

No King but Jesus

April 7, 2024

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Judges 2:7-19; 17:6

Session Outline

1. Rebellion and Idolatry (Judges 2:7-13)
2. Sin and Rescue (Judges 2:14-19)
3. The Ultimate Issue (Judges 17:6)

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?



Leader Guide

No King but Jesus

Introduction

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


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?

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 worshipping 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?


Once the people turned from God to Baal, they also began worshipping 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.

Israel’s Sin

The sin of Israel was its worship of the Baals and Ashtoreths of the Canaanites. These were the male and female gods of the Canaanite religion. The religion of Canaan was a fertility cult known for its ritual prostitution. Therefore the author spoke of how Israel “prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them.”


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?


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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

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 worshiping 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?

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?
- Where do you find yourself drawn away from worshipping Jesus? How can this group support one another in faithfulness in these times?
- Where have you sought control of your life instead of trusting Jesus to be your King?

Prayer of Response

Thank Jesus for being the King of kings. Confess any ways that you've followed your heart and have been drawn away from Him. Praise Him for the ways that He has rescued you and restored you repeatedly.

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

Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in Judges and Ruth* by Eric Redmond
- *Judges and Ruth* by Barry Webb and Kent Hughes
- *Be Available* by Warren Wiersbe

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Historical Context of Judges

Purpose

The book of Judges chronicles the moral and spiritual descent of Israel from the relative high point at the beginning of the book through a series of downward spirals to the depths of degradation in chaps. 17–21. Though God raised up a sequence of deliverers—the judges—they were unable to reverse this trend and some even became part of the problem. By the end of the book, Israel had become as pagan and defiled as the Canaanites they had displaced. If this trend continued, it would be only a matter of time before the land would vomit them out, as it had the Canaanites before them (Lv 18:28).

Author

No author is named in the book of Judges, nor is any indication given of the writer or writers who are responsible for it. The three divisions of the book are on a different footing regarding the sources from which they are drawn. The historical introduction presents a form of the traditional narrative of the conquest of Palestine that is parallel to the book of Joshua. The main portion of the book, comprising the narratives of the judges, appears to be based on oral or written traditions of a local observer.

Setting

The period of the Israelite judges lay between the conquest of the promised land under Joshua and the rise of the monarchy with Saul and David. The events described are thus to be dated from the early fourteenth century BC to the latter part of the eleventh century BC, a period of around three hundred fifty years. This was a time of social and religious anarchy, characterized by the repeated refrain, “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever seemed right to him” (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).

We cannot ascertain exactly when the book of Judges was composed. The reference in 18:30 to the fate of Dan at “the time of the exile from the land” suggests a date of final editing after the exile of the northern kingdom by Assyria around 722 BC. Meanwhile, the suggestion that readers could visit the site of Gideon’s altar at Ophrah in 6:24 suggests a date prior to the exile of the southern kingdom, Judah, in 586 BC. Its message would have resonated strongly at several points of Israel’s history, and it has been argued that it fits well during the dark days of Manasseh (686–642 BC; 2Kg 21:1–18). However, it is not possible to date Judges with precision.

Special Features

The book of Judges is the second of the Historical Books in the Old Testament (Joshua-Esther). In the Hebrew Bible, these books are called the Former Prophets; the theological and spiritual concerns found in the Pentateuch and the Prophets take precedence over simply recording historical facts. The book derives its name from the Hebrew designation of the principal characters, *shophetim* (2:16), which could also be translated as “governors.” These judges were the Lord’s agents of deliverance. The Lord is both the central character and the hero of Judges.

Extended Commentary

Joshua 2:7-19

2:6–13 This passage is a flashback summarizing the beginning of the book of Judges. Baal was the Canaanite god of storm and rain, while Ashtoreth (also known as Astarte) was his consort, the goddess of love and fertility. Both of these deities were worshiped under a variety of local manifestations and were perceived as the key to agricultural success in the land of Canaan.

2:14–15 The consequence of Israel’s covenant unfaithfulness was the covenant curse (Dt 28:48). Instead of the Lord fighting for Israel and handing their enemies over into their power, the Lord gave them over into the hand of their enemies, and they suffered greatly.

2:16–19 Because of their distress, the Lord raised up judges for Israel, and they saved them from the power of their marauders. There is no mention of repentance by the people; the judges were raised up as the result of the Lord’s pity on their groaning. In relenting from the punishment he had imposed on his people, the Lord showed himself to be “a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth” (Ex 34:6). The judges typically governed Israel (or part of it) and sought to lead them in the ways of the Lord during their lifetimes—a ministry that is most evident in the life of the final judge, Samuel. Yet their influence on the people was limited, and after each judge died Israel invariably reverted to their idolatrous ways. This period of Israel’s history was a downward spiral, with each generation acting more corruptly than their fathers. The judges slowed rather than stemmed the rising tide of iniquity.¹

Judges 17:6

17:5–6 Centers of personal devotion like Micah’s shrine were outlawed in Dt 12. The ephod is reminiscent of the idol that Gideon constructed at Ophrah (Jdg 8:27). The household idols, or “teraphim,” were often associated with divination (Zch 10:2) and were portable objects of veneration throughout the ancient Near East, although their exact form is unknown. Micah also installed one of his sons to be his priest, in opposition to the officially authorized Levitical priesthood. In those days everyone did whatever seemed right to him (a lifestyle exemplified by Samson). The author may have been saying the lawlessness was because there was no king in Israel. Alternatively the author—who was writing this much later, and had seen how immorally Israel could function under a wicked king—may have been saying that even without a king to lead them astray, the people behaved atrociously all on their own.²

References

1. Iain M. Duguid, “Judges,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 366.
2. *Ibid.*, 390–391.