The Lord would then allow an enemy to conquer them. They would live in bondage until they called on the Lord. The Lord would answer their prayer and send them a deliverer, who became known as a judge. The Lord would give them freedom from bondage, and they would have a period of rest from their enemies. But over and over they would turn away from God and the cycle would begin again. This distinct cycle happened at least five times. In his commentary, Adam Clarke observes that we should learn from these events 1) not to presume for God is just, and 2) not to despair, for God is merciful. It is from these events that we get the histories of Othniel, Ehud, Deborah with Barak, Gideon and Samson. These judges arose to help Israel in times of oppression.

The debate between Calvinists and Wesleyan about the possibility of backsliding was answered by one cynic who said that Calvinists don't believe in backsliding, while Wesleyans do and practice it freely. The truth is that there are far too many who do backslide. And the results are not good. God actively “resists the proud.” It is the proud who thinks he “has need of nothing” while in reality is spiritually impoverished. The oppression of sin can only be lifted when men call upon the Lord for deliverance. But the oppression can be lifted for God “gives grace to the humble.” The answer to backsliding is to daily “walk humbly with our God.”

Tuesday Week 21 Proving Israel

Bible Reading: Judges 3:1-11

Q 82 What helped to cause Israel to serve false gods?

A. They married women who were unbelievers.

“Daddy, why can’t I stay overnight with my friend?” The little girl looked puzzled. “All my friends do overnights.”

“We don’t do everything like everybody else does,” said the father. We are serving the Lord first. One reason we don’t let you do overnights is that we don’t know everything that goes on when we’re not around. Sometimes things happen on overnights that are not good. We’ve decided that it’s better for you to always stay with us.”

Too many times bad things happen on overnights, and that father was protecting his daughter. He was concerned that she had the right friends, and he was concerned to keep her from wrong influences. A godly home is the safest place for children.

Many parents in Israel forgot to protect their children. They allowed them to make friends with people who worshipped idols. Soon the children also worshipped idols. It was wrong for the Israelites to be like the heathen. But they learned their ways and forgot God.

It is still wrong for God’s people to become like unbelievers. “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:21).

Thinking Deeper

There are some accounts of “evangelistic dating” where a Christian has dated an unbeliever who later became a Christian. Most of the time, though, the reverse is true. If the Christian keeps the faith and falls in love heartache inevitably follows. If they marry, will the children be raised Christian or pagan? Will the Christian be able to maintain godly standards of living while an unbelieving spouse has no interest in those standards? These kinds of difficulties are faced by married couples when one person gets saved and the spouse doesn’t. Why would a young Christian take on such a life voluntarily? The story of the Judges shows how such mixed marriages often lead to spiritual disaster.

It is with this history as a background that the Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote “be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.” It is for the good of the Christian that God warns believers not to marry outside of “the household of faith.” Anyone considering marriage should heed this important precept.

Bible Reading: Judges 17:1-6

Q 83 How did people decide what to do in the days of the Judges

A. They did what was right in their own eyes.

Young Danny noticed an ice cream store. “Dan, can’t we stop and buy some ice cream?” he asked. “Not today,” answered the father, “It’s Sunday.”

“Oh, Dad, Jesus wouldn’t care if we bought some ice cream!” Danny’s pleas didn’t convince his father. They drove on past the store without stopping. Danny’s father knew that the Bible says “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.” He was careful to keep that one day out of seven as a special day. It wasn’t a holiday—it was a holy day.

During the time of the judges, people did what seemed right to them. They didn’t carefully consider what God said in the Scriptures. If it seemed right, they did it. But that way of deciding right and wrong often got them into trouble.

We are no different today. If we don’t check with the Bible, we will make big mistakes. Always be sure you are living in a way that pleases God.

Thinking Deeper

Atheists, realizing that their belief system easily leads to anarchy and hedonism, have claimed that they are just as moral as anyone else. One atheist wrote that society establishes morality and the controlling force to keep people from violating that morality is the policeman. Governments that are run on that basis are called police states.

In contrast, America was founded on the belief that there is a Creator who has given higher laws than the mores of society. Men derive personal rights from the Creator. The police in this society have the duty of ensuring that individual rights are protected. In addition, American government was founded on the assumption that individuals would have inner constraints to keep them from the excesses that harm others. John Adams, our second president, wrote “our constitution was made for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.” The Bible has been the foundation upon which the morals and religious beliefs have been built. Without this foundation, society will deteriorate. If there are no inner constraints, short of anarchy, the only answer is the police state. The Christian religion is the answer to atheism and practical atheism’s policeman. “The fruit of the spirit is...self control.”

Bible Reading: 1 Samuel 3:7-21

Q 84 Why did God call Samuel?

A. God called Samuel to be a prophet of the Lord in Israel.

A fourth grade class was asked by the teacher to write an answer to this question: "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Many of the students wrote about what kind of job they wanted to have, like being a nurse, or a firefighter, or a cowboy. One boy thought about the question. He didn't know what he wanted to be. But he was a Christian and knew that the Lord had a plan for his life. He wrote his answer. "When I grow up I want to be what Jesus wants me to be."

When Samuel was a little boy, his mother brought him to the temple. He was to serve the Lord under a priest named Eli. One night Samuel heard God calling him. He answered, "Speak, for thy servant heareth." Samuel was willing to be whatever God wanted him to be. God had a plan for Samuel. He wanted him to be a prophet in Israel. Samuel was faithful to God when he was a young boy, and he remained faithful all his life. God wants us to be faithful, also.

Thinking Deeper

God gave Samuel a special calling. He was chosen to bring people the word from the Lord. He was in a culture that had been heavily influenced by paganism. Time and again the Children of Israel had abandoned God and embraced idols. They lost the blessing of the Lord and were sold into subjection to other nations. When they called on the Lord, He heard them and raised up judges to deliver them. This cycle lasted until Samuel was called. Samuel had the Word of the Lord to give to the people. Under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, Samuel was able to apply God's truth to the people. He prophetically spoke to his people in his time. He spoke God's word with boldness.

People of God face a variety of temptations. One of them is to take on the belief systems of the culture in which they live. Often the culture has practices and expectations that are contrary to the Bible. God's call for His people is to come out of their culture into the Christian community. The preacher is to be like Samuel in calling the people away from the pagan ways of the present culture. He is to speak God's Word with boldness. He must point out where the culture is in violation of God's law. And he must call the people to decide to follow God's Word instead of following cultural norms. "Choose you this day whom ye will serve."

Friday

Week 21

Review the Week's Questions

Q 81 What did the children of Israel do after Joshua died?

A. They forsook the Lord and served false gods.

Q 82 What helped to cause Israel to serve false gods?

A. They married women who were unbelievers.

Q 83 How did people decide what to do in the days of the Judges

A. They did what was right in their own eyes.

Q 84 Why did God call Samuel?

A. God called Samuel to be a prophet of the Lord in Israel.

It was recess time and the students were playing scooter dodge ball. While they dashed around on scooters, they threw the ball to get others out. A boy was hit by a ball that was thrown by a girl. As he sat at the sidelines watching, he said "Get her!" The teacher who saw the whole thing looked at the boy and said one word: "Revenge." He knew that the teacher was right. He wanted revenge on the girl that had gotten him out. He also knew that his feeling was wrong. It was a game to be played by certain rules and she had played by the rules. He should not have those bad feelings toward her just because he lost the game. It hadn't occurred to him that his feelings were wrong until the teacher said that one word.

Without the Word of God being spoken to them, Israel did what was right in their own eyes. God sent Samuel to give them His Word. When they heard the Word of the Lord, then they knew that their ways were wrong. God sends us His Word so that we can know the difference between right and wrong. "Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me" (Ps. 119:133).

Thinking Deeper

A young man was trying to build a wall with mortar and rocks. He mixed the mortar with water and began putting the rocks in place. After some time, he checked the strength of the wall. To his dismay, he found that the wall crumbled with a slight amount of pressure. What could be wrong? On checking, he found that instead of mortar he had been using a bag of gray lime. It looked like mortar, but had no strength at all. He had to start over, making sure he had mortar, not lime. When he got the real thing, the wall was strong, and stayed in place for years.

When Israel was doing what was right in their own eyes, they invariably did what was wrong. They had no strength under pressure. Their spiritual life was devastated. Without being built on the solid foundation of the Word of God, they crumbled in the face of opposition. They needed to be brought back to the reality that only that nation is blessed whose God is the Lord. God called Samuel to proclaim His word to Israel.

Invariably, spiritual movements that are significant have a man of God calling people back to the Word. Luther led Europe's Protestant Reformation with the phrase "sola scriptura." Wesley became known as a man of "One Book."

If a man will lead his family in godly ways, that man will be a man who brings them to the Word of God. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."