

Sermon & Bible Study Helps

Biblical Stewardship - Anti-gambling Trusting God Instead of Gambling

Emphasis Passage: Isaiah 65:11

King James

But ye are they that forsake the LORD, that forget my holy mountain, that prepare a table for that troop, and that furnish the drink offering unto that number.

New King James

But you are those who forsake the LORD, Who forget My holy mountain, Who prepare a table for Gad, And who furnish a drink offering for Meni.

New International

But as for you who forsake the LORD and forget my holy mountain, who spread a table for Fortune and fill bowls of mixed wine for Destiny,

New American Standard

But you who forsake the LORD, Who forget My holy mountain, Who set a table for Fortune, And who fill cups with mixed wine for Destiny,

New Revised Standard

But you who forsake the LORD, who forget my holy mountain, who set a table for Fortune and fill cups of mixed wine for Destiny,

New Jerusalem Bible

But as for those of you who abandon Yahweh, who forget my holy mountain, who lay the table for Gad, who fill cups of mixed wine for Meni,

New Living Translation

But because the rest of you have forsaken the LORD and his Temple and worship the gods of Fate and Destiny,

Hebrew Text

אֶת־הַר קָדְשִׁי
my holy mountain

הַשֹּׁכְחִים
who forget

יְהוָה
the LORD

עֹזְבֵי
who forsake

וְאַתֶּם
But you

מִמִּסְךְ
cups of mixed wine

לְמִנִּי
for Destiny

וְהִמְלֵאִים
who fill

שֻׁלְחָן
a table

לְגֹד
for Fortune

הַעֹרְכִים
who set

KEY WORDS (WITH STRONG'S REFERENCE NUMBERS)

- עֲזָבָה ('*ōzēbē*) verb qal participle masculine plural construct.
(5800) עָזַב ('*āzāb*) leave, forsake, loose.
- הַשְּׁכַחָם (*haššēkēh'm*) adjective masculine plural absolute, with prefixed article הַ (*hā*, "the").
(7913) שָׁכַח (*šākhāh*) "forget(ting)."
- קִדְשִׁי (*qāḏšî*) noun common masculine singular construct, with 1st person common singular pronoun suffix, "my."
(6918) קִדְשׁ (*qāḏōš*) apartness, holiness, sacredness.
- לַגַּד (*laggad*) noun common masculine singular absolute, with attached preposition לַ (*la*, "to") and article, "the."
(1408) גַּד (*gād*) fortune. Also the Syrian god of fortune, Gad.
- לַמְנִי (*lamnî*) noun proper absolute, with attached preposition לַ (*la*, "to").
(4507) מְנִי (*mēnî*) pagan god of fate, possibly related to Hebrew verb מָנַח.
(4487) מָנַח (*mānāh*) count, number, tell, appoint, prepare.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Isaiah the prophet ministered in Judah from about 750 to 700 b.c. He lived and prophesied at a time of severe spiritual and political decline for God's people. During his ministry the northern kingdom, Israel, was conquered by the Assyrians (722 b.c.), and the population was carried into captivity. In 701 b.c. he witnessed the invasion of Judah and the sacking of every major city except Jerusalem. However, he also prophesied Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians (39:1-6). These invasions can be traced to one cause—the people's sin (cf. 5:1-30).

The record of Isaiah's ministry comes to a close with God's answer to Isaiah's questions in 64:12. Considering all that had befallen the nation, and all that was yet to come, Isaiah asked if God would temper His judgment. In chapters 65 and 66, God declares that He has not finished. The people's sin had been too substantial. Complete destruction was the only possible response (65:15). Even so, God promised He would not destroy His faithful remnant (65:8), but would one day bring them into a new kingdom (65:17-25).

The focal passage for the following sermon and Bible study helps is part of God's response to Isaiah's questions in 64:12. God said He would preserve a remnant from destruction (65:8), but those who engage in false worship will not be among them (65:11-12).

SUGGESTED SERMON OUTLINE

The following sermon outline provides the building blocks for an expository sermon on gambling from Isaiah 65:11. Please refer to the ERLC fact sheet on gambling and other illustration sources to strengthen your application of these points. The exposition supplied with each point is intended as a starting point for further study and the development of your own ideas.

Introduction: Describe some completely unexpected tragedy that happened to you or someone you know.

Transition: Life is full of the unexpected. Wouldn't it be nice to control the future so that nothing bad ever happened—our cars never broke down, our children were never hurt, we never got any diseases, we never lost our jobs? The people that Isaiah was talking to were trying to do that very thing. They were trying to appease the gods of Fortune and Destiny so that they would bring them only good luck and positive outcomes.

Many people who gamble are looking to luck to change their futures. They know they will probably lose money, but they are hoping to beat the odds. Surveys show that most people gamble to win money. Many of these people are Christians who would never think that they are like the people Isaiah is speaking about. Yet it is probable that God reacts to their gambling in a much different way. For just as those ancient Israelites had turned to other sources to influence the outcome of their lives, many people who gamble today are doing the same thing. The question for us then is not what we think we are doing when we gamble, but what God says we are doing. From this passage we learn that God sees the activity of gambling in a much different way than many Christians think of it. When we gamble to change the outcome of our lives . . .

I. We turn from God.

Isaiah says the people who had turned to false gods had forsaken the Lord (יהוה, YAHWEH). The use of the covenant name for God is important here. The covenant that God had entered into with His people required a commitment by both God and Israel. The Book of Deuteronomy describes the nature of this covenant relationship. It includes solemn words of warning and promise (Deut. 30:15-20).

Isaiah says the people had also forgotten (שכח) God's holy mountain. Isaiah may not mean they had no memory of God, but that they had neglected their duties to God. They had forgotten that they were to worship God and Him only. Perhaps they had been so influenced by their culture that they had expanded their horizons to include other gods. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had become a God among gods, who had a particular place within the pantheon of gods. Apparently the future was not an area these people felt they could trust God for—that belonged to the control of other gods.

When we look to gambling to change the outcome of our lives, we also are looking to something besides God for our futures. We are looking to blind chance, the lucky number, the twist of fate to give us something that we feel God has not adequately supplied.

II. We turn to false gods.

The people Isaiah addresses have turned from God to the pagan gods of Fortune and Destiny. Some Bible translations treat the nouns גַּד and מְנִי (Gad and Meni) as proper names, while others translate the meaning of the names. Either choice is possible, for the gods' names identified what they were believed to be able to do. These people believed these gods could affect the future and that they could be persuaded to bring good luck.

Many people who gamble engage in a similar practice. They often develop all kinds of strange and unusual habits and beliefs that they hope will influence the outcome of their gambling. Some gamblers have lucky machines, and they will stay at those machines until they lose all their money. Others have special rituals like inserting their coins in a certain way or rubbing someone's head. Whatever the practice, the object is the same. These people have engaged in the same kind of practice as those ancient Israelites. They are looking somewhere else for their good fortune. They have turned to the gods of destiny and fortune. After all, if they didn't believe their behavior could influence the outcome, they wouldn't do what they do. Deep down, they must believe there is some force that they can influence by their overtures.

III. We give to others what belongs to God.

Isaiah identifies three things these people have given to the false gods that they should have given to the true God. (1) They had given them reverence. They set a table for them and filled cups with mixed wine for them. They were making offerings to them rather than to God. (2) They had given them resources. The offerings were resources given to the people by God that they had turned around and offered to false gods. (3) They had given them trust. The offerings indicated that the people were looking to these false gods for their future well-being rather than to God.

Those who gamble do the same things. They exalt gambling over God, and look to chance and fortune to provide for them. They bet the resources given to them by God to take a chance on a better outcome than they believe God could give them or has given them. They trust in luck to improve their lot in life rather than God.

Conclusion: In verse 12, Isaiah declares what will happen to these people who worship the false gods of Fortune and Destiny. God says He will destine them for the sword. There is a play on words here. The word destine in verse 12 is from the same root as the word Destiny in verse 11. God says these people will fall prey to the very thing they were trying to avoid. They were hoping for good fortune and looking for it in the wrong places. In fact, the places they were looking for good fortune were the very places that could not bring it. Destiny holds good fortune and bad. God is the one who can control its outcome. To look anywhere other than Him is to invite trouble. Those who trust in luck and fortune when they gamble will find themselves faced by the same truth. Indeed, very few people ever profit from gambling. Most of them lose. After all, when it comes to gambling, one person's gain is financed by the losses of many others.

BIBLE PASSAGES THAT GIVE GUIDANCE ABOUT GAMBLING

- Exodus 20:3, gambling violates the principle of Lordship
- Matthew 6:24, gambling violates the principle of spiritual priorities
- Exodus 20:17, gambling violates the principle of love
- 1 Corinthians 10:23-24, gambling violates the principle of stewardship
- 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12, gambling violates the principle of work
- 1 Thessalonians 5:22, gambling violates the principle of witness
- Romans 13:1-4, gambling violates the principle of the civil magistrate

Excerpted from *Biblical Insights on Gambling*,
published by The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention

SUGGESTED BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS

This is a suggested Bible study for any size group. The sermon notes on this sheet, the accompanying fact sheet, and the enclosed book serve as resources as you prepare to teach and then lead this Bible study. Answers are provided with the questions when appropriate, but do not be too quick to give the answers. Allow the participants time to talk about the questions among themselves and offer their own answers.

- Begin the study by helping your group understand how widespread gambling is. Ask: What kinds of gambling exist in our area? In our country? (The group may need help in remembering the many kinds of gambling. Make sure they understand how widespread it is.)
- Can you remember when we didn't have all this gambling? When did it all start? (If you have gambling in your area, ask: How long have we had gambling here?)
- Why do people gamble? (After people offer their reasons, refer to the chart on the accompanying fact sheet showing why people gamble.)
- What do most people think of gambling today? Do you know people who gamble? Why do they gamble?
- Regardless of why people gamble, what are they counting on to win? Luck
- To see what God has to say to people who trust in luck. Let's look at Isaiah 65:11. (Refer to the Historical Context section and sermon notes to get some historical background on this passage.)
- What were these people doing? Worshipping the gods Fortune and Destiny.
- Why was their activity displeasing to God? (Refer to the accompanying sermon notes to prepare to lead the discussion.)
- Because luck is the common element in all forms of gambling, is it possible that God thinks of gambling in the same way that He thought about these people's worship? (Talk about the ways in which gambling and the false worship mentioned in Isaiah are similar and different.)
- Given the similarities between the worship of the gods Fortune and Destiny and the dependence on luck in gambling, what should be the Christian response to gambling?
- Are there reasons besides the dependence on luck that should cause a Christian to decide not to gamble? (See the section "Bible Passages That Give Guidance About Gambling" for passages the group can read to answer this question.)
- How can we help other Christians recognize how God feels about gambling? (Group members may want to consider asking their pastor to preach on the subject of gambling. They may suggest that this Bible study be taught in other classes. They may want to provide literature on the subject of gambling to their church and friends. The ERLC has several excellent pamphlets on gambling.)

- What can we do right now about gambling in our area? (Ask the group to come up with practical suggestions and then lead them to discuss ways to implement them. See the section “What You Can Do About Gambling” for some helpful ideas.)

WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT GAMBLING

Decide to get involved. Stopping the spread of gambling in all of its forms is going to be up to the citizens of this country. Too many lawmakers have shown that they will not resist gambling unless they hear from the people.

As much as possible, refuse to shop at stores that provide gambling opportunities. Tell the owners of those stores why you will not shop there any longer. Share the facts about gambling with these owners in a kind, concerned manner. Take your business to stores that do not promote gambling. Tell the owners why you are shopping there.

Find other people in your church or community who share your concerns. Form an action group or become part of an existing one. Ask your pastor if he knows about any groups or individuals that you can work with. Post fliers in your neighborhood and hold a neighborhood meeting for people who would be interested in addressing the gambling issue.

Get to know your state representative and state senator. Visit them if you can. Attend their meetings in your area and share your opposition to gambling. Write to them about your opposition.

Provide gambling information to the people in your church. Ask your pastor to include ERLC materials or materials from your state or other local moral concerns agency in bulletins. Print information in the bulletin or include bulletin inserts.

Observe Anti-Gambling Sunday in your church. Encourage your Sunday School teachers to teach a lesson about gambling. Ask your pastor to preach a message about gambling.

Write letters to the editor. Share your observations about the problems caused by gambling.

Contact community and other religious groups. Share with them the problems associated with gambling and ask them to work with you to defeat or repeal gambling legislation.

Stay informed. Stay informed about the latest issues and significant people in the gambling debate. Share this information with others.

Pray for God’s power. Gambling destroys people’s lives and violates God’s design of trust in Him for one’s livelihood. Therefore, we can expect God’s help if we commit ourselves to make a change and ask His help in accomplishing it.

Remember, gambling can be defeated. Some types of gambling have already been defeated in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, and South Carolina. It was defeated because people saw how destructive it is. It can be defeated in your community for the same reason.