

REBELLION'S CYCLE

God brings righteous judgment on His rebellious people, with the goal of their repentance.

JUDGES 2:11-19

MEMORY VERSE: JUDGES 2:18

PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** Judges 1:1–3:6, First Thoughts (p. 84), and Understand the Context (pp. 84-85). Review the Introduction (pp. 10-11) for additional insight into Judges. Identify the verbs used to describe the sins of the Hebrews and what those reveal about the nature of sin.
- **STUDY** Judges 2:11-19, using Explore the Text (pp. 85-89). As you study, look for signs that over time the Israelites spiraled downward in their sin and disobedience against God.
- **PLAN** the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 90-91) and ideas in *QuickSource*. Add variety to the plans for your group this session by using at least one suggestion from More Ideas on page 92. Reference *Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible* for ideas to customize your session. Brainstorm creative ways to use the Suggested Music Idea (p. 92) that are appropriate for your group.
- **GROW** with other group leaders at the Group Ministry blog (*LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry*).
- **GATHER** the following items: Personal Study Guides. Prepare to display the following Pack Items:
 - PACK ITEM 1** (*Map: The Judges of Israel*); **PACK ITEM 2** (*Outlines of Joshua; Judges; Ruth*);
 - PACK ITEM 3** (*Poster: Winter 2016-17*); **PACK ITEM 4** (*Time Line: Joshua; Judges; Ruth*);
 - PACK ITEM 7** (*Chart: The Judges*).



FIRST THOUGHTS

KEY DOCTRINE

Repentance

Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God.

One reason we study history is to learn from it. We can discover what to do and what to avoid. We can identify actions to emulate, follies to avoid, and warnings to heed. In many cases, we see ourselves repeating the same noble acts or going down the same destructive paths. Unfortunately, in many cases, we are more likely to identify with historical figures than we are to learn from them.

(In PSG, p. 82) **In what ways have you seen history repeat itself?**

Do you think we can learn from history and stop repeating the same mistakes? Explain.

The Israelites knew their history yet repeated a destructive cycle of rebellion. This cycle began with their sin against God, took them to the depths of despair, and then brought them back to life by God's grace. God brought righteous judgment on His rebellious people, with the goal of repentance. Unfortunately, after a short time passed, the people would start the cycle all over again, returning to their sins.

Christians are susceptible to the same kind of choices. We don't always choose to honor God. Jesus empowers us to escape this destructive cycle and embrace fellowship with Him.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "Ashtoreth" in the Winter 2016-17 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JUDGES 1:1–3:6

This week's session passage (Judg. 2:11-19) is part of the prologue section of Judges. The prologue is important because it sets the stage for understanding the rebellious cycle into which Israel was drawn after the death of Joshua. Israel failed to fully drive out the inhabitants of the land (1:27-28). Thus, over time, the Israelites intermingled with the indigenous population, resulting in the assimilation of their lifestyles and idolatrous religions (3:5-6).

The "Angel of the LORD" (2:1) reminded the Israelites of God's command not to make a covenant with the peoples living in the promised land. Not only did they endear themselves to their pagan neighbors, they "took their daughters as wives for themselves" and "gave their own daughters to their sons" (3:6). Additionally, the Lord instructed His people to destroy pagan altars. Instead, the Israelites "worshiped their gods" (3:6).

Wandering in the desert for 40 years meant the Israelites had to be nomadic, moving about constantly. Once they settled in the promised land, they adopted a more agrarian lifestyle. They began to grow crops.

The cycle of preparing the fields, sowing seed, and harvesting crops depended on the fertility of the soil and the appropriate amount of rain. Israel's Canaanite neighbors worshiped Baal and Ashtoreth [ASH tuh reth] for these very reasons. First, they believed Baal was the storm god who provided the crucial rains. Secondly, the fertility of the soil was thought to be tied to the relationship between Baal and his female consort Ashtoreth. The Canaanites developed cultic practices as part of their worship that reenacted the love interest between the false god and goddess. Their hope was that such worship would guarantee Baal's and Ashtoreth's favor.

Because the Israelites rebelled against the Lord's commands by participating in the worship of pagan gods, they "suffered greatly" (2:15). In this environment, the Lord "raised up judges, who saved them from the power of their marauders" (2:16). The writer of Judges used specific examples to show how the judges delivered God's people and how the people repeated their rebellious cycle. In 2:16-23, the writer summarized the rebellious cycle. Using the acrostic SWORD, we can understand the cycle more clearly. The "S" stands for the sin the people committed (2:17a,19); "W" for God's wrath kindled in response to their sin (2:20). "O" stands for the oppressing nations the Lord raised up to discipline His people (2:21-22); "R" for the people's cry of repentance (2:18b). Finally, "D" stands for the deliverers (judges) the Lord empowered to liberate His repentant people (2:16,18a).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

ABANDONMENT (JUDG. 2:11-13)

VERSE 11

Joshua and the elders who outlived him had seen the Lord's great work wrought on Israel's behalf (2:7-10a). The succeeding generation, however, had not seen or experienced the work Yahweh had done on Israel's behalf, nor did they "know the LORD" (2:10b).

What stark words we read: ***The Israelites did what was evil in the LORD's sight.*** The assessment comes against the backdrop of God's covenant with Israel. The Lord had promised never to break His covenant with Israel (2:1). He also prohibited Israel from making a covenant with the inhabitants of the land they were entering (2:2). In fact, the Israelites were commissioned by the Lord to tear down the altars of their neighbors' false gods. The covenant is mentioned again in verse 20: the Lord's anger burned against Israel because they had violated His covenant and disobeyed Him.

The phrase *in the LORD's sight* serves as a reminder to all of us that life is lived under God's watchful eyes. Just as God was aware of Israel's transgressions, even so today the Lord watches over us. When we seek to obey Him, He is aware of our devotion. And during those times we deceive ourselves into believing we can live in sin and no one will know, the watchful

BIBLE SKILL

Memorize a verse and apply it to a real-life situation.

Memorize Judges 2:18 in your preferred Bible translation. Write the verse in your own words. Reflect on the truths revealed in the verse. What does this verse say about God's feelings for His people and about His power to benefit them? Record a summary of your reflections and how the verse can comfort you during difficult times in your life.

JUDGES 2:11

¹¹ The Israelites did what was evil in the LORD's sight. They worshiped the Baals

eyes of the Lord still are upon us. In fact, God watches over us just as a loving father keeps an eye on his children to encourage good behavior or to discipline bad behavior.

The precise nature of Israel's sin is declared: **they worshiped the •Baals**. Baal was the supreme god of the Canaanite religion, associated with storms and the fertility of the land for crops. The plural form, Baals, acknowledges the presence of many forms of Baalism, each with localized nuances in worship. The Hebrew verb rendered *worshiped* can be translated as "served." Both terms indicate a full devotion to the idol.

JUDGES 2:12

¹² and abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They went after other gods from the surrounding peoples and bowed down to them. They infuriated the LORD,

VERSE 12

By worshiping Baal, the Israelites had **abandoned the LORD**. Significantly, the covenant name, Yahweh or *the LORD*, is used to cast their actions in a covenant context. The "evil" of the previous verse denoted spiritual malignancy in the hearts of the Baal worshipers. Here the evil is spelled out: the people abandoned the Lord.

The Lord is identified with two notes. First, He was the **God of their fathers**. To the ancient Hebrews, this title summoned to mind the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. To abandon the Lord was no mere shedding of an ancestral religion. Many signs and wonders of God on Israel's behalf affirmed His covenant with the Hebrews. To abandon the covenant Lord who had dealt so faithfully with their fathers was grievous indeed.

Second, the Lord is identified by His past action as the One **who had brought them out of Egypt**. The exodus and subsequent covenant making at Sinai brought Israel into existence not only as a nation but also as the covenant people of God. They were to be His representatives, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, to all the peoples of the earth. By abandoning the Lord, the Israelites had forsaken their identity and mission and had abandoned the one true God who had delivered them.

The phrase **other gods** no doubt encompassed various other idols of the people surrounding Israel. Many locals had their own individual gods or house gods. The Israelites **bowed down** to these idols. This idolatrous worship **infuriated the LORD**.

VERSE 13

The writer summarized the two aspects of the problem. The people **abandoned** the Lord, and they **worshiped Baal and the •Ashtoreths**. The new element added, the Ashtoreths, refers to the female consorts of the Baal in Canaanite religion. The union of Baal and Ashtoreth was believed to secure the needed rains and fertility of the soil for growing crops in Canaan. The name *Ashtoreth* is a hybrid using the consonants of the name *Ashtart* and the vowels of the Hebrew word *boshet*, meaning "shame." By combining the two words, the Hebrew scribes sought to cast shame on this goddess.

JUDGES 2:13

¹³ for they abandoned Him and worshiped Baal and the Ashtoreths.

What aspects of contemporary culture do you think could claim too much of our attention today and weaken our devotion to God?

OPPRESSION (JUDG. 2:14-15)

VERSE 14

Christians who have been exposed to an emphasis on God's love in Christ are often uncomfortable with statements such as **the LORD's anger burned against Israel**, He **handed them over to marauders**, or **He sold them to the enemies**. In each case, God seems to be the active agent of judgment against His own people. In reality, when God's people chose to live in a way He did not prescribe, He allowed them to fully experience the perils. He remained faithful to His covenant even when His people rebelled against Him. The distance between the Lord and His people when they sinned was due to their waywardness. Though the Lord had tried to convince them to repent, they stubbornly refused.

The results were devastating: **They could no longer resist their enemies**. The verb *resist* refers to the power or strength to oppose their foes. God's people drew their strength from Him. When they pushed Him away by rebelling against His covenant, they found themselves standing in their own power. Yet their power was insufficient to defeat their foes.

VERSE 15

The Israelites **went out** to fight on many occasions because adversaries surrounded them. During the exodus and conquest, the Lord fought for His people, securing victory. His people were to express gratitude through obedience to God's covenant. During the time of the judges, the people often forsook the Lord, disobeying His commandments. Baal worship proved to be a particularly debilitating temptation.

What does it mean **the LORD was against them**? In Hebrew, this phrase reads, "the hand of the Lord was against them." The Lord's removal of His hand referred to an act of His loving discipline of His people. The idea of passive wrath included God's allowing His people to reap the consequences of their own waywardness. The prophet Jeremiah proclaimed: "Your own evil will discipline you; your own apostasies will reprimand you" (Jer. 2:19a). The words **brought disaster on them** carried the idea of misery, distress, and calamity.

Israel was no innocent victim of a capricious God. Rather, the Lord **had promised and sworn to them** that their sin would bring great judgment upon them. The purpose of God's commandments was to keep His people in line with His will. As they transgressed the covenant by worshiping false gods, they distanced themselves from the protective blessings of the Lord.

JUDGES 2:14

¹⁴ The LORD's anger burned against Israel, and He handed them over to marauders who raided them. He sold them to the enemies around them, and they could no longer resist their enemies.

JUDGES 2:15

¹⁵ Whenever the Israelites went out, the LORD was against them and brought disaster on them, just as He had promised and sworn to them. So they suffered greatly.

Separated from God's protective presence, Israel suffered greatly. They became disorganized and divided. God's people had traded His protection for the stress of military defeat.

(In PSG, p. 86) **Does God use the same means to discipline His people today as He did to discipline the Israelites? Explain.**

REPENTANCE (JUDG. 2:16-19)

VERSE 16

The writer's affirmation that *the LORD raised up judges* speaks to God's faithfulness to His covenant in spite of the people's sins. When they were unfaithful, God was still faithful. Later, Paul recalled this fact in Romans 3:1-4.

The word *judges* derives from a word meaning "to judge," but we should not limit their actions to a judicial setting. The exploits of Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Barak, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson often involved armed conflict. Ehud and Samson more or less acted alone, but the others led armies into battle.

The result was deliverance and an immediate relief from pain. God empowered the judges to deliver His people from their enemies. **Marauders** is related to a Hebrew verb meaning "to plunder." The verb refers to the action of conquering armies that divest the vanquished of their personal belongings, the so-called "spoils of war." Part of God's discipline of His people was to allow neighboring nations to conquer them and then to harass them, often for long periods of time.

The Septuagint, or Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, amended the phrase *who saved them* to read, "the Lord saved them." The term *Lord* appears once in the Hebrew. The Septuagint, however, inserted the Greek *kurios* ("Lord") a second time. Thus, the Septuagint affirmed the real deliverer was the Lord Himself, though He used judges as instruments of deliverance. The Greek translator might have been motivated by 2:18, where the Lord was the One who saved the people.

VERSE 17

The writer emphasized the rebellious nature of God's people by providing three emphatic statements of their obstinacy. First, **they did not listen to their judges**. The judges were the deliverers the Lord raised up because He was faithful to His covenant and sought to preserve His people (as we saw in 2:16). The phrase *did not listen* means the people did not obey God's instructions through the judges. In so doing, they rejected the Lord's leadership.

Second, the people **prostituted themselves with other gods**. The Hebrew verb used here means "to act a harlot." The *other gods* were the idols

JUDGES 2:16

¹⁶ The LORD raised up judges, who saved them from the power of their marauders,

JUDGES 2:17

¹⁷ but they did not listen to their judges. Instead, they prostituted themselves with other gods, bowing down to them. They quickly turned from the way of their fathers, who had walked in obedience to the LORD's commands. They did not do as their fathers did.

of neighboring peoples, including Baal and Ashtoreth. The act of **bowing down to them** meant complete prostration on the ground to show reverence and humility before those idols.

Third, the people **quickly turned from the way of their fathers**, which is identified as the way of **obedience to the LORD's commands**. The term *quickly* speaks to the rapidity with which God's people forgot His deliverance by returning to their idolatry. *Obedience* translates the verb "to hear" and refers to hearing God's commands and submitting to His instructions. The final statement, **they did not do as their fathers did**, underscores their abandonment of the covenant the Lord had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

VERSE 18

God's faithfulness contrasted with Israel's unfaithfulness. **The LORD** occurs three times in this verse to underscore God's covenant faithfulness. First, He **raised up a judge for the Israelites**. The deliverer was established for Israel's benefit. Second, He **was with him**, referring to divine empowerment of the judge. Israel's deliverance was attributable to the Lord. Third, He **saved the people** from their enemies. The referent is *the LORD*. Though He used human judges, God was the great Deliverer. Fourth, **the LORD was moved to pity**. This Hebrew verb has a variety of usages, including "to comfort," "to repent," or "to relent." The verb reflects God's compassion for His people.

The severity of Israel's plight under enemy nations is emphasized by the phrase **those who were oppressing and afflicting them**. Their groaning expressed their suffering to God. The word **groaned** is rare in the Old Testament but appears in Exodus 2:24 showing God's reason for delivering His people. Repentance is strongly implied in the process of acknowledging that their sins had resulted in divine discipline.

VERSE 19

This verse reflects the rebellious nature the people exhibited toward the Lord. **Whenever the judge died**, they acted **even more corruptly than their fathers**. The new rebellion followed the same path; they were **going after other gods to worship and bow down to them**. In spite of repeated demonstrations of God's faithfulness, **they did not turn from their evil practices or their obstinate ways**.

Since God brings righteous judgment on His rebellious people, with the goal of their repentance, what specific actions do you think people should take to be restored to fellowship with Jesus?

JUDGES 2:18

18 Whenever the LORD raised up a judge for the Israelites, the LORD was with him and saved the people from the power of their enemies while the judge was still alive. The LORD was moved to pity whenever they groaned because of those who were oppressing and afflicting them.

JUDGES 2:19

19 Whenever the judge died, the Israelites would act even more corruptly than their fathers, going after other gods to worship and bow down to them. They did not turn from their evil practices or their obstinate ways.

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

GUIDE: To introduce the group time, ask the group to share some significant historical events that have happened in their lifetime. Comment that when we pause to think about historical events, we sometimes see patterns where history repeats itself.

DISCUSS: *In what ways have you seen history repeat itself? Do you think we can learn from history and stop repeating the same mistakes? Explain.* (PSG, p. 82)

LOOK: Focus attention on **Pack Item 1** (*Map: The Judges of Israel*), **Pack Item 2** (*Outlines of Joshua; Judges; Ruth*), **Pack Item 3** (*Poster: Winter 2016-17*), and **Pack Item 4** (*Time Line: Joshua; Judges; Ruth*) to set the context for today's study. Also refer to the book introduction (PSG, pp. 8-9) and Understand the Context (PSG, p. 83) to help introduce the Book of Judges.

TRANSITION: *As we explore Judges 2, look for the cycle of the Israelites' rebellion, God's judgment, and the promise of forgiveness that God offered.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Judges 2:11-13, while the group listens for the rebellious choices the Israelites made. Direct the group to silently read the second paragraph under Verse 11 (PSG, p. 84) to better understand the scope of the Israelites' disobedience.

DISCUSS: *In what ways is sin abandoning God? Is it a declaration of allegiance to something other than God? Explain.* (PSG, p. 85)

PRESENT: Stress that it is no surprise God was "infuriated" (v. 12) with the Israelites' evil behavior. State: *It would seem they had forgotten all that God had done in bringing them out of Egypt as slaves and raising them up to be a mighty nation of His chosen people. Not only did they wander away from God, they turned their loyalty and affection to idols by worshiping the false gods of their Canaanite neighbors.*

DISCUSS: *What is the connection between sin and worshiping God? How does one impact doing the other? (PSG, p. 85) Besides our actions, in what other ways could we abandon God?*

TRANSITION: *Note the progression we see of how the people abandoned their worship of the one true God and turned toward idol worship. Now look for God's response in verses 14-15.*

READ: Direct the group to read silently Judges 2:14-15, looking for the description of God's swift judgment.

DISCUSS: *How did God discipline the people for their rebellion against Him?*

EMPHASIZE: Highlight the concept of God's active and passive wrath, as it is described in the information under Verse 14 (PSG, p. 85) and Verse 15 (PSG, pp. 85-86). Stress that God removed His protection and stood by while enemies were victorious over His people, and He also worked to bring discipline against His people.

DISCUSS: *Does God use the same means to discipline His people today as He did to discipline the Israelites? Explain.* (PSG, p. 86)

TRANSITION: Like the people of Israel during the time of the judges, believers today must also prepare themselves for His discipline when there is disobedience. Now let's look to verses 16-19 and the hope that God offers His people.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Judges 2:16-19. Encourage the group to listen for the contrast between the hope God offered the people and their downward spiral of disobedience.

STUDY: Arrange everyone into four teams (an individual can be a team), dividing verses 16-19 among the teams. Direct each team to search the information on their assigned verse(s) in the PSG (pp. 87-89). After allowing time for study, call for each team to share any details they discovered.

DISPLAY: Direct attention to **Pack Item 7** (*Chart: The Judges*) to help the group better understand the judges and their purpose.

DISCUSS: Why is repentance important in the life of an unbeliever? Why is repentance important in the life of a believer? (PSG, p. 89)

SHARE: God raised up judges to deliver the people from the suffering they experienced as a result of their disobedience. After the death of a judge, they soon returned to their rebellious ways. God is compassionate and forgiving, but He desires our true repentance when we do wrong.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

ASK: What questions do you have about today's study—about the cycle of rebellion, righteous judgment, and repentance? Respond to any questions based on your understanding of Scripture. If there are questions you cannot answer, work to get an answer before the next group meeting.

DIRECT: Encourage the group to discuss the second question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 90): *Share with the group ways God has disciplined you or someone you know in the past. Be sure to include the lessons learned. Discuss with the group how the lessons learned can encourage others in the group to live a Christlike life.* Call for volunteers to share their responses. Challenge the group to encourage each other toward Christlike living.

DO: As time allows, direct attention to the third question set (PSG, p. 90): *Review the information on the inside front cover, paying particular attention to words and phrases that point to repentance. If you have not made this initial step, contact your Bible study leader to visit about this important decision. If you have made this initial step, find one person with whom you can share about the need for repentance, and share the information on the inside front cover with him or her.* Encourage anyone who has not taken the initial step toward repentance to do so today, and make yourself available for anyone who might want to talk or pray. Challenge all who have repented to share that good news with a friend or family member who needs to hear it.

PRAY: Thank God for the wonderful forgiveness He offers to all who turn away from sin and rebellion to seek Him.



PRACTICE

- Give yourself a heart-check. Is there any unconfessed sin you need to deal with? Ask for God's forgiveness, turn from the sin, and then turn toward right choices and attitudes.
- Follow up on any unanswered questions the group had during today's group time.
- Contact anyone in the group who was absent from the study, sharing with them a summary of key insights from this study.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

To supplement the introduction, ask the group, by show of hands, who has a favorite movie or novel they have watched or read more than once. Note that no matter how many times we watch the movie or read the book, the ending never changes. Say: *Today we start a study through the Book of Judges. We will see that although the characters changed, the desperate cycle of sin and rebellion did not change.* Read Judges 2:11.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To supplement Judges 2:11-13, invite the group to name how we set different standards in our daily lives—how fast to drive, how often to brush our teeth, and so forth—and in our spiritual life—how we interpret God's instructions to us in Scripture. Call attention to verse 11. Stress that when the people abandoned God, they set their own standards for right and wrong—a very dangerous rebellion.
- To help the group better understand that what was happening in Judges 2:14-15 to the people of Israel was no surprise, call for a volunteer to read aloud Deuteronomy 28:47-48. Explain that these verses are part of a longer description of the curses that would come upon the people if they broke their covenant relationship with God. Explain that the events in verses 14-15 had been promised by God from the beginning.
- As a supplement to Judges 2:16-19, encourage the group to complete the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 88): *Memorize Judges 2:18 in your preferred Bible translation. Write the verse in your own words. Reflect on the truths revealed in the verse. What does this verse say about God's feelings for His people and about His power to benefit them? Record a summary of your reflections and how the verse can comfort you during difficult times in your life.*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Call attention to the first question set (PSG, p. 90): *Spend time in private worship. Reflect on Jesus' being our only hope for salvation and God's offer to forgive our sin through faith in His Son. Record your thoughts as a part of your private worship time.* Challenge the group to make time for worship in their schedules this week and to record their thoughts during the worship time.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Review the words to "I Am Thine, O Lord," by Fanny Crosby, noting that no matter where we stand in our relationship with God today, His desire is that we draw closer to Him.