

1/19/20 - Judges 10:6-11:28 - "Jephthah: Using God to Manipulate Man"

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Date: 19 January 2020

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[0 : 00] We are in the thick of judges, and very quickly today we're going to feel quite a pulse of the spiritual well-being, or actually the spiritual sickness, of the nation of Israel after the death of Moses and after the death of Joshua. And that's exactly where we are in the biblical timeline, as far as biblical history goes. We are after the death of Moses, the death of Joshua, the season of the judges, and then leading up into the prophets, or the kings, and then the prophets, and then the New Testaments, becoming Messiah. So we're very back, we're far back in history, but there is a great deal of detail in the text today that I believe will help us to be encouraged and also look at ourselves through the lens of the text. And I want to remind you of the original sin cycle, the cycle of sin that we have been going through. So the book of Judges goes through this cycle of sin, of obedience, disobedience, obedience, disobedience, and that being the disobedience of the nation of Israel. And it's going to be important to have that clear in our minds today because something's going to change. There's going to be a drastic change in the text today. There's going to be a drastic change between God's dealing with Israel for the first time in this book, but also Israel's dealing with God. Are you familiar with the book, Lion, Witch, and the Wardrobe?

Anyone? Wow, that was quick. Anybody not familiar with that? No? You're probably going to be lost the rest of the sermon. Just, okay. I'm just kidding. But in the first book of the Chronicles of Narnia, Mr. Beaver, you know the little beaver character, he describes what it is like for human children to meet the Christ figure of the book. It was a lion named Aslan. And Lucy admits that she feels uncomfortable meeting a lion in person. So Mr. Beaver explains that this is only natural because Aslan is a fierce and mighty king, a powerful lion. And Lucy asks if Aslan is safe.

And Mr. Beaver responds, safe? Who said anything about safe? Of course he isn't safe, but he's good. I tell you, he's the king. So as we see the text today, the same is going to be true for our God and our king in this text. So let's pray. Lord God, as we are coming and gathering as your children, looking to your word to receive nourishment, to receive meat, to receive food that only can satisfy us. Father, we ask for help, the power of your Holy Spirit to help us understand the text within this page, these pages. And Father, whatever the original message was that this author desired to be communicated, Lord, let that be broadcasted in our midst today. And let this change us today.

And we pray this in Jesus' precious name. Amen. Please open up with me into Judges chapter 10. I'm going to read Judges chapter 10, verse 6 through 17. You'll see, if anybody was here last week, you'll probably be wondering why we're not going over the Judges 1 through 6. We're saving that for a different week. In about three weeks, we're going to cover all the minor Judges, because they all serve a significant and kind of similar significance in the book of Judges. So we're going to lump all them into one and talk about what their significance is. But today we're going to talk starting in verse 6.

And I'm going to read verse 6 to 17. So follow along with me. The board, it will be up on the screen. But just open your Bible and how we do things. If you're new with us, just keep your Bible open and keep your finger there, because we're going to be talking about the text throughout the sermon.

[4 : 40] It says in verse 6, The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, the gods of the Philistines.

And they forsook the Lord and did not serve him. So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of the Philistines and into the hands of the hand of the Ammonites.

And they crushed and oppressed the people of Israel that year. For 18 years they oppressed all the people of Israel who were beyond the Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead. And the Ammonites crossed the Jordan to fight against Judah and against Benjamin and against the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was severely distressed. And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord, saying, We have sinned against you because we have forsaken our God and have served the Baals.

And the Lord said to the people of Israel, Did I not save you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites, from the Ammonites, and from the Philistines? The Sidonians also, and the Amalekites, and the Mayanites oppressed you. And you cried out to me, and I saved you out of their hand. Yet you have forsaken me and served other gods. Therefore, I will save you no more. Go and cry out to the gods whom you have chosen. Let them save you in the time of your distress. And the people of Israel said to the Lord, We have sinned. Do to us whatever seems good to you. Only please deliver us this day. So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the Lord. And he became impatient over the misery of Israel. And the Ammonites were called to arms. They encamped in Gilead. The people of Israel came together, and they encamped at Mizpah. And the people, the leaders of Gilead, said to one another,

[6 : 51] Who is the man who will begin to fight against the Ammonites? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead. What a situation that Israel has got themselves into as the sin cycle continues in this nation. Just as the cycle has gone around all throughout, this has been the the sixth, I think it's the sixth major cycle in the book of Judges. And round and round they have gone of disobeying the Lord. And the sin cycle seems to start out the same way as it had previously. They did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, in verse 6, and served other gods. Seven deities actually were recalled in this passage. Two by name, the Baals and the Ashtaroah, and then five by regional affiliation.

And looking back, remember the author of this book forecasted that this very thing was going to happen, just as the introduction of a book or a novel or a movie kind of forecast where the book is going.

Back in chapter 2, verse 11 through 13, talked about what we are reading today, when it says, And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals. It's from chapter 2, verse 11. And they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the Lord to anger. They abandoned the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtaroah. You see, there was a severe problem developing, and it was getting only worse in this nation. And due to their polytheistic convictions, the one true God was now just being mixed in the middle of all the other foreign gods. And this is a disturbing reversal of the original covenant that was made between God and the nation of Israel. Back in Deuteronomy 7, verse 1 says, When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you're entering to take possession of it, the land that they're in right now, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, all the Ite, mind you. Seven nations, more numerous and mighty than you.

And when the Lord your God gives them over to you, you must defeat them. Then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them. Obviously, none of this is happening right now. This nation is completely lost. And so the cycle continues.

The second part of the cycle continues, and they forsook the Lord and did not serve Him, in verse 6. The anger of the Lord, in verse 7, was kindled. So the Lord is starting to get a little bit short.

[9 : 51] His anger is being kindled. And then in verse 8, Israel was under oppression and distress, in verse 8. And just like the cycle from previous chapters, they cry out to the Lord.

And this is the sixth time that they cry out to the Lord, in verse 10. And it's interesting, because it seems fairly legitimate. They cried, saying, we have sinned against you and forsaken our God and have served the Baals.

They're acknowledging their sin. It seems legitimate. But was this merely them playing lip service in their confession? Or did the statement truly come from the depths of their hearts? And I say that because, looking as the story continues, as we read, there's a big change in this story. A very big change. In verse 11, it says, I saved you. I will save you no more. Go and cry out to the gods whom you have chosen.

You could almost sense the sarcastic tone in the Lord's voice. Let them save you in your time of distress. You only care about me when it's convenient for you.

The Lord deals with the nation of Israel like this all throughout the Bible. Consider Isaiah 57, 13.

The Lord says, When you cry out, let your collection of idols deliver you.

[11:20] The wind will carry them off, and a breath will take them away. We see this tone in Jeremiah 2, 28. But where are your gods that you made for yourself?

Let them arise, if they can save you in the time of your trouble. For as many as your cities are your gods. Judah. And Ezekiel 20, 39. As for you, O house of Israel, thus says the Lord, Go serve every one of you his own idols, now and hereafter.

If you will not listen to me, but my holy name, you shall not profane with your gifts and your idols. Seeing their hearts, the Lord clearly knew that there was a disconnect from their words and what was really going on in their hearts.

They were not genuinely crying out to him. And this was not a genuine confession. And they were only after a momentary relief. Thinking back to even when I was younger, I feel bad for my mother and the things that I took her through.

But I used to know a phone number. The only phone number I knew at one point in my life was 911. And often I would call 911.

[12:38] You know, just, you know, down there sitting in my grandma's basement and just, you know, the only number I knew. And sure enough, you know, they would call back, you know, looking for the emergency.

Somebody would pick up. That was the strangest thing on my side. That somebody actually picked up. And then I'd hang up real quick because I'd get nervous. And so they would call back. And sure enough, I don't know how many times I did that.

But it was many numerous times. And it's almost like the track record almost discredits that next phone call that I make.

Consider somebody playing with fire at their house. And all of a sudden, the curtains catch on fire. And the fire department comes zooming out and comes to that house. And, you know, they put out that fire.

The next week, the same thing happens. That kid with the Zippo, you can't just separate them. And knowing me, I was a pyromaniac growing up too. So that wouldn't be far from the truth. But time and time again, that fire department, that 911 phone station would call.

[13:42] And they'd come and they would respond and save us. With the intention to save us. And then that sixth time, hey, it's me again. Like, literally, the house is burning down.

I need you this time. I need you this time. In verse 15, it seems as if at face value, Israel may for the first time be repenting.

Not only did they acknowledge their sin, but they also put away foreign gods. There was also crying out and action. But church, was it too late? Was it too late at this point?

I think it was too late as the author records some vital hints in these pages. Israel's response to the Lord abandoning them, essentially, was do whatever is good for you.

Think about that statement. What's that supposed to mean? If I can only imagine if my kids came to me and I'm disciplining them and they say, do whatever is good for you.

[14:47] What? What? My discipline is for you. Because the Almighty God is good. He's eternally good.

Everything he does is good. And by the nation of Israel saying this, what are they even talking about? Who says that? Do whatever is good for you, Lord.

And they also say, do whatever you wish, just deliver us what? This day. Do whatever you wish, just deliver us this day.

Israel was not concerned about tomorrow, nor the next week. Their repentance was short-sighted and beneficial to them. And this is very unfortunate, not genuine repentance, church.

The Lord searches the heart. Look at this. In Psalm 17.3, it says, You have tried my heart. You have visited me by night. You have tested me. And you find nothing.

[15:48] I have purposed that my mouth will not transgress. Or the ever-popular Psalm 139.23, Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts.

And see if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting. Jeremiah 17.9, The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick.

Who can understand it? I, the Lord, search the heart and test the mind and give every man according to his ways, according to the fruits of his deeds. There was a habitual, habitual and cyclical pattern going on in the nation of Israel.

And it's almost like, based on their historic tendencies of all the past cycles that they were going around, that the Lord was delivering them, raising up a judge, it's almost like they get to this sixth time and they see the distress coming their way, and they're like, Okay, we've got to make this really believable.

I know we've really screwed up, but we've got to make this time count, because, man, like, we're going to get destroyed. And if their hearts were not indeed crying out in genuine repentance, what was their strategy?

[17 : 07] They were trying to manipulate God. They were trying to pull a fast one from God who searches the heart, who knows our motives.

And looking broadly at the condition of Israel, how tragic they find themselves in. Their spiritual condition in this passage is self-centered, it's manipulative, it's addictive to these other gods. Imagine how hard it is for us to deal with people like that in our own lives, that are just concerned about themselves, not to mention an entire nation that the Lord endures with.

This reminds me of that of a concerned parent whose child suffers from a destructive addiction. At times, the process of unconditional love toward that child sometimes calls for extreme action to take place, which may be involved with temporary abandonment of that child, for the sake that they will eventually see their true desire behind all their gimmicks and all their games.

They will see that you really love them through that abandonment, the process. And the same can be true in this passage, in a sense, as God is grieved by their consistent rebellion against Him.

[18 : 28] And God's response is one of that of, called tough love, if you know that saying, tough love. Church Israel repented out of their desire to not experience their distress.

They were only concerned about their distress. They weren't grieved over their sin against God, and that did not stem from their hearts. Don't fall for the same mistake of repenting only when it benefits you.

So the point of this first passage is don't try to manipulate God. Don't. Notice something vital in this passage, though. In the midst of tough love, there is still grace.

While the Lord sold them and is absent from their deliverance, He's not raising up a judge this time. He's actually letting them go to their own vices. But nowhere does it say that the Lord forgot them. While the Lord sold them, while the Lord will not save them, nowhere in this passage does it say that the Lord forgot them. That's what makes tough love tough, right?

[19 : 39] It's painful to remember our children who might drift, and they know that the only thing that's going to help them is temporary removal out of their lives. You see, forgiveness through Christ and the power of the dwelling Spirit fills us with a grace that never runs dry.

But it takes genuine repentance that comes from our hearts. So if you are in a place of habitual and cyclical sin or disobedience, there is hope because God has not forgotten you either.

Church, may our repentance be a daily act. And if you think that that's just for religious dogmatics, to repent and all that stuff, I think you need to repent of that.

Repentance is for today. May our daily repentance be that of true repentance. We can call it repentance without strings attached. Repenting out of the concern of our offense toward God.

And let us draw upon genuine repentance, church. And let Psalm 139 be on our hearts. Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts.

[20 : 49] And see if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting. So Israel, they're out of options.

They're on the brink of war. They're looking for a leader. The passage ends looking for a leader. What do we do? Looking around at each other. Well, God's not going to help us.

We've got to do something. We can't just sit here like sitting ducks and just get destroyed. What good ever comes from superficial religion?

God is clearly removed. Even though they try their best. They try to put away other gods. They try to make this time believable.

Chapter 10 is actually a good alley-oop. Any basketball people? It's an alley-oop to chapter 11. Because there's actually so much parallelism between chapter 10 and chapter 11.

[21 : 48] It's so striking. I was going to get a graphic up on the screen, but just did not have the time. But they are very closely linked. So why should the previous account of the state of Israel be included with the account of Jephthah, who we're going to meet in chapter 11?

It is because for the first time ever in the book of divine absence in the nation of Israel, it has quite an important function in Jephthah's cycle.

The state of Israel has an important function in the Jephthah cycle. So God's absence is echoing throughout the pages from here on out. Darkness is setting in, as you could imagine, not having God intervening on your behalf.

And we're headed for disaster, actually. But let's see who raises up a deliverer in Judges 10. Let's see if God comes through for them.

Maybe he'll see that they are sitting ducks and he's going to help them. Read with me in chapter 11, in scene 2. Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty warrior, but he was the son of a prostitute.

[23 : 00] Gilead was the father of Jephthah. And Gilead's wife also bore him two sons. And when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out and said to him, You shall not have an inheritance in our father's house, for you are the son of another woman.

Then Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob. And worthless fellows collected around Jephthah and went out with him. Now trouble's lurking. After a time, the Ammonites made war against Israel.

Their distress has come, church. And when the Ammonites made war against Israel, the leaders of Gilead went to bring Jephthah, who was a mighty warrior, from the land of Tob.

And they said to Jephthah, Come and be our leader, that we may fight against the Ammonites. But Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, Did you hate me and drive me out of my father's house?

Why have you come to me now when you are in distress? And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, That is why we have turned to you now. That you may go with us and fight against the Ammonites and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.

[24 : 12] Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, If you bring me home again and fight against the Ammonites and the Lord gives them over to me, I will be your head. And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, The Lord will witness between us if we do not do as you say.

So Jephthah went to the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and leader over them. And Jephthah spoke all his words before the Lord at Mizpah.

So in verse 1 of chapter 11, we meet Jephthah, our next leader, we'll say, of Israel. He was a Gileadite.

He was a mighty warrior. He was the son of a prostitute. Jephthah had two stepbrothers. He also had a stepmother. And he was also driven out of his land and went to the land of Tob and surrounded himself by reckless fellows, it says.

There was trouble lurking. They were looking for a leader, and the only one qualified for this task at this time was Jephthah. Obviously, he was a mighty warrior.

[25 : 21] That was his motto in the nation of Israel, in this land of Gilead. And look at me in verse 7. It says, But Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, Did you not hate me and drive me out of my father's house?

Why have you come to me now when you are in distress? Isn't that interesting? Doesn't that sound familiar from the previous chapter? It mirrors the Lord's response to Israel when they were looking for a deliverer from their distress earlier.

Back in Judges 10, 13, Yet you have forsaken me and served other gods. Therefore, I will save you no more. And look at me in verse 11. It mentions that they want him to be their head.

This is a position which, in their culture, was known to be less than king. The head was still subject to the rulers and the elders. Notice that there's nothing about judgeship here.

Clearly, the leaders were doing what they want, and the people made him head and commander over them. Notice the Lord didn't have anything to do with this.

[26 : 39] They're clearly doing what they feel is right and best in their eyes. So, verse 9, you know, they have a good plan. It seems enticing to the ears.

You know, it's almost like, as he says in verse 9, It says, If you bring me home again to fight against the Ammonites, and the Lord gives them over to me, I will be your head.

If you can almost hear what Jephthah is saying in that passage, let's see if God comes through with us. Let's roll the dice. Let's cross our fingers.

And yeah, if everything works according to what you're saying, you know, I'll be your head after that. What a bad way of doing business here. Without consulting the Lord.

Verse 10, we see the inauguration ceremony of Jephthah. He said all these words before the Lord at Mizpah. Anyone with strong covenantal convictions would see this passage and say that this is a little bit odd, that they would have this type of ceremony at Mizpah.

[27 : 50] Because these people who know the covenants and the places of worship back in this time, Mizpah was not a legitimate place to worship Yahweh.

So, looking at like all these lies and the manipulation, just as earlier Israel was crying out to the Lord, and it looked like they were actually repenting.

Here we have an inauguration ceremony that looks legitimate just as their words back in the previous chapter. From the outside looking in, from man's perspective, yeah, wow, look at what the Lord's doing.

He's raising up Jephthah. Look at all these people clapping their hands and speaking all these words. He is our mighty warrior. The Lord has come through for us. Praise the Lord.

But was it truly genuine? In manipulation, they repented in chapter 10, and in manipulation, they raised up Jephthah.

[28 : 55] So the point of this scene is don't use God to manipulate man. Don't use God to manipulate man. As we go into scene 3, the last scene, as we conclude chapter 11, verse 12 continues.

And so Jephthah is commissioned. Jephthah sends a letter of his messengers to the enemy who's coming against them. Verse 12 says, Then Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites and said, What do you have against me that you have come to me to fight against my land?

And the king of the Ammonites answered the messengers of Jephthah, Because Israel, on coming up from Egypt, took away my land from the Arnon to Jabbok and to the Jordan.

Now, therefore, restore it peaceably. Jephthah again sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites and said to him, Thus says Jephthah, Israel did not take away the land of Moab or the land of the Ammonites.

But when they came up from Egypt, Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea and came to Kadesh. Israel then sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, Please let us pass through your land.

[30 : 16] But the king of Edom would not listen. And they sent also to the king of Moab, but he would not consent. So Israel remained in Kadesh.

Then they journeyed through the wilderness and went around the land of Edom and the land of Moab and arrived at the east side of the land of Moab and camped on the other side of the Arnon. But they did not enter the territory of Moab, for the Arnon was the boundary of Moab. Israel then sent messengers to Sion, king of the Amorites, king of Heshbon.

And Israel said to him, Please let us pass through your land to our country. But Sion did not trust Israel to pass through his territory. So Sion gathered all his people together and encamped in Jahaz and fought with Israel.

And the Lord, the God of Israel, gave Sion and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they defeated them. So Israel took possession of all the land of the Amorites and inhabited that country.

[31 : 20] And they took possession of the territory of the Amorites from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan. So the Lord, the God of Israel, dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel.

And are you to take possession of them? Will you not possess what Chamash, your God, gives to you to possess? And all that the Lord, our God, has dispossessed before us, we will possess. Now, are you any better than Balak, the son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he contend against Israel or did he ever go to war with them?

While Israel lived in Heshbon and its villages in Aror and its villages and all the cities and are on the banks of the Arnon? 300 years, why did you not deliver them within that time?

I, therefore, have not sinned against you. And you do me wrong by making war on me. The Lord, the judge, decide this day between the people of Israel and the people of Ammon.

[32 : 26] But the king of the Ammonites did not listen to the words of Jephthah that he sent to him. You can take a breath.

That's a big stretch of passage. I just want to warn you. I am not going to exegete this whole passage because I spent so much time this week looking at this thing, charting out, mapping out, confirming facts, yep, check, check, check, connecting the dots.

And while I'm in here like every detail, okay, this guy said to this and they did this and this happened to this, I was missing the point completely. I was missing it during my preparation. So while there is a lot of detail in here, in this passage, there is something vital that the author, that being Samuel, is trying to communicate to a specific audience and also to us today.

Did Jephthah's discourse come from what he knows in his heart? Or was he paying lip service to the glorious victories of the past and the innocence of the past?

[33 : 51] Or did he truly believe it from his heart? There's one thing of reading a history book and getting all the facts right. Because he actually, in that whole traveling up from Egypt, he got all the facts right.

But there's a difference between reading something in a history book and actually believing it within your heart. Could that be what the author is trying to communicate? So long story short, while there is a lot of good within Jephthah's discourse, yeah, they acquired the land fair and square.

This war that's being called is 300 years overdue. Where was this king trying to come up against them? You know, 300 years ago. Nothing's an issue until now. Why? There were a bunch of numerous problems with his discourse that happened after he mentions the traveling from Egypt up to Kadesh.

The first problem is Chamash. Chamash was the god of the Moabites. He wasn't the god of the Ammonites. So, Jephthah was either ignorantly making an embarrassing mistake to this king, or he was possibly muddling the Ammonite theology in hopes to maybe provoke this king to anger.

Like, you can't even get my gods right. The second problem in this discourse, following the traveling, the record of the travels, Jephthah displays his ignorance to the Torah as he implies that the Amorites received their land from Chamash.

[35 : 31] Now, if you can see in verse 23, he says this right here in 24, actually. Will you not possess what Chamash your God gives you to possess?

And all that the Lord our God has dispossessed before us, we will possess? This is an error, an ignorance to the Torah because they received it from Yahweh.

This is a historic error. Error. If there's any note takers with me today, Deuteronomy 2.19 speaks on this. Deuteronomy 32, verse 8 through 9 speaks on this.

And Amos 9, verse 7, speaks on this. And the third problem with his discourse was Jephthah, after muddling all that info, brings this statement.

After following, it's almost like he needed to stop while he was ahead. It sounded good, but then he took it a couple steps further. And when he could have stopped and his integrity would have been kept intact, he kept going.

[36 : 36] And then out of all this misinformation, Jephthah said, his statement, the Lord will be our judge. The Lord, our judge, decide this day. In verse 27.

Well, that sounds good. That's a promising statement. But as younger, in his commentary on this passage, he states that Jephthah was a pragmatic Yahwist.

Jephthah was a pragmatic Yahwist, meaning that he will use anyone's name to further his agenda. And what is that, church?

Manipulation. So we could spend all of our time, just like I did with my laser focus and magnifying glass and looking with a microscope and try to find something noteworthy about Jephthah being a mighty warrior, highlighting in much detail the actual feebleness in his poor religious discourse to this king.

But what I think we need to do is to stand back from these pages a little bit and see something that the author Samuel is developing for us today.

[37 : 51] Because there is a consistent melody of absence and manipulation all throughout this text between chapter 10 and chapter 11. It's like waves on the ocean that are just, just come and they go, come and they go.

Absence and manipulation, like song notes on music pages. The melody of the passage today is just that. Consider standing back and seeing from chapter 10 to chapter 11, the grand scope, looking back at the superficial repentance of Israel trying to manipulate God, looking at the, raising up Jephthah as their leader.

They were only concerned of their self-interest in bargaining with Jephthah to be their leader. They had no right to raise up their own leader. And then the third thing, in the main scope of things, Jephthah's erroneous dissertation of provoking this Ammonite king.

Church, I have to beg a question to you today. What is God's role in this story? What is God's role in this story? And I would say merely a tool that they pull out when it's convenient for them, when they need to, need to make something believable.

So what does he do? God removes himself. And could this be so that Israel may once again hunger for this presence by making them taste his absence?

[39 : 26] Is there a sense in your own life, right now, as you sit here, as anybody's tuning in online, is there any sense in your own life that God is not near to you at this season?

Maybe the season's in the past. Maybe when you have money problems, maybe all of a sudden you lose your job, and you're sitting around asking God and your distress in that time, is that mortgage payment coming?

And you know it's coming, you know that that distressful situation is going to come, you have no money, you're looking around and you have no idea where God is. Is God just going to leave you there as a sitting duck?

Or marital problems, having disagreements in your marriage and fighting and just, you're trying to pray for your spouse but your spouse really isn't reciprocating anything and just find yourself in this cycle of craziness in your marriage asking where God might be.

Well, for any students, you know, sitting in a lecture hall, knowing that very well that God has sent you to this university for a specific purpose to fulfill His plans and desires, and you just feel completely lost, sitting there just looking at everyone, zoomed into their books, studying like crazy, and you just don't feel that God is in it.

[41 : 05] Health problems, you know, the list could go on. Is there a sense in your own life that God may not be near? There's a saying that I think we're all kind of familiar with, that absence makes the heart grow fonder.

Think about it. While life brings us many trials and tribulations, some self-afflicted of our own stupidity, and others not, some things just can't be explained.

Why did I lose my job? Why is this happening to me? Some things just can't be explained. But we are naturally prone to feel a distance from God in these times.

Scripture tells us to rejoice in tribulation and these trials. But why? Why would Scripture tell us to do this? Because those circumstances of asking God, where are you?

Our natural response is what? To focus more intimately on Him. To reach for Him more often. To seek Him deeply during those times when we don't feel God near.

[42 : 26] Now, you can always distract yourself, but it will never last. Your head will always hit the pillow. You know what I'm saying when I say that. You can't escape the thoughts that hit your head on the pillow.

Regardless of the distractions, you can stay busy all day where your head will hit the pillow. So rest in assurance that when we draw near to God through true repentance that comes within our hearts, He will draw near to you.

Rest knowing that He has not forgotten you. it doesn't take long to read through the Psalms to understand this is actually a deep theological reality and how often God grows us through these means and these ways.

Me included. Just because I'm wearing a cool jacket and I have a cool microphone by my ear doesn't mean that I'm exempt from His trials and His tribulations and Him withdrawing sometimes His voice at times to make me focus more intently upon Him.

He tests us every now and then. So do you feel tested right now in your life? Do you feel tested? I want to encourage you to take hearts because the God of this universe may seem distant from you but He has not forgotten you.

[43 : 52] Nor does He neglect His church. He knows about that mortgage payment coming. He knows He's right there with you in that lecture hall on YSU's campus. He's in your marriage.

He's within all these things. He has not forgotten you and He does not neglect His church. You have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. And instead of asking God why is this happening to me better for us to ask God what are you trying to teach me in this?

As you seek Him honestly and diligently and then you wait. How many of us like to wait? I know a couple of us waiting for Chipotle to have our online pickup order that we came there right when it was supposed to be ready for us for pickup and it's not ready.

None of us like to wait. This is America. You seek and you wait and you might ask how long do I have to wait Brent?

How long? And I'm going to tell you it doesn't matter. Just don't let go. And if anybody actually wants a book recommendation there's a really good book by John Piper that says When I Don't Desire God which talks very in depth about this.

[45 : 22] And in my studying this week I came across a book chapter called Forsaken by Grace Gali Gali mentions in this book some helpful remarks about divine absence and he suggests that God's withdrawal is actually good news in two different ways.

Number one God's divine absence signals that he desires a genuine mutual relationship. So regardless of how we feel we know that God is omnipresent.

He's not bound to time. He is always ever present in our lives. The sense of his absence is something that God has to manufacture he says an experience that he has to take special pains to create because he is omnipresent.

The second reason this is good news is because quote it is one of the ways God topples our idols how he helps us purge our lives of sin that replace worship for him.

It is essentially the tough love expression by a parent toward a rebellious child or by a spouse toward an unfaithful or addicted partner. The sense of forsakenness can therefore serve as a rude awakening at times in our lives that can compel one to abandon false gods and return to the true God.

[46 : 49] So what can we learn from Jephthah and the leaders of Gilead? I'll repeat don't try to manipulate God and don't try to use God to manipulate man regardless of tangible inferences of historic truths of what he did back then don't manipulate God and don't use God to manipulate man.

Church we must be encouraged through genuine repentance and godly grief that when we call upon the name of the Lord he hears us because Christ Jesus is interceding for us and he is our advocate to the father.

Let us not make the mistake of thinking that we're inviting God into our game of life. How foolish we would be in that thinking.

Looking back to the intro of how great a reality that children's book the lion the witch and the wardrobe is. As Lucy asked if Aslan is safe Mr. Beaver responds safe.

Who said anything about safe? Of course he isn't safe but he's good. He's the king I tell you. Let us revere God in this sense and draw near with fear and trembling because of who God is but also draw boldly and confidently because of what Christ did for us.

[48 : 19] Let's pray.