



Session 8

REBELLION'S CYCLE

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

JUDGES 2:11-19

¹¹ The Israelites did what was evil in the LORD's sight. They worshiped the Baals 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, ¹³ for they abandoned Him and worshiped Baal and the Ashtoreths. 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. 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. ¹⁶ The LORD raised up judges, who saved them from the power of their marauders, 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. 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. 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.

Highlight the verbs used to describe the sin of the Hebrews. What do these verbs reveal about the nature of sin?

FIRST THOUGHTS

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 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.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JUDGES 1:1–3:6

Once the land was in the Israelites' possession, Joshua divided it among the twelve tribes. Israel remained faithful to God throughout Joshua's lifetime (Josh. 24:31), but matters changed not long after his death. Though the Israelites possessed and lived in the promised land, enemies lived among them, as recorded in Judges 1. The Israelites couldn't remove them because they had iron chariots (Judg. 1:19). They never drove the Canaanites out completely from the land (1:28).

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. The Israelites disobeyed. 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). Because of their rebellion against the Lord's commands, the Israelites "suffered greatly" (2:15). In this environment, the Lord "raised up judges, who saved them from the power of their marauders" (2:16).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

ABANDONMENT (JUDG. 2:11-13)

VERSE 11

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

How did the Israelites go from being conquerors to being prisoners in their own land? God answered that question for the Israelites: they *did what was evil in the LORD's sight*.



Almost unimaginably, they **worshiped the •Baals**. Baal was the supreme god of the Canaanite religion. The Canaanites (and obviously, some Israelites) believed that Baal insured productivity. Male and female prostitutes worked at temples of Baal; worshipers had sexual relations with prostitutes at the temple. This act was believed to encourage the sexual union between Baal and his cohort, Ashtoreth [ASH tuh reth]. Worshipers of Baal believed that this union between Baal and Asherah, in turn, insured the fertility of the land, animals, and humans.

VERSES 12-13

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

The Israelites **abandoned the LORD**. The verb translated *abandoned* can also be translated “leave” or “forsake.” In the Book of Genesis, this same word is used to instruct the man to leave his mother and father and bond with his wife (2:24). The idea of abandonment also can be seen in 1 Chronicles 10. After the death of King Saul, the Israelites, in fear, abandoned their cities and fled (v. 7).

The writer of the Book of Judges wanted no mistake regarding God’s identity. The Hebrews shouldn’t compare Him to any of the pagan gods, for **the LORD** was the One **who had brought them out of Egypt**. But instead of worshiping the One who had delivered them, they **went after other gods from the surrounding peoples and bowed down to them**. The word *bow* in Hebrew can also be translated “to worship” or “to adore.” While the Israelites should have worshiped and adored the Lord, they instead worshiped and adored pagan deities.

Taking into consideration the fact that the Hebrews **abandoned the Lord and worshiped Baal and the •Ashtoreths** (Ashtoreths refers to the female consorts of Baal), we should not be surprised to read that **they infuriated the LORD**. Such abandonment would provoke anyone to anger, but especially the Lord.

In what ways is sin abandoning God? Is it a declaration of allegiance to something other than God? Explain.

What is the connection between sin and worshiping God? How does one impact doing the other?

OPPRESSION (JUDG. 2:14-15)

VERSE 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.

With ***the LORD's anger*** burning against Israel, ***He handed them over to marauders who raided them.*** The God who had protected and provided for His people now removed His protection and allowed their enemies to prevail. This Hebrew army had once marched around Jericho and witnessed Jericho's wall collapse. Israel had won multiple victories. At Hazor [HAY zawr], the Israelites defeated an enemy "as numerous as the sand on the seashore—along with a vast number of horses and chariots" (Josh. 11:4). This mighty army once "took all this land ... He [Joshua] captured all their kings and struck them down" (Josh. 11:16-17). But sadly, Israel's once mighty army ***could no longer resist their enemies.***

VERSE 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.

The Lord not only withdrew His protective hand, He also worked ***against them and brought disaster on them.*** God's action should not have been a surprise. Previously, He had promised and sworn to do this. Joshua warned them: "Be very diligent to love the LORD your God for your own well-being" or else "the LORD your God will not continue to drive these nations out before you" (Josh. 23:11-13). Ominously and candidly, Joshua warned, "If you break the covenant of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, and go and worship



other gods, and bow down to them, the LORD's anger will burn against you, and you will quickly disappear from this good land He has given you" (23:16).

Notice in Judges 2:14 that God's people "could no longer resist their enemies." Also notice in verse 15 that God actually worked against His people as they went out to meet their enemies. These two verses demonstrate God's passive and active wrath.

Every believer understands God's active wrath. God destroyed "every creature under heaven" with the flood (Gen. 6:17). He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with "burning sulfur" (Gen. 19:24).

God's passive wrath may be more challenging for believers to understand. The Lord's passive wrath is His decision to not intervene in the life of a person or a situation. King Saul made a series of poor decisions, including making a sacrifice in Samuel's absence (1 Sam. 13:8-13) and failing to kill Agag, king of the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:8). A desperate Saul then "inquired of the LORD" (1 Sam. 28:6). But in that situation, "the LORD did not answer him" (1 Sam. 28:6). The Lord simply allowed the decisions of Saul to have their natural outcome.

The apostle Paul attempted to help Christians in the church at Rome understand God's active and passive wrath. Of God's active wrath, Paul wrote: "God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18). But sometimes God's wrath is passive in that He delivers individuals "over in the cravings of their hearts" and "degrading passions" (1:24-26). In God's passive wrath, He simply allows normal consequences to occur. In the Book of Judges, the Israelites disobeyed God, and God then allowed their enemies to oppress them.

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

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

This verse completes a cycle often found in the Book of Judges: rebellion, oppression, repentance, and deliverance. In these verses, the cycle is incomplete, but notice: “The Israelites did what was evil in the LORD’s sight” (rebellion, v. 11); “He handed them over to marauders” (oppression, v. 14); and then **the LORD raised up judges** (deliverance, v. 16).

The complete cycle can be seen in chapter 4: “The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD” (rebellion, 4:1); “the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan” (oppression, 4:2); “the Israelites cried out to the LORD” (repentance, 4:3); and finally, “Deborah ... was judging Israel at that time” (deliverance, 4:4). The cycle can be seen additionally in 3:7-15 and 6:1-14. The Israelites made the same mistake again and again.

God provided judges to offer leadership during these dark times. We should not understand the judges simply in terms of a judicial role. While some judges tried cases and administered justice (see 4:5), the judges of the book by the same name served as military deliverers. 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.

VERSE 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.

Considering the trying times in which the Israelites lived, we might conclude they would have welcomed the leadership of God-appointed and God-anointed judges. Instead, **they did not listen to their judges** but **prostituted themselves with other gods**. The phrase *did not listen* means the people did not obey God’s instructions through the judges.

While Joshua and the elders had been faithful to the Lord (Josh. 24:31) and walked in obedience to the Lord’s commands, the Israelites of the Book of Judges **quickly turned from the way of their fathers**. The term *quickly* speaks to the rapidity with which God’s people returned to their idolatry.

VERSE 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.

God's faithfulness in verse 18 is contrasted with Israel's unfaithfulness as described in the previous verse. Compassionately, ***the LORD raised up*** judges and, through them, ***saved the people***. He was ***moved to pity whenever they groaned because of those who were oppressing and afflicting them***. The same word for *groaned* was used in Exodus 2:23-25: "The Israelites groaned because of their difficult labor, and they cried out; and their cry for help ascended to God because of the difficult labor. So God heard their groaning, and He remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God saw the Israelites, and He took notice." When His people groaned because of their bondage in Egypt, God heard, remembered, saw, and took notice. During the time of the judges, when God's people groaned because of their oppression, ***the LORD was moved to pity***. The Hebrew word translated ***moved to pity*** reflects God's compassion for His people.

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.

VERSE 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.

As long as the judge lived and provided leadership, the Israelites remained faithful to the Lord. But ***whenever the judge died***, so died the faithfulness of the Israelites. In fact, their disloyalty to the Lord only worsened: ***the Israelites would act even more corruptly***. They depended on human judges to deliver them; unfortunately, the judges died. We depend on the eternal Christ as our faithful Deliverer.

As we saw in a previous session, godly commitments can be difficult to keep (Josh. 24:19). The cycle of rebellion continues for every Christian today. As believers' sins continue, so does the discipline of God. As a loving parent disciplines a child, God lovingly disciplines His children. The writer of the Book of Hebrews reminded readers: "Do not take the Lord's discipline lightly or faint when you are reproved by Him, for the Lord disciplines the one He loves" (12:5-6). When disciplining His children, the Lord always has love as His motive and repentance as His goal.

What should a believer do when he or she incurs the discipline of the Lord? Repent. Repentance expresses a feeling of regret for one's sin. But repentance is more than a feeling. True repentance also demands the changing of one's mind and a turning from sin back to Jesus.

Why is repentance important in the life of an unbeliever? Why is repentance important in the life of a believer?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Repentance*

Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God.

IN MY CONTEXT



- God alone is worthy of worship.
- Believers who turn their back on God can expect to receive His discipline—either overtly or through passive wrath.
- God provides relief from His discipline when wayward individuals repent and turn to Him.

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.

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.

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.

MEMORY VERSE

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 2:18