



Consequences

AFTER JOSHUA'S DEATH, ISRAEL FELL INTO A CYCLE OF SIN, JUDGMENT, CONFESSION, AND RESTORATION.

JUDGES 2:11-23

Intending to do well doesn't always result in something being well done. We recognize this to be true regarding the people of Israel when Joshua died and the era of the judges began. Before Joshua's death, the Israelites insisted they would be faithful to the Lord and never worship the gods of the Canaanites. However, as soon as Joshua and the elders who served alongside of him died, Israel broke their promise and suffered the consequences of their infidelity to the Lord.



What factors might cause people to break their commitments, and how can we guard against this in our own lives?

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

JUDGES 1:1–3:6

In Joshua 13:1, God said to Joshua, “You have become old, advanced in age, but a great deal of the land remains to be possessed.” Then in verses 2-6, the Lord listed all the lands in Canaan that were yet to be possessed by the Israelites. Next, God promised that since Joshua could not do it, He Himself would drive out Israel’s enemies, but in the meantime Joshua should go ahead and distribute the tribal allotments of the land to Israel as their inheritance. Therefore, Joshua 13:1-6 indicates that even though the Lord had given all of the promised land to the Israelites when Joshua died, there were still areas in their tribal allotments where they needed to go in, drive out their inhabitants, and possess them. It is essential to recognize this as we begin a study of the book of Judges.

As the book begins, it looked as if all would go well for the tribes as they set out to possess the unconquered areas. The tribe of Judah took the lead with a measure of success at first but were unable to drive out the Canaanites in the lowlands (Judg. 1:2-19). After that, with the exception of a couple of bright spots, the continuing narrative is one of failure and compromise. The Israelites were not supposed to make agreements with the Canaanites and coexist with them, but they did. Because of their sins, the angel of the Lord confronted Israel with a declaration of judgment. He declared that God would no longer drive out the Canaanites but instead would allow them to remain in the land to be thorns in Israel’s sides (2:1-3).

As soon as Joshua and the elders who served with him died, a new “generation rose up who did not know the Lord or the works He had done for Israel” (2:10). This generation abandoned the Lord and began worshiping the gods of the surrounding peoples in Canaan. Instead of ridding the land of the Canaanites, Israel became like the Canaanites. As a result, whenever the Israelites went out to war, the Lord was against them and caused them to be defeated (2:15).



As you read Judges 2:11-23, pay attention to the cycle of sin, judgment, repentance, and restoration.

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

THE EVIL (JUDG. 2:11-15)

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 ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed other gods from the surrounding peoples and bowed down to them. They angered 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.

VERSES 11-13

Verse 11 says literally, “The sons of Israel did the evil thing in the sight of the LORD.” This statement highlights three important matters. First, the “sons of Israel” is a reminder that they were descendants of their patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whose name the Lord changed to Israel (Gen. 32:28). The tribes of Israel were named after the sons of Jacob and Joseph’s two sons since Joseph received a double blessing from his father. It was to these forefathers and their descendants that God made His covenant. The Lord made several promises to Abraham. Among them, He promised to make Abraham a great nation. After many centuries, Israel was beginning to see evidence of this happening. Also, God promised them Canaan as their inheritance. They were now in Canaan, and much of the land was in their possession.

Second, what was “the evil thing” Israel did? Using the word “the” means it was not just any evil thing they did. It was the most egregious thing they could do. They **worshiped the Baals and abandoned the LORD, the God of their ancestors**. This statement recalls Moses’s warning to the nation in Deuteronomy 30:15-20. He set before the people the way of life and blessing in the land of Canaan that would come with faithful devotion to the Lord, or the way of curse and death that was sure to come if they worshiped other gods and served them.

In this instance, the Israelites worshiped ***Baal and the •Ash-toreths***. *Baal* literally means “lord, master, owner, possessor, or husband.” As a proper noun, it referred to the supreme god of the fertility cult of the Canaanites. He was the storm god whose worshipers believed gave his rain to the earth so that it could bear fruit. Ashtoreth was the Canaanite goddess of fertility, love, and war. The fertility of the land depended on the sexual activities of Baal and his consort. Therefore, the false religion of the Canaanites promised its adherents material prosperity while incorporating flagrant sexual immorality into its manipulative practices. The worship of Baal and Ashtoreth became a tremendous temptation to Israel up to the time of the Babylonian exile. Instead of being a witness to the nations by living in such a way that pointed them to the one and only true God as Moses had instructed in Deuteronomy 4:1-8, Israel ***abandoned the LORD***. Their failure to separate themselves from the Canaanites led Israel to incorporate the ways of the Canaanites, including their religion.

Third, the Lord saw their sin; it was not hidden from Him. Just because the people of God took their eyes off of the Lord does not mean He took His eyes off of them. The writer of Hebrews said, “No creature is hidden from him, but all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account” (Heb. 4:13). The unfaithfulness of the Israelites angered the Lord, and they were going to give an account for this evil thing they had done.

VERSES 14-15

The Israelites ignored Joshua’s charge to faithfully worship the Lord. Instead, they broke the promise of commitment they had declared at Shechem (Josh. 24:14-24). It was inconceivable that after everything the Lord had done for them, they abandoned Him. What the Israelites did was a breach of trust. While verses 13-15 describe what the Israelites did, verses 14-15 describe what the Lord did in response. ***The LORD’s anger burned against Israel***. They would experience the grave consequences of their infidelity. The Lord would not stand by idly as His covenant people committed spiritual adultery against Him. Though they are not identified here, the Lord raised up marauders to attack and plunder Israel. Without the Lord’s help, Israel was defenseless against their enemies. They would be helpless without His protection.

What’s more, whenever Israel went out to fight against their attackers, ***the LORD was against them and brought disaster***

on them. The enemies who raided them were His pawns. The events described here echo the warning God gave to Israel through Moses in Deuteronomy 31:16-21. The Lord warned Israel that if they “prostitute themselves with the foreign gods of the land,” despising Him and breaking His covenant, that His anger would “burn against them on that day,” that “they will become easy prey,” and “many troubles and afflictions will come to them.” The Israelites ignored God’s numerous warnings through both Moses and Joshua. Consequently, **they suffered greatly.** Their abandonment of the Lord brought about the dire consequences of which they had been warned. God is always faithful to keep all of His promises.



What factors contribute to a person or group abandoning God?

THE CYCLE (JUDG. 2:16-19)

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 ancestors, who had walked in obedience to the LORD’s commands. They did not do as their ancestors 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 ancestors, following other gods to serve them and bow in worship to them. They did not turn from their evil practices or their obstinate ways.**

VERSE 16

Verse 16 is amazing. While the Lord was against the Israelites (v. 14), He was actually for them. In a situation that appeared hopeless, there was grace and hope. **The LORD raised up judges, who saved them.** In the book of Judges, the judges functioned as military deliverers who saved their people from their enemies. With that said, the true Savior of Israel was the Lord Himself who raised up and empowered these leaders to deliver their people.

The emphasis is on God’s compassion for His people as they suffered from His discipline and on His power to raise up deliverers who saved them from those who attacked and plundered them.

VERSE 17

One would think that when the Israelites witnessed God raise up judges to save them they would have realized the only way to be protected and to flourish would be to repent. Instead, the Israelites **prostituted themselves with other gods**. In Exodus 34:15-16, Moses foretold that when Israel entered the land of the Canaanites they would “prostitute themselves with their gods.” This language recalls the marital language of the covenant relationship the Lord had with His bride, Israel. At the same time, this statement appears to allude to the lewd activities of the Canaanite fertility cult that involved cultic prostitution in an attempt to manipulate their gods. **Bowing down to them**, the Israelites demonstrated their reverence and submission to these false gods instead of to their ever-present, faithful God who took them from nothing and made them a nation.

It is amazing how quickly they turned back to the false gods. The Israelites not only witnessed and experienced God’s salvation from their oppressors through the judges, but they also had the testimony of the Lord’s faithfulness and powerful deliverances of their forefathers **who walked in obedience to the LORD’s commands**. With all of that, the Israelites still **did not do as their ancestors did**.



KEY DOCTRINE: *Salvation*

Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God. (See Luke 3:8; Romans 2:4-5.)

VERSE 18

Verse 18 indicates the Lord repeatedly raised up judges to deliver His people from their adversaries. The Lord was with the judge, and He enabled the judge to deliver and protect the people from their enemies. The people **groaned because of those who were oppressing and afflicting them**, and they “cried out to the LORD” (see Judg. 3:9). However, there is no indication the Israelites ever repented of their sins against God. It seems they cried out

because of their affliction, not because of conviction of their sin. Nevertheless, the Lord raised judges to save the Israelites because of His compassion; He *was moved to pity*. Even though they were unfaithful to Him and His anger burned against them, the Lord would not turn His back on His people whom He loved. The impotent false gods and idols the Israelites bowed down to were powerless to respond in such a way.

It seems they cried out because of their affliction, not because of conviction of their sin.

VERSE 19

When a judge died the people obstinately continued their downward spiral into deeper corruption than the previous generation. The book of Judges describes repeated cycles of (1) the abandonment of the Lord and the worship of the Canaanite gods, (2) the anger of the Lord with the Israelites and His raising up enemies to oppress them, (3) Israel's groanings and cries out to God, (4) the Lord's compassion on His people as He raised up judges to deliver them, (5) a period of peace for the Israelites as long as the judge lived, and (6) the Israelites stubbornly acting more corruptly than the previous generation as they returned to the Canaanite gods.

 **What does God's providing a deliverer tell us about His character?**

THE DECLARATION (JUDG. 2:20-23)

²⁰ The LORD's anger burned against Israel, and he declared, "Because this nation has violated my covenant that I made with their ancestors and disobeyed me, ²¹ I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died. ²² I did this to test Israel and to see whether or not they would keep the LORD's way by walking in it, as their ancestors had." ²³ The LORD left these nations and did not drive them out immediately. He did not hand them over to Joshua.

VERSES 20-23

By repeating verse 14, verse 20 emphasizes how angry God was with Israel. Next, the Lord referred to Israel as ***this nation***. This expression indicates a sense of alienation and speaks to Israel's infidelity to God as Israel violated the covenant the Lord made with their forefathers. Consequently, the Lord emphatically declared He would no longer give the Israelites the ability to drive out the Canaanites who still lived in areas of Israel's tribal allotments that were yet to be possessed. So even when the Israelites had some success in battle during the time of the judges, it did not result in the possession of more land.

The Lord made clear His intention in allowing the Canaanites to remain. It was to test the Israelites. Would they turn back to God and walk in His ways like their forefathers, or would they continue in their rebellion against Him? The writer then stated the Lord did as He declared. The Lord did not give Joshua victory over the remaining Canaanites in the land. Israel's unfaithfulness to the Lord resulted in the loss of His blessing.



When and how has God tested you? How is your faith stronger as a result?

BIBLE SKILL: *Learn more about a person in the Bible.*

The “angel of the LORD” appears in Judges 2:1, the first of four times in the book of Judges (see also 5:23; 6:11; and 13:1-24). Many scholars believe this was a “christophany,” an appearance of Jesus prior to His incarnation in the Gospels. Read and reflect on other possible christophanies in the Old Testament, such as Genesis 32:24-30 and Daniel 3:24-25. Why do you think Jesus appeared in situations like these? How does the presence of Jesus affect your life each day?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + God's people must guard against the danger of forgetting what the Lord has done for them.
- + Believers can be assured that God's faithfulness to act on behalf of His people is rooted in His character, not in ours.
- + Believers can expect their obedience to God to be tested.



Discuss as a group how you might help one another guard against the danger of forgetting what the Lord has done for you.



Why is it essential that you always remember that God's faithfulness to act on behalf of His people is rooted in His character, not in ours? What will result if you doubt or forget this truth?

Memorize Judges 2:10.

Prayer Needs