

## Lesson 12

### God's Persistence: Continuing to Strive with the Israelites

**Introduction:** In our last lesson, we saw that without God's revelation, we would remain in the same broken states He found us. He needs to continue His work in our lives for growth to happen. We are unable to be faithful apart from His work in us. In this lesson, we look at God's relationship to the Israelites, how He is persistent and long-suffering with the continually-sinners Israelites. We will begin by looking at the concept of the Zeal of the Lord. When talking about God's attributes, some attributes get all of the focus: holiness, omnipotence, omniscience, sovereignty, love, gracious, merciful, never changing, eternal, etc. But then there are attributes you rarely hear anything about—attributes such as God's "zealousness." What is God's zealousness? Is it different from being jealous? And what is God zealous for? These are some of the questions we will be answering in this lesson.

#### **Israel engages in idolatry.**

- **Read Numbers 25:1-13.**

Up until this point of God choosing to punish Israel for the sin of idolatry, how much other sin do you think existed within the lives of every individual? I would guess a lot! Notice the extremely strong response from God regarding this sin in verses 4

through 9. Also notice-this sin directly had to do with Israel's relationship with God and their rejection of His revelation of Himself to them. Next, notice what God says about Phinehas in verses 10 through 13: "He was zealous with my zeal among them, so that I did not consume Israel with my zeal...He was zealous for his God and made atonement for the nation of Israel."

- **Read Exodus 34:5-7.**

God's description of Himself emphasizes the fact that He is merciful, gracious, long-suffering, abounding in goodness and truth, and that He forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin.

Now look at **Isaiah 42:8**. God says, "I will not give My glory to any other!" I am the Lord God Who has bestowed grace and mercy upon YOU. I am the One that has been extremely long-suffering and have abounded in goodness and truth towards YOU! It is I that have forgiven YOUR iniquity, transgression, and sin and I will not allow you to give credit for these things to any other.

So, when Israel joined themselves with the Moabites to worship Baal in **Numbers 25**, this was to take all these truths that are true of God (and that He bestowed upon Israel over and over) and say they are true of Baal and not God. Regarding the difference between being zealous and being jealous, actually both terms are used to translate the same Hebrew term "Kanaw" or "Kinaw." Depending upon which

version of the Bible you use, some versions use “jealous” here in Numbers 25 instead of “zealous. In general, though, being zealous is usually referred to as a positive or godly form of jealousy. It always has to do with God, His truth, His ways, or His people. When used of humans, sometimes it’s positive, but usually it’s negative. When used of God, it’s always in a holy, righteous sense. See also:

- **Exodus 20:5**
- **Deuteronomy 4:24**
- **Ezekiel 39:25**
- **Nahum 1:2**
- **Zechariah 1:14; 8:2**
- **1 Kings 19:10**
- **Genesis 37:11**
- **Proverbs 27:4**

The things we see God protecting with zeal are His people, His chosen ones, His relationship with His chosen ones, and His glory. God’s relationship with His chosen ones is all based upon His glory! This was true of Israel and it’s also equally true of us today as Christians. All that we have and all that we are is totally based upon the finished work of our gracious, merciful, and long-suffering God and Savior Who has saved us from all of our sins!

**God chose Joshua to take Moses’ place.**

- **Read Numbers 27:18-23.**

One of the things that really stands out here is the fact of God the loving initiator. At this point, Israel was supposed to be in the Promised Land and Moses with them. Because of their sin of unbelief and Moses' striking the rock twice, here they are, still in the wilderness waiting to die in order for the next generation to be led into Canaan. Even though their sin and unbelief had gotten them into this mess, God in His grace and long-suffering raised up another godly and faithful man to take Moses' place and to be the one to lead them into Canaan.

Joshua had been Moses' constant companion and helper. He had accompanied Moses when God gave him the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. Joshua was also one of the spies who had believed that God would give the Israelites the land of Canaan. He was a man who trusted in God.

- **Read Deuteronomy 34:1-5.**

God did exactly what He promised He would do. He did not allow Moses to enter the land, but He did graciously take him up on the mountain and allowed him to view it from a distance. It can be tempting to listen to this story about Moses and view God as being kind of harsh. I mean, look at all the good things that Moses had done "for the Lord." Couldn't He have been a little more gracious with him? Come on, didn't God owe him at least a little bit? We must keep in mind, though, that there is nothing more important than God, His will, and His glory! God

owed Moses nothing. It was the pure grace of God that Moses received anything from the Lord as he was a sinner just like all of us who only deserves to die and go to hell.

Sometimes as Christians, we can actually slip into that same mentality regarding our own lives. At times when God blesses us with something, deep down we can tend to think that He “owed” us or that it was because of something that we’ve done right or well or have sacrificed.

**Discussion:** Name some of the things that we as Christians can easily view as things that cause us to earn or become worthy of God’s blessings.

Two things should absolutely amaze us—first, the only thing we “deserve” from the Lord is punishment. The fact that He has sent His Son to be punished on our behalves will glorify Him for all of eternity. Secondly, not only do we not deserve to NOT be punished, but we also don’t deserve to receive anything good from God! We could spend months talking about all of the good things that we receive from the Lord. There is a song by Ascend the Hill called “The Love of God” with the following verse: *“If we with ink the oceans filled, and were the skies a parchment made, were every stalk on earth a quill and every man a scribe by trade, to write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry, nor could the scroll contain them all though stretched from sky to sky.”*

## **Joshua led the Israelites into Canaan.**

- **Read Joshua 1:1-2.**

No one could hinder God from fulfilling His plan to give the Israelites the land of Canaan. The Egyptians couldn't. Satan couldn't. The Canaanites couldn't. Not even Israel's own sinfulness and unbelief.

This provides a pretty amazing physical picture of God and the plan of redemption He is carrying out today for the church. Satan can't hinder it. Governmental laws and regulation can't hinder it. The world can't hinder it. Not even the sinfulness of mankind can hinder it because it's actually our sinfulness that creates the reason or need for God's plan of redemption in the first place. God is persistent in his dealings with Israel because He loves His creation and is passionate about making Himself known. He continues to endure their rebellion for generations and generations because He is zealous for His people and plan.

## **Israel turned to idolatry after Joshua's death.**

- **Read Judges 2:7-13.**

After Joshua and his generation died, the Israelites followed the ways of the idolatrous nations nearby, making idols and worshiping them instead of the one true God. Keep in mind that in doing so they were giving God's glory to dead statues! They were saying that the love, grace, mercy, and deliverance they had

received from God had actually been received from these lifeless statues! So, what did God do?

- **Read Judges 2:14-15.**

With this time of punishment, a “cycle” begins in Israel that goes on and on for many generations, all the way up to the time of Christ in the gospels. That is the cycle of Israel rejecting God, God bringing about punishment, Israel turning back to Him, and God delivering them. It’s amazing to me that God doesn’t give up on them, but as we saw, long-suffering is a part of His nature!!

- **Read Judges 2:16-23.**

At this point, the way in which God was working in the lives of Israel as a nation had changed drastically from His description in **Exodus 19:4** when He states, “I bore you on eagle’s wings and brought you unto Myself.”

Between **Exodus 19** and **Judges 2**, God had revealed Himself and manifested Himself over and over and over to Israel. With great patience and long-suffering, He bestowed much grace, mercy, love, and forgiveness upon them. The previous generation had refused to believe God at the border of Canaan and they died in the wilderness. This next generation had been blessed and privileged with being led in to finally occupy the Promised Land. They, too, had

seen God reveal Himself through the many miracles He performed in giving them this land (Jericho, etc.).

Now here is the next generation that were probably children when they occupied the land. Not only are they NOT believing God, but they are also totally rejecting and despising Him and turning in worship to false idols! Hence **Judges 2:19** says that they would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers.

It's been pretty clear through these last couple of lessons that God has punished Israel solely for how they responded to His revelation of Himself in their lives. This is a pattern that you see all the way through to the life of Christ and even up to us today in this day and age. It was Israel's rejection of God and His revelation of Himself that led them to not believe Him at the border of Canaan and the punishment of dying in the wilderness. It was Israel's rejection of God here in **Judges 2** that led to them being conquered by their enemies. We see this happening over and over throughout the rest of the Old Testament.

Then we see it is Israel's rejection of Jesus as the Christ that led to them being set aside as a nation and God's turning to work in and through the Church. Today, as individuals, it's what we do with God's revelation of Who Jesus really is and our need for His sacrifice that determines whether we receive eternal life or eternal death. However, as we have seen over and over throughout the Old Testament, along with God's justice and judgment, His grace and mercy are ever present.

No matter how many times Israel turned away from God, God never totally abandoned them. They were and still are His chosen people. When they confessed their sin, He was always ready and willing to forgive them and accept them back. God was always faithful to preserve a remnant.

Along with raising up “judges” to deliver them from the current predicament they were in, God was also building more testimony and foreshadowing that was pointing toward the coming ultimate Deliverer Who would once and for all deliver them from their sin.

Ultimately, God was faithfully protecting Israel because they were His chosen people. They were chosen to be the ones through whom the “whole world will be blessed,” by using them to bring the Deliverer into the world. God used them to record Holy Scripture to one day be given the complete revelation of God to the future church. They were also chosen to be the ones through whom God would reveal Himself and His heart to the rest of the world by recording His interaction with them.

***Discussion:*** Do you think that God was surprised by Israel’s disobedience? Was He shocked by how “stubborn and stiff necked” they were? What is the significance of Him choosing a people in which He knew full well exactly how stubborn and disobedient they would become?

- **Read Isaiah 41:8-10; 44:1-8.**

At the end of the time of the judges, God raised up Samuel and I'm sure most of us all know his story. Toward the end of Samuel's life, there was no one to take his place because his sons were not obedient to the Lord.

- **Read 1 Samuel 8:1-9.**

Talk about an amazing picture that clearly manifests just how sovereign and supreme God really is. In the midst of Israel's ongoing rejection of God and desire to be like the other sinful nations around them, God used their sinfulness to establish a royal line within Israel through which the future Deliverer would enter the world. The future Deliverer would be prophet, priest, and king.

Even though Israel continued to sin and turn away from God and God would punish them, it still didn't change His plan or alter His faithfulness to carry it out. This is the height of sovereignty. As humans, when we talk about God's sovereignty, we tend to think of it in terms of man not having a free will; i.e., God is absolutely sovereign; therefore, everything is predetermined.

Well, what if God is SO sovereign and SO supreme and SO omnipotent that He doesn't have to predetermine man's every move or every decision in order to bring about His will?

What if God is sovereign beyond our understanding to the point that He can totally give every man the ability to choose to sin, reject Him, and depart from

His will, and yet still use them in His plan to bring about His will?

This is exactly what we see God doing here!

***Discussion:*** Remember, the revelation of God's supremacy, sovereignty, and wisdom. How are these facts significant for us today on a daily basis? What about in regard to our salvation?

### **Many kings ruled over Israel.**

As you know, the last exchange between Israel and Samuel kicked off the time in Israel's history in which they were ruled by kings. Saul was chosen to be the first king, followed by David and then Solomon. After Solomon died, the nation of Israel was divided into two kingdoms. First were the ten northern tribes which continued to be called Israel, and then the two southern tribes which were called Judah. Both kingdoms ended with having twenty kings each through the years. All twenty kings of Israel in the north were evil or ungodly kings, while some of the kings of Judah were bad and some of the others were good.

Looking at **Ezekiel 16** we see a clear physical picture of God's faithful persistence. Jerusalem is compared to a child born and unwanted. Without help, the child would have died (verse 5); God saw Israel's frailty and caused her to live (verses 6-7). He clothed the child and gave her riches, so that she become known (verses 8-14), but she became proud and sold herself

to other nations and gods, giving away the riches God had given her, sacrificing His children, making a shrine of herself, and prostituting herself (verses 15-29).

At one point, God refers to the judgment that will come upon Jerusalem, saying that once complete, His jealousy will be satisfied (verse 42). This is the same Hebrew word “Kinaw.” God’s jealous or zealous nature means He will continue to pursue until the objects of His affection are His. Once the punishment is complete, His jealousy is satisfied because Israel will have returned to Him.

- **Read Ezekiel 16:59-60.**

In spite of Israel’s constant rebellion, God remembers His covenant. He continues to endure the ungratefulness of a stubborn people because He is zealous for them. Even though Israel is unfaithful, God goes beyond just keeping His covenant. He promises to create an everlasting covenant, and He’ll do it without our help (and often through our attempts to sabotage). Talk about persistence!

*To see more of God’s persistence, read through Lessons 26-28 in the full Knowing God curriculum.*