

## APOSTASY AND GOD'S GRACE

(Judges 10:6-18)

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WHAT DOES THIS episode tell us about God's people? What does it tell us about God himself and how he deals with people? The description of the apostasy is the most detailed yet in the book. Seven foreign deities or sets of deities are detailed to emphasize how completely the Israelites have departed from Yahweh. This time God himself (not a prophet) confronts the Israelites. This also witnesses to the severity of their apostasy.

We must also look at the degree to which God has revealed himself in the preceding cycles. God has poured out his heart into the Israelites. In spite of his gracious compassion and goodness to them, delivering them time and time again from their enemies (hence the listing of seven oppressors), they have readily turned away and are worshiping other gods (hence the listing of seven groups of foreign deities). And with the most recently narrated cycle, they have done this before the cycle is even completed. In their fickleness the Israelites have made a mockery of God's grace; they have taken advantage of his character and attributes in an attempt to manipulate him.

This is why God is so angry and sarcastic in his dealings with the Israelites in this episode. This is not arbitrary anger, but well-informed, perceptive, purposeful, and focused anger. God is so used to their pattern of repentance that he sees right through their insincerity. As humans we think that because we can hide our sinfulness from other people, somehow we can hide it from God. But God examines the hearts of human beings (Ps. 17:3-5, 139:23-24, Jer. 17:9-10) and sees the wickedness, improper motives, and so on that reside within the soul.

No wonder Israel's vain attempt at manipulating God through insincere repentance fails. Their devotion is only for convenience (i.e., they want God to end their trouble that has come as a result of the oppression, but they also want to continue living according to their own desires).

OFTEN AS CHRISTIANS we want God to perform when we want him to. We want him when we need him. Otherwise, we don't want to be bothered by him. We want a god who will perform according to our criteria, according to our timing and agenda.

Even when we are the ones who have acted unfaithfully and are reaping the consequences of those actions, this is the kind of god we want. Yet we are the ones who have turned away from the Lord God to the materialistic gods. We are the ones who have disobeyed his Word in seeking the gratifications of the flesh. Yet when the consequences of worshiping these other gods come upon us, we want God to deliver us immediately. At times in the past, he has bailed us out. For example, he has provided for the reckless credit card debt that we ran up. In his grace he worked on our behalf. Yet we do it all again and expect his performance one more time. And with enough prayer and repentance, he will bail us out again, right? After all, isn't his grace infinite?

What's wrong with this picture, with this theology of God? The present passage demonstrates that it doesn't work this way. Believers are entirely capable of going through the motions, of offering God insincere and superficial repentance. They can do the right rituals, play their parts, and certainly put on a convincing performance, at least as far as other human beings are concerned. But the Lord sees through the charade; he knows our hearts. He will not be manipulated by us.

