

HELP IS ON THE WAY Sunday School- July 10, 2011

Unifying Topic: LISTEN TO GOD'S JUDGES

Lesson Text

I. Israel's Apostasy (Judges 2:11-13)

II. God's Anger And His Love (Joshua 2:14-16)

III. Israel's Downward Spiral (Judges 2:17-19)

The Main Thought: And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the Lord; but they did not so. (Judges 2:17, KJV).

Unifying Principle: When things are going well, people tend not to worry about spiritual things. When things are not going well, what spiritual resources will we need? In the period of the judges, the people ignored God when things were going well, but in times of trouble, they repented and cried out to God for help. God raised up a judge to provide the help they needed.

Lesson Aim: To examine the cycle of Israel's apostasy in comparison to God's faithfulness.

Life Aim: To thoroughly examine and determine some of the root causes of our stubbornness against fully complying with God's will.

2:11 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim

2:12 And they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger.

2:13 And they forsook the Lord, and served Baal and Ashtaroth.

2:14 And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies.

2:15 Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed.

2:16 Nevertheless the Lord raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them.

2:17 And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the Lord; but they did not so.

2:18 Then And when the Lord raised them up judges, then the Lord was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the Lord because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them.

2:19 it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way.

HISTORY:

Judges is the seventh book of the Old Testament. It follows Joshua and precedes Ruth. The book introduces the military leaders known as judges whom God raised up to deliver Israel from oppression. They were divinely appointed and empowered and did not rule by heredity (inheritance). While the author is not indicated by the text, Jewish tradition has always ascribed it to Samuel the prophet, and rightly so, since he was the major spiritual figure of the time of the judges.

The recurring theme of the book of Judges is spiritual apostasy. Several cycles of compromise-apostasy-oppression-repentance-deliverance occur throughout the book. In many ways judges is the opposite of Joshua. Under Joshua's leadership, Israel strictly obeyed the commands of the Law and won constant victories. By contrast, during the time of the judges, Israel forsook the Law and compromised with her enemies and toleration of and coexistence with the enemy replaced their desire for total victory. They reaped the painful consequences of their disobedience.

¹The two books of Joshua and Judges begin with two very symbolic pictures in the death of two very symbolic characters. Firstly we read that the events in the book of Joshua occur 'after the death of Moses'. Moses is forever associated with the law of God, and as such is a picture here showing that entry into the Promised Land can only occur after his death. So who could take them in to the Promised Land and into their inheritance? Joshua! whose name means 'Yahweh is Salvation.' As Moses is a picture of the Law, so Joshua is a picture of both Jesus Himself, and of true faith in the grace and salvation of God. By faithfully obeying the Lord, Joshua led the Israelites to victory. But here in **Chapter 1 of Judges**,

¹ <http://www.jesusplusnothing.com/studies/online/judges3.htm>

<http://www.pitem.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

the book starts with the words '**after the death of Joshua**', and in a very real sense, goes on to portray that which happens when the Joshua type of faith has died.

After the death of Joshua, there was still land to be taken from the Canaanites. The nation of Israel went to receive instructions from the Lord. God was with Judah and Simeon and they defeated the city of Bezek and took its king, Adoni-bezek. He was made to suffer the same torture he had inflicted on others (70kings)—he also loss of his thumbs and big toes (**w1-6**). According to God's instructions for conquering the Promised Land, he should have been killed. Judah had conquered Jerusalem and massacred its people, setting the city on fire (**V8**). Jerusalem in the period of the judges was occupied by the Jebusites.

The tribe of Judah, under the leadership of Caleb, conquered Hebron, which became the early Judean capital. Caleb promised to give his daughter Achsah to be the wife of the man who would take the city of Kirjath-sepher—city of books or scribes (known now as Debir,) (**w9-13**).

²Judah was able to conquer the major cities and mountainous region of Philistia, but the people in the valleys proved too formidable because of their iron chariots (**w16-19**). Although Judah initially took Jerusalem (Jdgs.1:8), it evidently regained its freedom (**V21**) and remained under Jebusite control until the time of David (2 Sam.5:6-9). Ephraim and Manasseh were able to capture Bethel (**w22-26**), an important city in patriarchal history (Gen.28:10-19). The conquest of Canaan was a long-term endeavor which started under Joshua's leadership. In the time of David, portions of the land remained under enemy control.

Six tribes failed to conquer their land. Manasseh, Ephraim, Zebulun, Asher, and Naphtali were unable to conquer important Canaanite cities; even when they grew stronger, they didn't drive out the Canaanites but put them to forced labor instead (**w27-36**). If the enemy is allowed to remain in one inch they will ultimately make a slave out of the "Believer." The situation had become so bad in Israel that the Tribe of Dan could not even live in the valley or plant crops therein; they were virtual prisoners in their own land. Dan would later choose to relocate rather than fight to claim its land (Jdgs.18:1-31).

Chapter 2 of Judges

2:1-5 Warnings and Weeping at Bokim. The **angel of the Lord** (actually a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ—God appearing in a human form) **came up from Gilgal**. Now this is very important! Whenever the Israelites made a binding agreement with God, He kept His promise. This specifically mentions where the angel of the Lord was before He came to where the people were now at this time. He came up from Gilgal. Gilgal means "*the rolling away*." It was the memorial site between Jordan and Jericho; it was where Joshua was last seen. And He came to Bochim, which means "*weeping*", "*lamentation*" and "*wailing*". He declared that they should make no allegiance with the inhabitants of Canaan and throw down their altars, but Israel's inability to drive out all of the Canaanites was a result of its disobedience and compromise with those pagan nations. And now instead of celebrating with victory, they are now in a state of weeping and wailing. The people responded with a public display of sorrow after the angel of the Lord had spoken. It seems that the people repented; however, it was obvious that their repentance was shallow.

2:6-10 Joshua's Victories. Now we go back to the days of Joshua. After the land was divided among the tribes in the time of Joshua, it was necessary for them to occupy the territory assigned to them in order to maintain it. The people are reminded of the faithfulness that characterized Israel as long as Joshua was alive. The people served the Lord all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders which clearly indicates the success of his leadership. Joshua died and was buried in the border of his inheritance, Timnath-heres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill of Gaash, at the age of 110years. There was a new generation that knew not the Lord or His works that He had done for Israel.

LESSON:

Judges 2:11-13 Israel's Apostasy

2:11-13 Extending from verse 10-"*And*" is a continuation about the generation that knew not God. This generation of Israelites abandoned the faith of their parents and began worshipping the gods of their neighbors. Many things can

² <http://www.sundayschoolservice.org/files/Bible/JUDGES.pdf>
<http://www.pitem.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

tempt us to abandon what we know is right. The desire to be accepted by our neighbors can pressure us into behavior that is unacceptable to God. They forsook God, His worship, neglected His tabernacle, and did evil in the sight of the Lord serving Baalim. God was the one that brought them out of the land of Egypt. God led them through the wilderness, and provided for them there, and brought them into the land of Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey; but all these mercies were forgotten by them. Their apostasy—their complete forsaking and falling away from God provoked God to anger. Four things that provoked God to anger:

1. Doing evil (v11).
2. Forsaking Him (v12-13).
3. Following other gods (v11-13).
4. Bowing down to other gods (v12).

Two images they served: Baal and Ashtoreth. ³What was the attraction of "Baal" worship? Baal was the god over the weather and nature for the Canaanites; he was essentially the agricultural god. In an agricultural society, people served Baal because they wanted good weather for abundant crops and flocks; the bottom line with Baal - personal wealth. What was the attraction of "Ashtoreth" worship? Ashtoreth was the Canaanite goddess of love, sex, and fertility; she was usually "worshipped" by having sex with a "priestess" who was a prostitute. The bottom line with Ashtoreth was sex, love, and romance. You will forsake that that you're not close to, to get to something temporary. They were not close to the Lord anymore.

Joshua 2:14-16 God's Anger And His Love

2:14-16 From verse 12 to verse 14, the Lord's anger grew "*hot!*" Nothing is more provoking to God than idolatry. Since idolatry was regarded as a breach of covenant with the God of Israel, His anger was expressed against them by allowing them to be delivered into the hands of "**spoilers**" (invaders who plundered them; band of raiders). They could no longer stand before their enemies. After being plundered, God allowed them to be "**sold**" (to fall into the power of; to be surrendered or given over to; as to sell a daughter in marriage or slavery) into the hands of the enemy. God kept the pressure on them, for their wickedness which kept them distressed. Their neglect of the covenant which bound them to the Lord also bound them together and caused them to present a divided front to their enemy invaders. No matter where they went, the battle went against them because the Lord's hand was against them. When the people repented and turned again to the Lord, He raised up judges; He sent help, who delivered them out of the hand of their enemies. These judges were empowered by God to lead the Israelites against their oppressors. Some judges are only mentioned briefly. "Mercy" has been defined as not giving a person what he deserves. This is exactly what God did for Israel and what he does for us. When we pray we are asking for what we do not deserve. God shows both sides of Himself by showing what He does—when we turn from Him and when we repent unto Him—when we're disobedient and when we're obedient. He shows His anger toward us and His love for us. He knows how to let us see ourselves and He knows how to let us see Him. He will send the right person to turn us from our destructive ways. He sent judges to deliver these same Israelites out of the hands of the enemies that invaded them with power.

Judges 2:17-19 Israel's Downward Spiral

God's compassion by sending the judges was dismissed by the Israelites. God went out on a limb for them, they wouldn't even listen to the judges He had sent. The Word says "**they went a whoring**"; they went astray; loving other gods; prostituted themselves to other gods; bowing down before them and committing spiritual adultery and infidelity. Why would the people of Israel turn so quickly from their faith in God? Simply put, the Canaanite religion appeared more attractive, and offered more short-range benefits. One of its most attractive features is that the people could remain selfish and yet fulfill their religious requirements. • Sex outside of marriage • Selfishness • Oppression of the helpless. These were not only allowed, but were encouraged as forms of worship by the other gods. They could do almost anything they wished and still be obeying at least one of the many Canaanite gods. The apostasy into Baal worship also tended to decentralize the strength of the nation. Faith in the "**One True God**" however, does not offer short-range benefits that appeal to our sinful human nature. The essence of sin is selfishness. The essence of faith in

³ http://www.blueletterbible.org/commentaries/comm_view.cfm?AuthorID=2&contentID=7530&commInfo=31&topic=Judges&ar=Jdg_2_13
<http://www.pitem.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

God is selflessness. The Israelites broke their faith with Jehovah; left the path of their ancestors; and abandoned the path of obedience.

The cycle continues: judges are raised up and the Israelites repent and because of their cry of sorrow, God delivered them, as long as that judge lived. But when the judge died, the people turned and they behaved worse than their ancestors. We tend to follow the same cycle—remaining loyal to God as long as we are near those who are devoted to Him, but when we are on our own, the pressure to be drawn away from God increases. **Verse 18** says, **for it repented the Lord because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them.** It does not mean that God changed His mind about the need for allowing the oppression, but rather that He felt *"sorrow"* or *"grief"* or *"compassion"* for their agony (for their pain and anguish). In other words, the author is merely indicating that God was not pleased, but it was necessary lest they continued in greater sinfulness. Since God's covenant with Israel was conceived of in the terms of a marriage, spiritual adultery was all the more serious. It was like an attempt on the part of Israel to break her vows to Yahweh, her spiritual husband. Without proper spiritual leadership, the church would go into a downward spiral which would lead to apostasy. Although God appoints a man over a congregation, our main leader should be God!

SUMMARY:

Although Israel obeyed the Lord while Joshua lived, after his death the new generation would serve the deities of Canaan and, as a result, would fall under other gods. Instead of pursuing "the God who acts" in vibrant relationship, the Israelites go after other gods, worshipping dead idols instead of the living God. **Their sin** was, in going after other gods. And **their sin**—*"provoked the Lord to anger."* Therefore, **their actions** are called *"evil in the sight of the Lord."* **Their actions**—provoked God into selling them into the hands of their enemies. *'I guess you can say, if you like sin so much or if you like your enemies so much, I'll let you be with them as slaves, because that's what sin is—slavery!'* However, God is also exceedingly merciful and compassionate despite the people's sin, just as He is with us.

The Cycle looks like this:

1. Israelites sin—rebel against God—turning their backs on Him and worshipping idols.
2. God judges them for their sin, allowing their enemies to oppress them in the Land.
3. Israelites are in distress and (sometimes) cry out to God for mercy.
4. God raises up a judge to deliver Israel from their enemies.
5. Israelites are obedient until that judge dies. (Then the Cycle of Sin repeats.)

Even when God sent judges to deliver Israel from oppression, they would not serve Him. He sent the help every time their way, but they would not listen to the judges. Instead, each generation would become increasingly more sinful, turning quickly away, from that when their fathers walked in the way of obedience. God was with the judges to bring deliverance to Israel. With these judges, God gave gracious revivals, but with each revival, the nation fell into deeper sin and bondage. They would forego none of the habitual practices.

APPLICATION:

Turning to another source will never yield the best source. God is always our best source! Hadn't He been there many times to revive you from trouble? His help is always available to us during good and bad times.