

The Doctrine Of Israel (Part Three): A Cycle Of Rebellion

A Carnal People

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Human life is a succession of habitual behaviors. We all have habits. In fact, our daily lives are constructed and driven by habits. Once we open our eyes in the morning, our rituals, our habits take over, they kick in. We do the same things, normally, each morning once we wake up and we have probably done those things perhaps for years or even decades. We just get into a habit of doing those same things every day. We rise, we put on our socks, we go to the bathroom, we make coffee, we pray, study, exercise, eat, shower, go to work, or whatever. Those are just things that came off the top of my head that probably most people in the church would do. We have similar habits at work, usually tackling things in a systematic way, because that is the typical structure and flow that we have imposed on our work and our work time.

So we enjoy our routines and we may even feel totally out of sorts if they get interrupted. We might not know what to do and kind of twiddle our thumbs and have to really sit down and think about what we are going to do next. And once we commute home we typically do the same things when we get home. We may eat dinner, do some housework, read, watch tv, brush our teeth, pray, go to bed, or whatever your routine may be. We do those same things every day, and though our schedules vary from time to time, maybe our weekend habits are a little different from our weekday habits, those things happen. A lot of times our schedules vary only because of circumstances outside of our control. We would rather, most of us, go along our habitual way and do the same things over and over again. So we tend as human beings to organize our lives through these habitual behaviors.

When I was a kid, I was amazed by my grandfather. I am talking about my mom's dad, we called him Pappy, like my dad is called by his grandchildren. But Pappy was really habitual. (My dad's very habitual as well.) He was about 80 years old at the time when I really got to know him and his whole life revolved around his routines. I am sure he got up and went to bed about

the same time every day. He had the same breakfast—he had coffee and two shredded wheat biscuits every morning. He had the same lunch, soft boiled eggs and toast every noon, at least that is how I remember it. Dinner was a bit more varied, but I believe, knowing them, that it was pretty straightforward, probably a lot of the same things every week. One of his favorite sayings to go along with that is, "when you find a good rut, stay in it" or stick with it, or however it was.

Now, parent's habits are oftentimes picked up by their children, to a certain extent. They are individuals, they are going to vary themselves to their own needs and wants. But after a while you have enough children and this goes on for long enough, they become family traits, and after a few generations, a handful of them become family traditions. And a few of them, after a few more years, become etched in stone and they become "the way things are done around here" or "we've always done it this way" and there is just no other.

Let us expand this out beyond the family or the clan or the tribe, and soon those things become national or even multinational characteristics. It becomes the American way, or it becomes the traditional Japanese way of life, or these are Slavic customs, or this is Spanish tradition, and so forth. They all began as habits and family traits and became characteristics of whole peoples. In this way, these habits and traditional behaviors become markers or identifiers of certain people.

We know Germans for their meticulous engineering. It just seems like a national trait. The French for their wine and cheeses, the Dutch for their clean and efficient lifestyles, the English for their pluck and their stiff upper lip. We Americans have a reputation for rugged individualism and work ethic. The Japanese are known for honor and their attention to detail, the Indians for their social hierarchy and their exotic traditions. Australians, they are also kind of a rugged people, but they are known for their rugged adventurism, their fraternal spirit—they always call each other mate—and their sense of humor. All of these are biased generalities of course. But national characteristics are a real thing.

Nations are, by the Bible's definition, just families grown large.

Let us go to Genesis 49, if you will. We will read the first seven verses in Genesis 49. We should not be surprised to see family characteristics of the nation of Israel in Scripture. They are put there by God for our learning so that we can understand what is going on. We are going to read this prophecy from Jacob in Genesis 49. I want you to notice what he says here in the first verse.

Genesis 49:1 And Jacob called his sons and said, "Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in the last days."

So this is what would happen to the people of Israel, of the various tribes, thousands of years in the future. At least about 3,500 years into the future. By this time obviously they were not just individual sons of Jacob with their small families, but they were whole nations. And so he lists here what the characteristics of these particular nations, having grown from these tribes, would be like in the last days.

Genesis 49:2-7 "Gather together and hear, you sons of Jacob, and listen to Israel your father. Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity and the excellency of power. Unstable as water, you shall not excel, because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled it—he went up to my couch. Simeon and Levi are brothers; instruments of cruelty are in their dwelling place. Let not my soul enter their council; let not my honor be united to their assembly; for in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will, they hamstrung an ox. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel."

We are just going to go through those three sons of Jacob because the rest of the chapter is similar.

But God shows here in this prophecy that these particular tribes as they grow into nations will have certain characteristics. By that we have been able to perhaps identify these nations on the world scene today. We think Reuben is France and they have something about them, about this honor and excellency

of dignity, the excellency of power. But they have been unstable and they have never been able to make that first rung of nations. And when they have it slipped back very quickly.

Simeon and Levi, we are not exactly sure where they are. Levi was scattered in Israel, but who knows where they are specifically. I have some guesses, I will not say them now, but they are known for being very cruel and warlike. Jacob says, I do not want to be part of their councils because that is just how they are there. You know, God made the Levites the butchers of Israel. How many sacrifices did they slaughter? It was a way to turn their cruelty and their harshness into a good channel.

But here we see national characteristics. We could have also gone to Deuteronomy the 33rd chapter where Moses does the same thing. He says he was going to show the children of Israel what their tribes would be in the last days. So these ideas of national characteristics come out clearly in the pages of the Bible.

If we were to take the time, we could see distinguishing features between the kingdom of Israel in the north and the kingdom of Judah in the south. They were different peoples. They were all Israelites, but the Israelites in the north and the Judahites in the south had a different way of approaching things. Actually they only coexisted in the land as the Northern Kingdom and Southern Kingdom for about 400 years. That is a relatively short time. And if we are astute enough, we can figure out the traits of certain individual tribes within Israel and Judah and those traits later became national characteristics once they had multiplied into the size of a nation.

In the Bible, God highlights certain characteristics of Israel that loomed large to Him in His dealings with them over the centuries. Now, chief among them is their highly independent and rebellious nature. They are deceitful—I am talking about all Israel here—cunning, and disloyal. They cannot keep their word, even to God, which is why, despite being led by righteous men and women down through the centuries, they always turned from God to go their own ways. Now they had some good characteristics too. I will not go into them today because they do not matter as much as the bad ones for my topic right now.

This is the third in a series of sermons that I have been giving on the doctrine of Israel and this one is about the character traits of Israel and the cycle of rebellion that this character trait of theirs produced. But before we go any further on this, I would like to clear up something pertaining to the Old Covenant, which was my subject last time. So if you would please go to Galatians 3, and this kind of blends with my subject. I am not really going off on a tangent here. It will end up helping, I think, the rest of the sermon as well.

Galatians 3:15-19 Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though it is only a man's covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it. Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one. "And to your Seed," who is Christ. And this I say, that the law, which is four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer a promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise. What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator.

Paul speaks here of three different things. Though there is some overlap among them, those three things are the promise, the covenant, and the law. They are not necessarily the same things. It is easy to become confused about these terms if we are not careful. Now, the promise is God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 and verse 7, and His subsequent promises to Isaac and Jacob, but specifically the one to Abraham. That He would give the Promised Land to his Seed, and through his Seed all the earth would be blessed.

That was the original promise there in Genesis 12. That is what God said. Go into this country that I will show you, and then He says, "I will make of you a great nation" and all of these things. That was the promise. Specifically the promise of a seed that would inherit the land. And Paul makes clear here that he was talking of one Seed, one particular Seed. It is singular. So what he is talking about is that the promise speaks of Christ.

Now the covenant that he mentions here is specifically the formal agreement God made with *Abraham*, not with Israel, but with Abraham in Genesis 15 and 17. That if Abraham walked blamelessly before God, He would bless him. And all these promises would then be fulfilled in his descendants.

Those are the two things, two of those three. The promise and the covenant. The promise and the covenant, I just want to make sure you understand this, are Abrahamic. That is, they occurred 400 years before the giving of the law. They are in that generation, not in the generation of the people who came out of Egypt.

Now we get to the law. The law, which he specifically says was four centuries later, is what we call the Old Covenant. That is the law that he means here. Paul says it was added because of transgressions. God did not need to do that with Abraham because Abraham kept the law. He kept the commandments. You could look at that in Genesis 26:5. So there were not transgressions multiplied that He needed to correct with Abraham, but He did with the Israelites.

What are the transgressions that he means here that the law was added because of? Well, it is simply the Israelites' transgressions throughout their sojourn in Egypt. Between the lives of Joseph and Moses, the Israelites had forgotten the ways of Abraham, who kept God's commandments. They forgot the way of God that He had taught them through the patriarchs, and they had absorbed the culture and the mores of Egypt, which were full of wickedness and transgression. And so God added the law, that is, the Old Covenant, so that they could work with Him and He with them. The Old Covenant retaught Israel His standards of right and wrong.

First, He gave them the Ten Commandments, His overall spiritual and physical principles that people are to live by. And then He gave the rest of the Covenant which spoke on more specific things. God felt that those things were necessary for He and them to be on the same page as far as what He expected from them. So what God was doing in adding the law, or the Old Covenant, was removing their ignorance about what He expected of them.

See, had He just gone on and said, we will make this agreement without giving the law to add to them, well, they could come back later and say we did not know what You expected of us. You did not give us any standards that we should live by. But no, He did. He gave them the Ten Commandments and He also gave them the rest of the law in the Old Covenant, so that should they break God's law, which of course they were going to, they would have to understand that they would face certain penalties for their sins. And so they could not accuse Him, once He gave the law, of failing to inform them of their responsibilities under the covenant.

A lot of times we look back and we do not realize the time element in all of this between what God gave to Abraham and then was carried down through Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Then there is this long gap where nothing was taught except Egyptian stuff, at least formally. And so after, I think it was 215 years that they were in slavery, or right around that. How many generations is that? Well, at twenty years to a generation or so, that would be ten generations, right? It was not quite that much because they lived longer back then and their generations were longer, but it was still several generations of Israelites who were in captivity and they had lost a lot of that knowledge that had been taught through the patriarchs. And so they needed a refresher course, and that is essentially what the Old Covenant is. It is a refresher to Israel about what God expects of His people.

This refresher course, the Old Covenant, gave them the knowledge that they would need in order to work with God, and know what the blessings were on the one hand, and the curses were on the other, so that they were entirely straight about what God wanted from them.

This point becomes vital in the relationship between God and Israel over the course of the Old Testament, and it is vital to our topic today. The codification of the law in the Old Covenant made it impossible for the Israelites to plead ignorance. They knew God made it very clear what was expected of them. They knew through the Old Covenant what His standards were—and are—and so when they repeatedly broke His laws and forsook the covenant and forgot Him, He was entirely justified by the terms of the covenant itself to enact the penalties that they had agreed to and ratified in blood.

God just said, "Okay, look here, this is what it says in the covenant. This is what you've done. Now I am perfectly justified in doing what I'm doing to your people because you abrogated your half of the covenant. And so I can do this now." His reaction was legal, as it were.

Let us go to Deuteronomy 9 and I am going to hop, skip, and jump through this chapter because I want you to see very clearly that God knew what He was getting into with Israel. I just want you to hear from God Himself through Moses. This is Moses speaking, but God is inspiring him to recount their rebellions.

Deuteronomy 9:1-4 "Hear, O Israel: You are to cross over the Jordan today, and go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than yourself, cities great and fortified up to heaven, a people great and tall, the descendants of the Anakim, whom you know and of whom you heard it said, 'Who can stand before the descendants of Anak?' Therefore understand today that the Lord your God is He who goes over before you as a consuming fire. He will destroy them and bring them down before you; so you shall drive them out and destroy them quickly, as the Lord has said to you."

This is what God wanted to do for them. He was willing to do this. Let us go drop down to verse 6.

Deuteronomy 9:6-8 "Therefore understand that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stiff-necked people. Remember! Do not forget how you provoked the Lord your God to wrath in the wilderness. From the day that you departed from the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the Lord. Also in Horeb, you provoked the Lord to wrath so that the Lord was angry enough with you to have destroyed you."

Deuteronomy 9:13 "Furthermore the Lord spoke to me, saying, "I have seen this people, and indeed they are a stiff-necked people."

Deuteronomy 9:18-19 "And I fell down before the Lord, as at the first, forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all your sin which you committed in doing wickedly in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. [This is obviously the aftermath of the Golden Calf situation.] For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the Lord was angry with you, to destroy you. But the Lord listened to me at that time also."

Deuteronomy 9:23-24 "Likewise, when the Lord sent you from Kadesh Barnea, saying, 'Go up and possess the land which I have given you,' then you rebelled against the commandment of the Lord your God, and you did not believe Him nor obey His voice. You have been rebellious against the Lord from the day that I knew you."

That is as far as we need to go. It is clear that from the beginning, God knew what kind of people the Israelites were. Few of them, and I would say *very* few of them, rose to the level of righteousness of a person like Abraham or Isaac or Jacob, and together, all the millions of them, the Israelites were a mess. They were a steaming cauldron of rebellion and disobedience. Especially, they were idolatrous, because they always wanted to be like the other nations. They did not want to be different. They wanted to be like Assyria. They wanted to be like Egypt. They wanted to be like Philistia or the Hittites.

They thought God's way was too restrictive. He made them do such strange things that the other nations did not have to do. They could not eat pig. They could not do certain things. They had to wear funny clothes. To them, it was probably embarrassing to be so different. Another thing is that even when they tried to do what God wanted them to do, they lacked the self-control to stick with it for very long. In the end, they thought God was holding them back.

What I have just given you in the last minute or so is the essence of what they told Samuel in I Samuel 8. We want a king like other nations. We want to do like they do. We do not want God to rule over us. He says specifically,

"Let them have it, Sam. They have not rejected you, they have rejected Me." But that was just the Israelite way. But God, like I said, had pegged them as being this kind of people from the very beginning.

Did you notice that he said to them that they had no righteousness? The Canaanites were just more wicked by comparison. He replaced the wickedness of the Amorites with the wickedness of His own people, just not as bad at that point. He called them stiff-necked, which is a metaphor for stubbornness and rebellion. They were unwilling to yield to God and to conform to His ways and commandments just about at any point in their history. They always found a way to squirm out of things or they made justifications for doing so. And Moses confirms this in verse 24 by saying that they had been rebellious from the very first instance of him having to work with them. "You have been rebellious against the Lord from the day that I knew you," and God could say the same thing.

What we understand from this, what we read here in Deuteronomy 9, is that the Israelites were not special of themselves. There was nothing about the Israelites that made them any especially good or righteous or whatever. What set them apart and what made them special was God's love for them. It was because of His promise to the patriarchs. If you want to look at that in black and white, that is in Deuteronomy 7:6-8. He says they were not any special people. They were not the greatest people. As a matter of fact, they were the least of all people. But He loved them because of the patriarchs and what He had promised to the patriarchs.

It was God's separation of them from other nations, what we might call His calling of Israel, that made them special. It was God's act that made them special. Apart from their connection to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Israelites were typical ungodly, unreceptive, lawless human beings just like everybody else. We could call them every man, every human being without the Spirit of God.

And though God wanted them to be the example nation to the rest of the world of a people who worship the true God, that is what He tells them in Deuteronomy the fourth chapter, they instead became an example of typical human carnality—the exact opposite of what He was actually trying to produce. And that, even with the advantages of God's covenantal blessings

and oversight. You would have thought that a people who were led by God, given His law, and given the blessings and the advantages that He gave them, they would end up being something good and special and great. Well, they had that potential but it did not work out that way.

They ended up being an example of how *not* to do it. God set them up for abundance and prestige and power but through their own selfishness and rebellion they provoked God to wrath and received the curses for disobedience instead. It is really a sad, sad story of the people who had so much, and so much potential, and they ended up squandering everything.

So instead of being the example nation, they became a teaching vehicle, a warning example to mankind of the human tendencies of people apart from God. Yet God still loves them, as Deuteronomy 7:7-8 declares, and He will save them, eventually, as we see in the book of Romans,

Let us go to Deuteronomy 32, please. It is the Song of Moses, and it is one of my favorite pieces of Scripture. I refer to it often. But I want you to notice how God describes Israel in this prophetic song, We are going to read verses 5-6 and then 13-20. He is speaking about Israel.

Deuteronomy 32:5-6 "They have corrupted themselves; they are not His children, because of their blemish; a perverse and crooked generation. Do you thus deal with the Lord, O foolish and unwise people? Is He not your Father who bought you? Has He not made you and established you?"

Deuteronomy 32:13-20 "He [that is God] made him [Israel] ride in the heights of the earth, that he might eat the produce of the fields; He made him to draw honey from the rock, and oil from the flinty rock; curds from the cattle, and milk of the flock, with fat of lambs; and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the choicest wheat; you drank wine, the blood of the grapes. [So all these things, all these advantages God gave them.] But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked; you grew fat, you grew thick, you were obese! Then he forsook God who made him, and scornfully esteemed the Rock of his salvation. They provoked Him to jealousy with foreign gods; with abominations they provoked Him to anger. They sacrificed to

demons, not to God, to gods they did not know, to new gods, new arrivals, that your fathers did not fear. Of the Rock who begot you, you are unmindful, and have forgotten the God who fathered you. And when the Lord saw it, He spurned them, because of the provocation of His sons and His daughters. And He said, 'I will hide My face from them, I will see what their end will be, for they are a perverse generation, children in whom is no faith.'

It is quite a condemnation. Did you notice the words he used to describe them? First, He says they are not His children, there is nothing like Him. That is what He means there. Normally, children take after their parents. But in this case the children of Israel did not behave either like Israel, meaning Jacob, or like God Himself. So He says they did this because of their blemish. Interesting, very interesting. It is like an unfit sacrificial animal. They have a blemish, they cannot be used for God's purposes because of the blemish.

They are crooked and perverse. They forsook God. They turned their back on Him and esteemed Him scornfully, or lightly. They provoked Him through idolatry, through new gods, new arrivals, He says. They were unmindful of Him. They did not bring Him to mind, He was not in their thoughts, they soon forgot God altogether. And finally He says there, they have no faith.

We can sum all this up with one word. They were carnal through and through. Their carnality was what was showing to everybody else, especially to God. They were just totally carnal people. They were carnal as the day is long.

But what God is getting at here is that in their perverse and forgetful way of thinking, they never trusted Him, "children in whom is no faith." *They never trusted Him.* They never could remember all of the good things He had done for them. It was like out of sight, out of mind. Thus they could not be loyal to Him. If you do not trust somebody and you do not remember the good things that they do for you, are you going to trust somebody? No. It was like a new experience for them every time and they had to relearn any kind of trust of God. And it was very shallow.

They were always failing Him. They were always going after the desires of their own hearts rather than seeking God. Amos says, "Seek God and live." Well, that never happened. Never happened in Israel because their constant attitude was, "What have You done for me lately, God?" "Why don't you come at my command, God?" This is what the Bible calls testing or tempting or provoking God, expecting Him to jump when they call. Their attitude was, "Why do you demand so much from us? Just give us what we want and we'll be happy." They thought of God as a genie. All you have to do is rub the lamp and you get three wishes. They thought He was there to do miracles for them whenever they ask for it. And God is not to be used that way.

Let us go to Judges the 2nd chapter. We will read verses 10-23. Now here, the author of Judges, presumably it was Samuel, lays out the cycle of Israel's life under the rule of God. And this is rather interesting. Here he is speaking about the generation of Joshua and those that had ruled with him in the first part of the period there.

Judges 2:10-23 When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel. Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals; and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the Lord to anger. They forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel. So He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. Wherever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for calamity, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn to them. And they were greatly distressed.

Nevertheless, the Lord raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them. Yet they would not listen to their judges, but they played the harlot with other gods, and bowed down to them. They turned quickly from the way in which their fathers walked, in obeying the commandments of the Lord; they

did not do so. And when the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed them. And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn way. Then the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel; and He said, "Because this nation has transgressed My covenant, which I commanded their fathers, and has not heeded My voice, I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, so that through them I may test Israel, whether they will keep the ways of the Lord, to walk in them as their fathers kept them, or not." Therefore the Lord left those nations, without driving them out immediately; nor did He deliver them into the hand of Joshua.

What we have here (I am just presuming Samuel wrote this) is Samuel's summary of the period, how it worked out during that period of time. And if we believe the Israelites came into the land at about 1400 BC, this would go all the way down to the time of Saul in the 11th Century BC. It is a period of around 400 years—from 1400 to about 1000 or so. So what we see here is Samuel's description of a cycle that Israel went through time after time, generation after generation. It is a cycle of rebellion.

What would happen is that the people of Israel would follow God as long as there was a righteous leader as judge over them, a judge who would model and enforce conformity to God's law. A strong man of some sort of the likes of Jephthah or even Samson. Samson had his faults, but he was one of those. Of course, Samuel was one of them as well. And many of the other judges, like Deborah with Barak. So there were, in this period, quite a number of righteous people, people that God called to deliver His people and to teach them His way.

But soon after that judge died, and no one righteous succeeded him or her, the people returned to the foreign gods, the Baals and the Ashtoreths whom their Canaanite neighbors worshipped. Now these idols of wood and metal,

stone, for some reason, to these Israelites, seemed more real to them than the living God. It is one of the great ironies of history. Now, what is more, these foreign gods of wood and stone and metal also satisfied their carnality in their perverse worship practices, because many of them were rather sexual in nature. And because they were lifeless, those gods could not punish them. To them it was the best of both worlds, was it not? In their perverse mindset, they were safer worshipping the gods of the Canaanites than they were the God of Israel. They could have their cake and eat it too, as it were.

Once this happened, God would become angry at their defection and He would allow foreign nations to invade and plunder and wound and kill the Israelites for a period of time, until they got to the point where they were ready to cry out to God for deliverance. Now, what God did there in sending these foreign nations against them was entirely just, as we mentioned before, because the terms of the covenant, which we read last time in the last half of Exodus 23, gave God permission to punish them for forsaking and forgetting Him. He could do that. He told them to beware of the Angel, remember in Exodus 23. Because that Angel not only led them and would fight for them, but if they forsook Him, then He would turn around and fight against them.

So, this warning against them, this idea that He could punish them for their transgressions and their rebellions, it is all throughout the Pentateuch. I mean, just think about the blessings and curses of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. Those are: if you do good, if you obey Me, I will make these blessings fall upon you. But if you turn away from Me, I will bring on these calamities. And God means it when He talks like that. God means it when He talks at all. So they knew that this would happen to them. God is faithful to His covenant. He abides by the terms. And if the other party does not do what it is supposed to, He kicks in and does what He is supposed to, because God is a very faithful, loyal God to His covenant.

So when Israel sinned grievously and constantly, national calamity was not far off because that is the way God works. And unfortunately that was their frequent state—that they were rebelling against Him. Like I said, invariably, Israel would cry out to God to deliver them. So He would raise a judge, He would find another person to work with for that purpose of delivering them out of the harm that these foreign nations were inflicting upon them. The judge would set things straight.

Sometimes there was a kind of national repentance and God would back the judge throughout his lifetime. Forty years of this judge or the twenty years of that judge, things were peaceful in Israel and then he died and things started to go to hell in a handbasket again. But once he died, all bets were off. Once the judge died, it was pretty likely that the Israelites would turn back to those foreign gods and the cycle would start over. They would invariably rebel again. They would turn to the gods of the Canaanites, the Philistines, the Egyptians, the Assyrians, you name it, the Babylonians, and it would happen again.

So these are the four steps that I have come up with here:

Step One: the judge delivers Israel and there is some sort of repentance perhaps. So, until the judge dies, there is peace and conformity to God's law.

Step Two: the people defect and rebel by going into idolatry.

Step Three: God chastens the Israelites with foreign nations in war and some other calamity.

Step Four: the people cry out and God raises the judge who delivers them.

This happens over and over and over and this cycle repeats endlessly and it has actually not stopped. This cycle will repeat until Christ returns. He is the final Judge to be raised and He is going to set things straight for all time by being King of kings and Lord of lords. So we could say this is still happening today. It actually occurred all through the period of the kings as well. You have a good king, things would go okay and then they fall into idolatry after that king died and the cycle would continue on and God would have to punish them with a foreign nation of some sort, whether it was Assyria or Philistia, or Syria or Babylon, and then He would raise up a righteous king and cycle would continue.

Like I said, this same cycle of rebellion and then God having to intervene is still happening today with the nations of Israel although it is not on the same scale or intensity, not as clear, I guess you could say. Aric and Beth and I were recently discussing the various American religious revivals. I do not

know how we got on the subject, but in the time that Americans have been here on this continent, there have been four major religious revivals, and in a way they show a similar cycle of national repentance and then they go downhill and God has to usually cause a war to happen to get people to turn.

I do not know if you are aware of these religious revivals, but they kind of fit in very neatly with various wars that we have had and various other calamities. Like the first great awakening was in the 1730s and early 1740s with Jonathan Edwards and John and Charles Wesley and George Whitfield. You might recognize some of those names. That happened just before the French and Indian war and of course before the Revolutionary War.

The second great awakening was in the early 19th century from about 1820 and 1850, and that was right between the War of 1812 and the Civil War, right in that that area. It spawned the temperance movement, the abolitionist movement, women's rights, the Salvation Army, the Adventist movement, and even the YMCA came out of that second grade awakening.

The third great awakening was after the Civil War in the 1870s and 1880s, and that mostly centered on the work of Dwight Moody in Chicago.

And then there was, in the early 20th century, the Azusa Street Revival. It has also been called the fourth great awakening or the 20th Century Revival. That was in the 1900s and early 19-teens and then just went on. The main preacher there was William J. Seymour, and at that time there was an explosion of what we now call Pentecostalism in the early 1900s. That later morphed into the teaching of Billy Sunday and then later on Billy Graham.

So in effect that fourth great awakening took most of the 20th century. It had its ups and downs, it probably ended in about 1980 or so, but this fourth great awakening with Billy Graham went not only nationwide but worldwide, and we are still seeing a lot of it today. Pentecostalism is just all over the globe now and it is just kind of interesting. That is a bit of a sidelight, but it is another cycle that you see of these revivals interspersed between wars and various other calamities. The 20th Century Revival or the fourth great awakening, or whatever you want to call it, had two World Wars

and a depression in there. So there was enough bad things, enough calamities going on that it made people start to turn to God for answers, and then we had the 70s and 80s and 90s and things have been going downhill ever since.

I just wanted to say that in terms of, just like the Israelites, Americans tend to blow hot and cold when it comes to religion. It might not be on the same scale as the Israelites' cycle, but they indicate a similar-functioning attitude toward God. There is no consistency and very little growth, if at all. As a matter of fact, Americans tend to be very good at backsliding. That is why they have to have such frequent revivals to try to jack them up again every once in a while.

Let us move on to Judges the 21st chapter. I just want one verse here.

Judges 21:25 In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

This is also repeated in chapter 17, verse 6. This is the theme of the book of Judges and it nicely sums up Israel's attitude toward God. God was their King, but they acted as if He were not their King. But I do not think we should limit this theme to the book of Judges or just to the period of the judges, because Israel never really accepted the sovereignty of God over them. And you see, as soon as they got to Samuel, they ditched God. (I Samuel 8) They were too eager to do their own thing. They wanted to go their own way. They did not want to have anybody, even the great God of the universe, telling them what to do.

It has always been a problem with Israelites, they have got this singular rebellious streak that is just so independent. They do not want to have any strict restrictions on what they can do. Israelites have always wanted to set their own standards of right and wrong, and they want to be beholden to no one. They just have the strong, stubborn independent streak, even in the face of God's promised abundant blessings for obedience and submission to Him. It is one of the great quotations from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, who puts these words into Satan's mouth but they essentially are words that could describe any Israelite: "Better to reign in hell than to serve in heaven." It is

kind of how the Israelites have always been as a whole. There were exceptions, of course, but they would rather be their own person rather than submit to God.

I know I am being pretty harsh on Israel. But this is what God saying. They always wanted to do what was right to them, not to God. As a matter of fact, God always comes way, way down the list of people they are trying to impress, which is very sad.

Let us go to Jeremiah 32 and we will begin to wrap up here. We will read verses 26-35. This is about the destruction of Jerusalem. Now we have jumped forward another 400 years from the time of Samuel and Saul. So now we are we are about at the time when Jerusalem is to be destroyed. Just notice the similarities here to how He is describing them as we saw in Deuteronomy.

Jeremiah 32:26-35 Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying, "Behold I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me? Therefore, thus says the Lord: 'Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the Chaldeans, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he shall take it. And the Chaldeans who fight against this city shall come and set fire to this city and burn it, with the houses on whose roofs they have offered incense to Baal and poured out drink offerings to other gods, to provoke Me to anger [Now notice this]; because the children of Israel and the children of Judah have done only evil before Me from their youth. For the children of Israel have provoked Me only to anger with the work of their hands,' says the Lord.

'For this city has been to Me a provocation of My anger and My fury from the day that they built it, even to this day. So I will remove it from before My face because of all the evil of the children of Israel and the children of Judah, which they have done to provoke Me to anger—they, their kings, their princes, their priests, their prophets, the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And they have turned to Me the back, and not the face; though I taught them, rising up early and teaching them, yet they have not listened to receive instruction. But they have set their

abominations in the house which is called by My name, to defile it. And they built the high places of Baal which are in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I did not command them, nor did it come into My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.'

This was the height of Israelite wickedness at the time of the Babylonian invasion. Did you notice that there was no change in all these years, 800 or more years since the time of Joshua and Moses. That from that time, the youth of Israel was that time when they came out of Egypt, and he says they have done only evil before Me from their youth. They have provoked Me only to anger, the works of their hands.

I sounded harsh about Israel. God is harsher. He says this time and time again that they are sinful, they are rebellious, they are stiff-necked, they are independent. They will not submit, they will not even admit they are wrong. They forget Him and they forsake Him. They always run after idols and they never do what He tells them to do.

I find what He says here in Jeremiah 32 to be a pretty definitive statement about the characteristics of national Israel. Throughout their entire history under the Old Covenant they sinned continuously, even during the times when they had good kings, good judges, and good prophets. Their sins mounted up year after year until God was absolutely sick of them. And He reacted with just punishment to destroy them because of their disloyalty to Him and to the covenant. He could not take it anymore. He was weary of it. It was time for something new.

This is why Paul says in Hebrews 8:8 that the Old Covenant had to be set aside because of the problem. The blemish. Remember that word from earlier in the sermon, the blemish that was in them—the people. The pot was spoiled from the very beginning. The stew was ruined because of that blemish, as it were. It could not be fixed, not without the infusion of the Spirit of God. And that was not to come until Jesus Christ.

So next time we are going to look into God's reaction a little bit deeper. I am going to also go into some of the physical and spiritual metaphors that God

uses in the Bible to explain their relationship and the ultimate divorce that occurred.