

LAMENTING AFTER THE LORD

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The history of the physical nation of Israel in the Old Testament is characterized by repeated cycles of disobedience interspersed by occasional and brief periods in which one or two generations of God's people would actually follow Him faithfully. This pattern is especially demonstrated during the 400-year period of the judges. It is summarized in Judges 2:14-19: "And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies. Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed. Nevertheless the Lord raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them. And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the Lord; but they did not so. And when the Lord raised them up judges, then the Lord was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the Lord because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them. And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way." The last of these cycles of disobedience under the judges came to an end when Israel under the judge and prophet Samuel lamented after the Lord.

The beginning of Israel's deliverance

Judges 10:6-7 says, "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the Lord, and served not him. And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon." This period of rebellion by Israel is described further in Judges 13:1: "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years." This is the time when the Lord raised up Samson as Israel's judge. However, Israel had not yet repented of their wickedness, and God was not

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going to fully relieve them of their punishment until they did. Rather, God said that Samson would “*begin* to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines” (Judg 13:5). This is exactly what Samson did up to the very moment that his own life came to end (Judg 13-16). After this, Samuel became judge.

Godly sorrow that works repentance

After persisting in wickedness and idolatry for several decades, and facing God’s wrath and punishment for it at the hands of the Philistines, and after losing the ark of the covenant and enduring more than 20 years with it being away from its proper place in the tabernacle, “*all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord*” (1 Sam 7:2). Finally, Israel was sorry. But God tells us that there are two kinds of sorrow: 1) godly sorrow, and 2) the sorrow of the world (2 Cor 7:10). Many wicked people become sorry that they get caught, or sorry that they are suffering the consequences of their deeds. But that kind of sorrow does not produce repentance. That is the sorrow of the world. *Godly* sorrow is not equivalent to repentance, but it is one of the necessary steps on the road to repentance. The church at Corinth was rebuked for allowing fornication to be in their midst, to the point of even being puffed up about it (1 Cor 5). The rebuke made them sorry, but it was a godly sorrow. The divinely inspired apostle Paul wrote, “Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow works repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world works death” (2 Cor 7:9-10). The Corinthians’ sorrow helped lead them to repentance. The sorrow of the world only works death. What kind of sorrow did Israel have in 1 Samuel 7:2? The verses that follow make it clear that Israel’s sorrow was truly a godly sorrow, because they sincerely repented. “*And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines. Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the Lord only*” (1 Sam 7:3-4). As a result, God finally gave them complete deliverance from their oppressors (1 Sam 7:5-14). If we have sin in our lives, may we have godly sorrow, and lament after the Lord and repent of those sins.