

# Session 14

## NO KING BUT JESUS

*Judges 2:7-19; 17:6*

### 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.*

– JOSHUA 2:18, CSB




## No King but Jesus

**THEOLOGICAL THEME:** When we sin and reject the Lord by serving other gods, we find ourselves in painful cycles of sin and rebellion. But God is faithful to rescue us when we cry out to Him.

**CALL TO ACTION:** If Israel is a mirror for us, and they lived in a cycle of rebellion and repentance, where do you find yourself in that cycle today?

Who makes the final decisions when two sides have a disagreement about something? This can be solved by the parties involved, or it may be taken before a judge in a court of law if it escalates. Many TV shows and movies are set in the context of the courtroom, as there is no shortage of drama that ensues in relationships between people.

Judges are trained in the law and trusted to make final decisions. Our country has levels of courts and judges going up to the Supreme Court, which has the ultimate legal say on right and wrong. Whether you agree or not, we must respect the judgments they hand down or pay the consequences. The book of Judges is all about choices, consequences, judgments, and restoration.

 What courtroom drama or movie is a favorite of yours and why?

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## What do you know about the role of the judges in the Old Testament?

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### Session Summary

Cycles of sin, rebellion, desperation, and restoration are common for Christ followers, both in biblical times and today. The world we live in is rampant with idolatry, just like the promised land was for the Israelites. It was the tool the enemy used to draw the people away from godliness and caused suffering, but it eventually led them to cry out for help.

The Lord loves His people and although He allows us to suffer the painful consequences of our sin, He also desires that we turn back to Him. When God's people cry out for rescue, He faithfully responds in love and restores us to Himself. Wherever you find yourself on the cycle of sin, rebellion, and restoration, God is there and will respond when you cry out to Him.

### 1. Rebellion and Idolatry (Judges 2:7-13)

This passage records the death of Joshua, who had faithfully led the Israelites after Moses. Joshua was a godly leader, and the nation of Israel flourished under his guidance. As often happens with strong leaders, the people followed his example and served the Lord faithfully as long as he lived. Joshua left a legacy of godliness and was a great man of God. The problem came when those who knew and remembered him died off, and a generation rose that didn't know the Lord or the things He had done for Israel. This was a generation that had no personal relationship with the Lord and no respect for His power.

## What lesson is there for us as we consider the spiritual decline of Israel following the death of Joshua?

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With their godly leader gone, we see the start of the downward spiral of the Israelites. Throughout the book of Judges, this same cycle repeated, beginning with the people rebelling against the Lord. God would allow them to face the consequences of their rebellion until they cried out for deliverance. Then God would hear their cries and raise up a leader who would call them to repentance. And the cycle repeated.

Scripture tells us the people “did what was evil in the LORD’s sight” (v. 11). Although they had been faithful to the Lord as they inhabited the promised land, after Joshua died, they forsook the Lord and began worshiping other gods. They chose to turn away from a relationship with the Lord and to false and powerless gods. Although it makes no logical sense, this pattern is all too common, even today.

The gods of Baal were thought to be the gods of nature and weather for the Canaanites. Baal was typically given credit for financial and material success. Nature and weather were crucial elements in an agricultural society, so the people gave in to the temptation of the day and placed their faith in a false god that made them feel more in control of their lives and success.




What are some false “gods” people today might turn to today?

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Once the people turned from God to Baal, they also began worshiping Ashtoreth. Ashtoreth was thought to be the goddess of love, fertility, and war. The typical forms of worship for this false god involved physical pleasure without restriction to the point of degradation and prostitution. The Israelites gave in to the gods of the people they allowed to live in the promised land alongside them, and it wasn’t long before they were fully immersed in idolatry that took them further from the Lord.


The pursuit of these gods was direct rejection of the Lord. The Israelites likely thought of this as merely adding to those they worshiped, not forsaking the Lord. This is a dangerous and wrong train of thought. God has made it clear we are to have no other god before Him. He is the one true God, and the children of Israel were given this instruction directly (Exodus 20:3). The phrasing that this idolatry was committed in the sight of the Lord emphasized the offense.

 Application: What do you need to rid your life of things that may be drawing your worship away from the Lord?

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## 2. Sin and Rescue (Judges 2:14-19)

Sin has consequences. The people chose to turn away from the Lord and they paid the price. The anger of the Lord burned against them. It is not a surprise that God responded in this way. He is a God of His word and had promised they would reap the curses of disobedience if they made that choice. We don't get to enjoy the blessings of obedience and be exempt from the consequences of disobedience and the Israelites experienced both.

 Why is it important to realize and remember the truth that sin has consequences?

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As a result of their idolatry, the people were given over to their enemies. God's goal was not punishment but allowing them to suffer so that they would repent and turn back to the Lord. God's ultimate goal and desire was restoration between Him and His beloved. The Lord works in similar ways in our lives today. When we sin and turn away from Him, He will allow us to suffer the consequences but waits to restore us when we repent.

Because of His great love for His people, God prepared the rescue for them even before they asked. Part of the cycle we see in the book of Judges is God raised up judges to rescue Israel from their self-inflicted calamity. Sadly, the people did not learn from this pattern and change their ways permanently but returned to their rebellion following the death of each judge.

 What makes it challenging to follow godly leadership long term? How can you seek to do that in our church?

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The Lord was with the different judges, giving them the power to lead in dramatic acts of deliverance. These moments brought glory to God as the deliverer of His people. As Israel cried out in their suffering with painful groanings, God had pity on them, and the judges led them to godly repentance and rescue from their plight.

Even with their bad choices and the suffering brought onto themselves, once the current judge died the people reverted to sinful behavior. The pattern of sin, bondage, repentance, and deliverance so apparent in Judges, remains today. It is discouraging to see this cycle destroying the lives of people who have access to the power of God through the Holy Spirit just as it is hard to comprehend how the Israelites could make the same poor choices over and over.



**Application: Where have you experienced these types of pattern in your own life?**

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### 3. The Ultimate Issue (Judges 17:6)

This one verse in chapter 17 summarizes the spiritual state of Israel during the time of the judges. It is also applicable to our lives today. It is important to study Scripture and learn from the right and wrong choices of those who have gone before us. When we invite God to speak to us about how the Bible applies to our daily lives, we can experience the blessings that come from obedience and avoid making some of the same mistakes believers have made before us.



**How can studying the Bible give us wisdom to avoid the mistakes of God's people in the past?**

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This verse tells us there was no king in Israel. There was no human king, but the Lord was over His people. Sadly, they were not satisfied with this. If they had focused on the Lord and trusted and served Him, they could have avoided much of the pain and suffering that followed their pursuit for an earthly king. Since Israel rejected God as king, they found themselves without any good, godly, human leadership.


This time of extreme individualism was marked by the description that every person did what was right in their own eyes. In the absence of respect for absolute truth found in God’s Word, the world encourages people to decide on and follow their own “truth.” In our world, this sounds like “own your truth,” “follow your heart,” or other sayings that mean you are your own god in some way and should put yourself first.

 **Where do you see “self-worship” prominent in our culture? What tempts you most in this way?**

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When we take our eyes off the Lord and open ourselves up to believing the lies of the enemy, we become vulnerable to reaping hefty consequences. The Lord is perfectly clear about who deserves our worship.

From Genesis to Revelation, we see the destruction that comes with ignoring the command to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. There is to be no king but Jesus on the thrones of our lives. When we get off track and follow the leadings of the world, we find ourselves worshipping false gods and rejecting the one true King, Jesus. The Israelites are a perfect example of why we should be diligent about protecting our hearts from worship of anything or anyone other than the Lord.


 **Application: What do you need to do to guard against worshipping anything or anyone other than Jesus?**

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## Conclusion

The children of Israel were caught up in cycles of sinful behavior, destructive consequences, desperation, and rescue by the Lord. The book of Judges records multiple instances that follow this pattern. As a means of rescue, God would raise up judges to lead the people out of their sin and into right relationship with God. But the people continued to reject the Lord as king and turned to false idols. This angered the Lord and He allowed them to reap difficult consequences until they were truly desperate for Him.

When we allow our hearts to be drawn away from God in worship of other things, we also face negative consequences. Jesus is the one true King, and we are to worship only Him. Because of His great love, when we turn back to Him in repentance, Jesus is waiting to restore us to Himself.

 How can you relate to the children of Israel and their cycles of sinful behavior?

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 Where do you find yourself drawn away from worshipping Jesus? How can this group support one another in faithfulness in these times?

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 Where have you sought control of your life instead of trusting Jesus to be your King?

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## Memorize

*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.*

- Joshua 2:18, CSB