

Return to Obedience

Key Verse: *“They put away the strange gods from among them, and served the LORD: and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel.”*
—Judges 10:16

Selected Scripture:
Judges 10:6–11:33;
21:25

but many, heathen gods. They 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.”—Judg. 10:6

Not surprisingly, the account reads that “the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel” (vss. 7,8), and he gave them into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites for eighteen years. This was particularly oppressive due to the fact that the Philistines, who resided to the west, and the Ammonites, who resided to the east, could effectively control the entire nation of Israel, its land and people, without there being any means of their escape. As a result, “Israel was sore distressed.”—vs. 9

This climax of trouble which had come upon the nation of Israel caused them, as it had in the past, to cry unto the

THIS MONTH’S SERIES OF lessons has focused on a few of the many times God delivered the nation of Israel from its enemies although, time after time, they slipped back into disobedience and the worship of the heathen gods around them. In today’s lesson, we have this cycle brought to a climax. Israel’s idolatry had progressed to the point where they were not just worshipping one or two,

LORD. This time, though, and for the first time during the period of the judges, their cry was accompanied by these words: “We have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim.” (vs. 10) God, however, did not merely take these words at face value. More proof of their sincerity was needed. He reminded them of how he had delivered them from the Egyptians, and from many other nations subsequent to that time; how that he had helped them every time they cried unto him. He reminded them that, in spite of all this, they continued to forsake him and go back to serving other gods. As a result, God said, “I will deliver you no more. Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation.”—vss. 11-14

By these words, God issued a heart-searching challenge to the Israelites. If, indeed, these other gods could deliver them from their trouble, then they would no longer have any need to serve him or to ask him for deliverance. If the other gods could not deliver them, then that would pose a serious question as to their legitimacy. It is clear from God’s statement that he wanted Israel to give serious consideration to their pattern of behavior—serving other gods, being subsequently punished by serving other nations, crying to the God of Israel for deliverance, gaining that deliverance, then going back to the worship of false gods. Such a pattern must needs be broken.

In at least this case, the Israelites took God’s soul-searching statement to heart. They responded again, “We have sinned: do thou unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto thee; deliver us only, we pray thee, this day.” (vs. 15) They recognized not only that they had sinned, but also that any punishment God chose to inflict on them would be justified. Yet, they still expressed the desire to be delivered. Our Key Verse brings out the ultimate action God was looking for—the total putting away of the strange gods from among them, and serving only the God of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ■