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Cycles of Rebellion and Retribution

2:11 to 3:6

Cycles of rebellion and retribution DIG: As you read this section, pay close attention to the cycle of rebellion, retribution, restoration. What factors contribute to a person or group abandoning ADONAI? What does God's providing a deliverer tell you about His character? What was the key to Israelite victory?

REFLECT: What idols or false ideas compete for your loyalty and attention? How is our society like the days of the Judges? How is today's Church like those days? What temptations do God's people face today that cause them to serve other gods? When and how has God tested you? How is your faith stronger as a result?

When a generation tolerates sin, the next generation will celebrate it, and the next generation after them won't even know it's sin (J. C. Ryle 1816-1900).



Had **they** remembered **Joshua**, the **Israelites** would have remembered **his** “farewell address” given to **the leaders** and **the people of Isra’el** (see the commentary on **Joshua**, **to see link click Cs - Joshua’s Farewell Address**). Had **they** known that speech, they would have known **the Torah**, for in **his** final message, **Joshua** emphasized the covenant **ADONAI** made with **Isra’el** and the responsibility to keep it. When you forget about **the Word of God**, you are in danger of abandoning **the God of the Word**, which explains why **Isra’el** turned to the vile and vicious worship of Ba’al.⁵¹

Rebellion: Idolatry (2:11-13): Another generation grew up who did not know **ADONAI** or remember the mighty things He had done for **Isra’el** (2:10). The children of **Isra’el** did evil in the sight of **ADONAI** and served the images of **Ba’al**, the sun and fertility **god** who was responsible for the rains and brought life (2:11 Hebrew). **How tragic that the children of such a loving God should sink to idolatry.** **Isra’el’s** loss of historical memory helps to explain **their** rebellion. It is a heartbreaking report that we read: **They abandoned ADONAI, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt, and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them** (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Bl - Have No Other Gods**) (2:12 Hebrew). **The sin was**

twofold. Not only did they abandon God who had been their Protector and given them their new national home, but they adopted the worship of strange gods. The very description reveals **Isra'el's** ingratitude. **YHVH** is called **the God of our fathers (First Chronicles 29:18)**. There is no reason to limit **their fathers** to the **Exodus generation**; the term may well be intended to include the patriarchs. All the pre-**Exodus** stories (beginning with **Exodus 12**) highlight **ADONAI's** faithful preservation of **His** fragile people (**Psalms 105:12-15**). Otherwise there would have been no **Isra'el**. Moreover, **YHVH** is **the One who brought them out of the land of Egypt (Exodus 20:2; Deuteronomy 5:6; Leviticus 22:33)**. What but the death and resurrection of **Messiah** could compare with that? That was **God's** mighty act on behalf of a hopeless people. **Isra'el** had abandoned **YHVH! And they provoked Ha'Shem to anger because they abandoned Him and served Ba'al and the Ashtoreth**, the Canaanite goddess of fertility and war (**2:13**).

The Bible is clear; spiritual amnesia produces apostasy. That is why **the Word of God** is so determined that the Church not forget what **ADONAI** has done for us (**4:9-14** and **6:10-19**). So **Jeremiah** diagnosed faithless **Isra'el**: **They didn't ask: Where is ADONAI, who brought us out of the land of Egypt, who brought us safely out of Egypt and led us through the barren wilderness, through a land of deserts and ravines, a land of drought and utter darkness, a land where no one travels and no one lives (Jer 2:6)**. When we allow either **God's** quiet keeping, or **His** dramatic rescue of us to slip into oblivion, we are on our way toward **Ba'al**.⁵²

Retribution: Divine Judgment (2:14-15): The Israelites ignored **Joshua's** charge to faithfully worship **the LORD**. Instead, they broke the commitment **they** had made at **Shechem** (see **Joshua Ct - The Renewal of the Covenant**). It was inconceivable that after everything **ADONAI** had done for **them**, **they** abandoned **Him!** What **the Israelites** did was a breach of trust.⁵³ **In His anger against Isra'el, Ha'Shem** had become **Isra'el's enemy** and **He handed them over**, literally *sold them*, **to raiders who stole their possessions. He turned them over to their enemies all around, and they were no longer able to resist them** as they had done in the days of **Joshua. Whenever Isra'el went out to fight, Ha'Shem was against them, causing them to be defeated, just as He had warned (2:14-15 NLT)**. Rather than destroying **the Canaanites**, **they** tried to establish a peaceful coexistence with **them**, thus exposing **themselves** to **Canaanite** religious and cultural influences. **James** reminds us that **anyone who**

chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God (James 4:4b).

Restoration: By the Judges (2:16-18): But then ADONAI raised up judges, who rescued (Hebrew: *yasha*) them from the power of those who were plundering them (2:16 CJB). One would think that when the Israelites witnessed God raise up judges to rescue them, they would have realized the only way to be protected would be to repent. **Instead, they didn't pay attention to their judges, but instead they committed spiritual adultery with other gods and worshiped them** only a few years after the death of the elders. **Isra'el is the wife of ADONAI (Isaiah 54:5; Jeremiah 31:32; Hosea 2:19-20), and the gods of their new worship were lusty fertility gods, whose worship included erotic, cultic rituals. And Isra'el's enthusiasm was seen by the fact that they quickly turned away from the path on which their ancestors had walked, and failed to obey ADONAI's mitzvot. When ADONAI raised up judges for them, He was the judge and rescued them from the hands of their enemies for as long as he judged. For ADONAI was moved to pity by their groaning under those oppressing and crushing them (2:17-18 CJB).**

Rebellion: Return to Idolatry (2:19): But when the judge died, the people returned to their corrupt ways, being even more corrupt than those of their ancestors, following other gods, serving and worshiping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways (2:19 NIV). Each generation outdid the previous generation in their Canaanization, spiraling downward into even worse apostasy. There was indeed a cyclical pattern of decline and rise during the period of the judges, but the cycles themselves devolved on a downward pattern. The patterns repeat themselves, but, the behavior of the Israelites intensifies so that each time Isra'el repented, it did not reach the spiritual level of the previous ones. Over the course of time, the apostasy grew worse until judges, such as Jephthah and Samson, became part of the problem, if not the cause of the problem, as with Gideon. The judges, then, represented a stop-gap intervention by YHVH into the repeated process of Canaanization,⁵⁴ because the apple of His eye acted like they belonged to Ba'al.

Retribution: The Wrath of God (2:20 to 3:6): By repeating verse 14, verse 20 emphasizes how angry YHVH was with Isra'el. Therefore the anger of Ha'Shem burned against Isra'el. This completed the divine judgement that began in verse 14. He accused this nation. Here, Ha'Shem called Isra'el *ha'goy-ha'zeh*, a term that showed God's alienation from Isra'el. The word *goy*

(meaning Gentile nation) is seldom used of **Isra'el**. But when it is, it often (not always) carries with it the concept of reprimand for becoming like a Gentile, and acting as though she doesn't have a covenant relationship with **ADONAI**. Basically, **YHVH** accused **Isra'el** of violating **the Torah**. **And He** declared: **Because this nation has violated My Covenant** (see the commentary on **Exodus Dd - The Mosaic Covenant**) **that I made with their ancestors and has not obeyed My mitzvot (2:20 NLT)**.

Next, **Ha'Shem** declares that **He will no longer drive out the nations that Joshua left unconquered when he died (2:21 NLT)**. **God** then placed a suspension to **His** own involvement in **His** holy war against **the Canaanites** (see **Deuteronomy Ag - The Problem of Holy War in the TaNaKh**). As a result, in none of the wars in the book of **Judges** is there a conquest of totally new territory. When a new territory or oppressor was overthrown, there was merely a regaining of an area that **Joshua** had already taken. In other words, there was no expansion of **Isra'el's** borders anywhere in the entire book. **Isra'el** has never possessed the **land** promised by **ADONAI** in its entirety, but **she** will when **the Messiah** returns to set up **His** Messianic Kingdom (see **Revelation Fj - My Chosen People Will Inherit My Mountains**).⁵⁵ This is not a contradiction of **Exodus 23:29-30** or **Deuteronomy 7:22**. There is a difference between not exterminating **the Canaanites** all in one year and not exterminating **them** at all. Earlier **YHVH** said **He** would not clear **the land** right away, but step-by-step, so **the land** would not become ruined. So, one motive has to do with the well-being of **the land**; but the other has to do with the delivery of divine discipline. All this shows the conditional nature of the Torah.

This is how I will test Isra'el, to see whether or not they will keep the way of ADONAI, living according to it, as their ancestors did (2:22 CJB). **This verse states the reason that ADONAI considered it necessary that Joshua should leave some of the Canaanite nations unconquered**. Thus, there were two reasons for **Ha'Shem** not driving out **the Canaanites**. The first reason was to punish **Isra'el** for **her** sin; and secondly, to **test Isra'el**. Would **she** reject idolatry and obey **the Torah**?

Verse 23 gives the result of **God's** judgement. **So ADONAI allowed those nations to remain where they were and did not drive them out at once**. The threat in **verse 21** was not the suspension of **wrath**, but of any further extermination of **the Canaanites**. The implication here is that **Ha'Shem** would not exterminate any more **Canaanites** as long as **Isra'el** persisted in **her** spiritual

idolatry. However, if **Isra'el repented** and turned back in obedience to **ADONAI**, then **He** would once again empower **her** to exterminate **the Canaanites**. It reaffirms the fact that enjoyment of **the land** was conditional on **her** obedience (see **Leviticus Ex - Blessings for Obedience**). **Or allow Joshua to conquer them all (2:23 Hebrew)**. This shows **God's** control over the destiny of nations. If **Joshua** didn't finish the task of driving out the enemy, it was because **YHVH** had not allowed it. And the reason for this was given back in **verse 22, this is how I will test Isra'el**.⁵⁶

There were two reasons **YHVH** didn't destroy all **the Gentile nations** in **Canaan**. The first reason was **to test Isra'el**. **These were the nations that Ha'Shem left to test those Israelites who had not experienced any of the wars in Canaan (3:1 NLT)**. Secondly, it was to learn the art of **war**. **He did this to teach warfare to the generations of Israelites who had no experience in battle (3:2 NLT)**. Again, **the third generation** (see **Am - The Joshua Generation Dies**) occupying **the land had not experienced war**. So, **they** had to learn the art of **war** for the future wars with **the Canaanites**. During **the wars in Canaan, Isra'el**, under **Joshua**, had learned **the power** to conquer **her** foes. However, this **power** didn't consist in overwhelming numbers or the bravery of **the Israelite** fighting men, but solely in the strength of **their God**, which was only available when **Isra'el** was obedient to **the Torah**. **Joshua** was not victorious by **his** own strength, but by **the power** of **Ha'Shem**. But this new **generation** had forgotten the true basis for victory, and so it was necessary to teach **them** how to fight a holy war. Disobedience would not only bring defeat, but also subjugation by those same **Canaanites**.

Then **ADONAI** names the specific **nations**, beginning with **the five lords of the Philistines** that would be **left in the land**. **These are the nations: the Philistines (those living under the five Philistine lords), all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites living in the mountains of Lebanon from Mount Ba'al-Hermon to Lebo-Hamath (3:3 Hebrew)**. The Hebrew word for **lords** is *seren*. It is the only use of **the kings** of **the Philistines**, except once. *Seren* corresponds to the Greek word *tyrannos*, well known in Greek classical writings. This shows that **the Philistines** had recaptured **the cities** that **they** had lost in **1:18**. The divine purpose for the continued presence of these opposing **nations** is restated in the next verse.

The divine purpose for the continued presence of those **Canaanites** is then reiterated. **They were left to test the Israelites to see whether they would**

obey ADONAI's mitzvot, which He had given their ancestors through Moses (3:4 NIV). The test was not for **God, Who** sees all things, but rather for **Isra'el** to give **them** an objective standard that would measure the level of **their** obedience or depth of **their** disobedience, which deserved **His** justice. The **test** for the new generation of **Israelites** was whether **they** would obey the commandments of **God** given in **the Torah**. If **they** were to obey **the mitzvot of the Torah, they** would, at the same time, learn the art of **war** successfully.

However, **verses 5 and 6** record **Isra'el's** failure to do so. Unfortunately, **the people of Isra'el** continued to disobey **the Torah** (see **Deuteronomy Ca - Warning Against Idolatry**), the command to conquer and destroy those **enemies. They** continued to **live among the Canaanites, Hittite, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites.** The second failure, in **3:6**, was intermarriage: **and they took the evil daughters of the pagans around them in marriage and gave their own daughters to the evil sons of those same pagans.** But even worse, **the Israelites served those evil pagan gods (3:5-6 NIV).** These two verses provide the theme of the whole book of **Judges**; the Canaanization of **Israelite** society in the areas of religion, ethics, and morality.⁵⁷ **Isra'el's** unfaithfulness resulted in the loss of **His** blessing.

The message of apostasy from **God** has great contemporary significance. In this regard, **the idol** of self is rampant today. Selfies are taken everywhere, and the "me" generation is upon us. The self is set at the center of existence as **a god**, ultimate significance is found in godlike individual autonomy, in self-set goals and boundaries. The sacred is defined in the first instance in relation to the self. Self-expression and self-actualization are important themes in this "religion," which is evident in our society from the advice of podcasters where the point seems to be no longer to be community or society, but to "find oneself," and to be the best person that one can be. This narcissistic society constantly promotes self over all others. At every turn it constantly encourages pursuit of personal happiness and gratification. It urges ignoring, and if necessary, dispensing with whoever or whatever stands in our way in the quest for personal satisfaction – whether it be husbands and wives, children, a pregnancy, the aged, the poor, and so on. **The idol** of the self supports sex as the autonomous individual's quest for self-fulfillment.

In our narcissistic society, however, the worship of self is a deeply dysfunctional and wicked one. **Idols** cannot liberate; **they** can only bring oppression. As believers, **ADONAI** is the only true **God**, and **He** should be at the center of our lives. We must reject the worship of self. But, unfortunately, **the old gods** are still with us. **They**

have simply changed **their** clothes so that **they** can merge more easily into our modern world. **They** still claim to provide meaning to life, to explain the universe, and to provide the basis for personal security. **They** still demand wholehearted commitment from **their** worshippers. We ought to be free of **them**, for in reality, a **God**-centered world view provides the only basis for such freedom.

Finally, it is important to note that **the gods** behind **the idols** of **this world** are no less demonic than those of the ancient world. Ultimately it is **the god of this world (Second Corinthians 4:4), Satan himself**, who stands behind these **gods** and demands allegiance with all of the oppressive overtones and chains contained in that commitment. What are we to do? **The Word of God** tells us **not to conform to the pattern of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Then we will be able to test and approve of what the will of ADONAI is good, pleasing, and perfect (Romans 12:2).**⁵⁸

*Dear heavenly **Father**, praise **You** who are eternally wise, almighty in power, totally righteous – yet you came down to earth to bless and forgive by offering the fullness of life to all who choose to love **You**. Sometimes life seems to get in a downward cycle of problems and then trials, then another issue. There is a solution to downward cycles is to look up to **the Lord**. It is so much better to have a friend with you during a trial. Then the trial is much easier to bear. **God** calls **His** children to **draw near. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you (James 4:8a).** **Gideon** did not understand why **Isra'el** was having such a hard time with Midian overpowering them and **he** wondered where **God's** love was that had delivered **them** from Egypt. **Then the angel of ADONAI appeared to him and said to him, "ADONAI is with you" (Judges 6:12a-b).** What a joy that the cycle of sin can be broken by turning away from sin, **drawing near** to **You, God**, and walking in obedience to **Your** ways! In **Messiah's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*