

Judges 2 • The Death of Joshua and Israel's Disobedience

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Judges Chapter 2. It begins in verse one, saying, *"Now the angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, "I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you, ² and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.' But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done? ³ So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you." ⁴ As soon as the angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the people of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept. ⁵ And they called the name of that place Bochim (which means weepers). And (it says) they sacrificed there to the LORD." (ESV)*

Let's stop there for just a moment. I think there's something there already to think about. We've been seeing here already in our study of Judges that the movement of Israel is toward disobedience, and their hearts are not devoted to the Lord. And God now comes through, it says, the angel of the Lord.

By the way, most people, most Bible scholars, and teachers believe that in this case, the angel of the Lord is, in fact, the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ, coming and speaking to the people. And He has a message for them, and it's not a message of good news.

He says, I brought you into this land, and I promised you this land, and I said that I would, through my power, uproot all the peoples of this land and I would give it to you. It's a good land. But now, even though I made my covenant with you, and I will never break my end of the covenant, he says, you have broken yours. You have not followed, you have not obeyed.

Therefore, the Lord said, I will no longer drive out the people of the land. In fact, I'm going to leave them here, that they might be a snare to you. And we're going to find out a little bit more about that as we go.

But I want you to notice here that as the angel of the Lord spoke these words to the people, we're told in verse 4 that they lifted up their voices and they wept, and they cried. I don't know how crying affects you when people begin to weep, they cry. I don't know how crying affects you, when people begin to weep, but it can have a very profound effect.

I remember once as a kid making the decision that the next time I got in trouble, I was going to try to lessen the impact of my father's punishment by faking crying. I remember I was about 9 years old, and I decided that I was going to use a little deception to play the drama card with my dad.

Next time— and I always deserved everything I got, let me just say this right now, okay? He was a fair man. He still is. But the point is, the next time I got into trouble, I tried to turn on the waterworks to try to soften his approach to me. Didn't work. At all. My father was completely unmoved.

And I don't know—it depends on who you are and how crying affects you. Somebody else might cry in front of you, and you just like, well, stop crying. It's okay. You start backpedaling right away.

The problem with this sort of thing is that the emotional response of people when they get into trouble isn't always indicative of their true heart. What I mean by that is the Bible tells us there's such a thing as worldly sorrow, and there's such a thing as godly sorrow.

Worldly sorrow is basically, I'm sorry I got caught. And they cry. Oh, let me tell you, they cry, and the tears are there, but it's not true repentance. And by repentance, we mean a change of the mind— I'm not going to do this anymore. It's simply, I got caught. I got caught, and I'm really bummed that I got caught.

And they might even say all the right things during this worldly sorrow demonstration. Are you sorry? Yeah, I'm sorry. But they're not. And how do you know? Because they turn right around and do it again.

The Bible says that godly sorrow leads to repentance. And again, repentance is that Greek word that speaks of a change of mind that addresses a change of heart that ultimately ends in a change of direction.

And so, how do you know if somebody has truly repented? They go the other way. They go the other way. They were going this way, it blew up in their face, now they're going this way. That's true repentance.

The nation of Israel hears the message of the angel of the Lord that says to them, listen, I'm not going to drive the people out anymore. And the reason is because you've been disobedient and you've broken your end of the bargain. So these people are going to stay in the land, and they're going to be a problem to you from this point on. And the people absolutely throw back their heads and howl in prayer, but there's no change in their lives.

God is the one who perfectly sees what's going on in the human heart. You and I can see a demonstration of crying and sorrow, and we might, unlike my dad,

you and I might be deceived by it and think, well, I think they've really had a change of heart. Look at how they're just weeping and crying, but God isn't deceived by that sort of thing. He knew exactly what was going on in the heart of the people, and he knew there wasn't any lasting desire to change. And it says there at the end of verse 5, *“they sacrificed... to the LORD.”*

Verse 6 goes on and says, *“When Joshua dismissed the people, the people of Israel went each to his inheritance to take possession of the land. ⁷ And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work that the LORD had done for Israel.”* And Joshua, this, by the way, doesn't that speak of influence? That's it. That's it. I mean, it's right there. It's a great scriptural reference to the power of influence.

But it goes on to say, *“⁸ And (then) Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of 110 years. ⁹ And they buried him within the boundaries of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash. ¹⁰ And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. (I want you to notice the next sentence) And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel.”*

That's a crazy statement, almost. It just sounds crazy to you and I to read that. This whole generation that lived during the time of Joshua and those who outlived him, who were subject to the influence of their godly lives—it says these men served the Lord, men and women, obviously. But then the next generation arose, and they did not know the Lord. It's crazy.

Now, I need to say something here, and this is important. It doesn't necessarily say they didn't know about the Lord. It does say they didn't know what the Lord had done for Israel. But you have to understand that knowing the Lord is not necessarily just knowing about the Lord.

In other words, what I mean by that is there are a lot of people who know about the Lord because they've been in church. They've heard the Bible taught maybe for years, maybe from when they were a child, and they've been raised up in that knowledge of the things of the Lord, but they don't know the Lord.

It doesn't follow that just because someone knows about the Lord, they know the Lord. Knowing the Lord is an intimate relationship with God. Knowing the Lord is a word that speaks of intimacy. It's the same word that is used in the Old Testament to describe physical relations between a husband and a wife. And there's no sexual connotation to it—understand that.

But the intimacy connotation is very much applicable. And just as a husband and a wife come together in sexual knowledge of one another, so a true believer knows the Lord in intimacy. Again, no sexual connotation, but an intimacy so that there is a relationship that goes beyond just knowing here intellectually.

We've all met people who know the Bible, who can quote the Bible, but they don't know God any more than they know anybody else. I mean, they don't have any firsthand, true knowing of the Lord from a practical, intimate, relational standpoint. And you can tell they don't know Him because the things they say betray that understanding.

They say things about God that leave you with the idea that they don't know God. When you know someone, you know how they act. You know how they're going to respond. You get to know somebody. Do you know that you can get to know God that way?

It's really funny. Getting to know God—knowing Him personally, knowing Him intimately—is an amazing sort of thing that adds to the intellectual knowledge. There are times when people will come and ask my advice on things, and there may not be a verse. There's no chapter and verse to really speak to that particular issue.

They'll say, pastor Paul, what do you think about da dah? And there's really nothing that the Bible says about that per se. A lot of times, people are looking for chapter and verse, but I can't find chapter and verse for that particular issue. But you can know the Lord and know His heart in such a way as to say, well, this is what I think is consistent with the heart of the Lord.

Paul even made reference in some of his New Testament letters to things. He would actually even say, now here's a message from me. This is not from God, but this is from me—somebody who's trustworthy—to convey what I believe is consistent with the character of God. And then he would say what he was going to, but he would always be careful to say, but this is no word from the Lord. This is me. But I think I'm fairly trustworthy in terms of my understanding of who God is from a character standpoint. (1 Corinthians 7)

Well, how do you get to know that? Well, you get to know God's character the way you get to know anybody else's character—by hanging out with them, talking with them, hearing their heart, and knowing. And of course, there's this added thing of a believer having the Holy Spirit within them as well, to know the heart of the Lord, to grow in that understanding of the knowledge of the Lord.

I've made this whole point to say that you can know about God without knowing God. And I think that there is a... I got to be careful. I want to be very

careful. I'm not being condemning about this. I think there is a word, though, that needs to be conveyed to parents in this passage about not taking it for granted that our kids are simply knowing the Lord. We can't stop. We can't ever rest in encouraging our kids to know Christ in a personal, intimate way. We just can't do that.

We can't stop by just saying, well, we take them to church with us. They kick and scream all the way, but we get them there. Praise the Lord, they're sitting in church every week, and we're taking them to Sunday school. Praise God for those Sunday school teachers. Sunday school teachers were never meant to take over where parents were supposed to be. They can wonderfully augment the work that you're doing, but they were never meant to step in your place and be the parents who are speaking to the kids on a daily basis, praying for them. And nobody loves your kids like you do. So there's a responsibility that you have.

Now, having said that—and again, my point there is, as parents, we just can't leave this thing up to chance. I want to say something else. I want to say that just because the second generation was raised up not knowing the Lord isn't necessarily the parents' fault. And that's a point that we need to make. God never condemns this first generation for the second generation being completely whacked out and not knowing the Lord.

Do you know that? It doesn't say that. I do believe that it's really the second generation who made the choice—we're not going to do this in following the Lord. Do you understand that following the Lord is a choice? We choose to do it. We don't do it because of warm fuzzies. We don't do it—hopefully we're not doing it because we're compelled or threatened or feel whatever. But it's a choice.

Every day, every day I wake up and say, God, I'm going to serve You today. I choose You over the gods of the world. And whereas the first generation—although we remember last week, we saw lots of signs of compromise—remember in last week's study? They were still ultimately choosing to serve the Lord. They were weakening in their faith. There were compromise issues related to their obedience, but they were continuing to choose to serve the Lord.

The next generation came along, and now because the situation is what it is, and they've got this world in front of them that looks just so cool and so fun and so exciting, they chose to follow the world. They chose to follow the peoples who lived in the land and the way they worshiped and the way they did stuff. And so you have to hold this thing in tension. Yes, there's a responsibility of parents. Yes, we have to be very careful. We need to pray for our kids. Don't leave anything to chance.

But please understand, our kids are free moral agents, okay? And ultimately, they're not automatons. They have the ability to choose their path, and hopefully, we have brought them up in a proper way. And generally speaking, there's a promise in Proverbs about raising up a child in the way they are to go, and that's a general principle. Do you understand that the Book of Proverbs is about principles for life, but they're not necessarily guarantees?

Okay, you have to understand that. Otherwise, you look at the Book of Proverbs, and you can kind of say, well, it says it right here. Solomon was, for the most part, generalizing principles of life.

He was basically saying, you train a child in a particular way and generally speaking, they're going to stay on that path, but that doesn't. That doesn't strip away their free moral agency or their freedom to simply look you in the eye at some particular point when they grow up and say, mom, dad, I don't want to do what you are doing. I choose not to go down the path that you have been on or are on right now. I choose not to do this. It can happen.

Listen, Adam and Eve went astray. Their parent was God. I mean, it doesn't get any better parenting, guys. You don't get any better than having God as the only singular parent you ever had, and they still chose.

I am not exonerating the responsibility of parents to do what's right, to raise their children properly, to pray and pray. And then when you're done praying, pray more for your children. And I'm not saying that we shouldn't do everything possible in our power, just trying to put it in the right perspective here because I think that we can tend to snap to one or other polar thing where it's either all on me, and if my kid goes wrong, it's my fault. Or you got the other side of the equation, which is just as unbalanced—it's all their, well, it's their decision. That's nothing to do with me, sort of a thing. And both of them can be a problem.

So, verse 11, let's keep reading: "*And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord (look at this) and (they) served the Baals.*" Or the Ba-als, depending on how you pronounce it.

Anyway, here you go. Starts just like here, it says that the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. Why? Because they served the Baals. Serving the Baals—this is life in America right now, right here. You know what serving the Baals is all about? It's about sex.

Do you know that these were fertility gods? And the whole idea was, there was this pagan belief that as farmers, and most everything was agriculturally based, they wanted to have the fruitfulness of their crops. So they believed—this is pagan thinking—that if we're going to stimulate the fruitfulness of the seasons

and have a bumper crop this year, we need to stimulate the gods who are overseeing these particular fertility issues.

And so what you would do in order to try to do that is you would go to the local pagan temple or temple of Baal and engage in temple prostitution or engage in sex with a temple prostitute. And the whole idea is that these gods, this male and female god, are there witnessing this sexual act between you and a temple prostitute. They're being aroused, and they too are engaging in some kind of spiritually, sexually intimate weirdness. And that's going to somehow spark the global fruitfulness of the land, and our crops are going to be wonderful this year.

First of all, it's really just superstition with a name. But second of all, it plays right into the flesh. Have you ever noticed that? I mean, it's all based around pleasure. They don't come up with things like, well, if we just cut off an arm, this god's going to love us, sort of a thing. It's pleasurable. Who isn't going to choose a pleasurable path?

So you got these kids who come up from the first generation. They're now the second generation of Israelites living in the land. And they're forced—well, no, they're not forced, but they're facing the issue of mom and dad and the way they've lived their lives.

And all kinds of free sex. And they're young, and they're hormonal, bent toward that. And so what do they do? They pick the world. And is it any wonder sometimes why we raise our kids to know the Word, hopefully to know the Lord, and then our hearts are broken when we find out that some of our kids are living together outside of wedlock or they're engaging in premarital sex all over the place? But what they've done is they've looked around and they've seen what the world has to offer, and they chose it. Quite simply, they chose it.

But of course, as we've said, all of these things—these lifestyle choices that we make to follow after the flesh—they come with consequences. And that's really what we see here in Judges chapter 2. We begin to see as God is priming the pump for us to understand this cycle of sin that Israel is going to get into here in the Book of Judges. And it's going to repeat seven times throughout the course of this book, and we'll see it as we go on. But I want you to notice how this cycle kind of begins.

It says at the end of—well, let's read verse 12: *“And they abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the LORD to anger.”*¹³ They

abandoned the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth.” Just another pagan deity.

“¹⁴ So (it says) the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them. (In other words, nations who came against them and just stole from them.) And he sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies.”

Now, please understand, this is not just God being angry because He wants to be angry. This is God allowing this in their lives so that He might get their attention. This is God literally rattling the bars of the cage that they have built for themselves by their sin in such a way as to say, look where you are. Look where your passions have gotten you. Look where your choices have led you. God allows things like that in our lives to help us see—look what's going on.

And I'm not saying that every rotten thing that happens in life is God doing this to you. I'm not saying that. Please don't take it that way because we live in a fallen world. And there's fallenness all around us, and rotten things happen all the time.

And just because you had a flat tire last week or heard that you might lose your job in six months doesn't necessarily mean that God is trying to get your attention about some aspect of sin in your life. It could just be that's just the world in which you live, and bad things happen.

But God uses these things when there is a choice, which is what these people have done. When there's a choice to say, I will not follow the Lord, and we walk into sin, God will allow the natural consequences of sin to unfold. And we talked about this last week. What happens? What are the natural consequences of sin?

Whenever we compromise obedience to God, it always issues forth in defeat and bondage. Always defeat and bondage. And God allows those things in our lives to get ahold of us and to help us understand what's going on.

Verse 15, in fact, we're told here that: *“Whenever they marched out (meaning their armies went to war against maybe the people that were harassing them), the hand of the LORD (was not for them but) was against them for harm, as the LORD had warned, and as the LORD had sworn to them. And (it says) they were in terrible distress.”*

A couple of things about that. First of all, God told them ahead of time. Listen, He didn't hold this back from them. God's a good parent. A good parent always lays things out very clearly to the children and says, okay, here's the deal. This is the deal. And they explain what's expected. And they say, now, if you don't

do this, here's what you can expect. So when this happens, don't be surprised. Don't say, what's that? You know exactly what's going on. Okay.

God did that. Told them, listen, if you go against My Word, if you walk away from Me, you're not going to be able to stand against your enemies anymore. In fact, my hand's going to be against you when you go out to battle. That's exactly what happened. But I want you to notice how verse 15 ends. It says, “...*And they were in terrible distress.*” Terrible distress.

Do you know that terrible distress is one of the best things that can happen to a disobedient believer? Absolutely. In fact, I'll tell you right now, when people come up, they might be caught off guard. Sometimes you come up and pray with me after the service, and you want to pray for your cousin or your son or your spouse or something like that who's walked away from the Lord.

What am I going to pray? God, make them miserable. That's exactly what I pray. Lord, make them miserable. Miserable in their sin. We've got to get to that point. You have to get to that point where you're just sick and tired of being sick and tired, and you're ready to change and you're ready to turn your life over to God.

But as long as we feel like there's another chance for me to enjoy my sin a little bit longer, we're going to take it. And we have to be brought to that point of just absolute, just the end of ourselves. And so it says they were in terrible distress. This is the best news I've heard all day about what's going on with the Israelites. They're in terrible distress. Praise the Lord, they're in distress. This is wonderful. The worst.

Have you ever tried to witness to somebody who's in the summer of their sin? Sin has seasons. You have springtime—ah, I think I'm going to sin. And then the summer is when you're just fully engaged, and you're having a blast. Get out the tanning oil. I'm just having a good time. And you go witness to somebody in the summer season of their sin, and you tell them what they're doing is wrong, they're going to go, really? Forget you, buddy. I'm having a blast.

And that's exactly what the Bible says. Sin is enjoyable for what? A season—summer. And then fall inevitably sets in, and that's where they start experiencing defeat. And then the winter of their season sets in, and that's when bondage to sin takes its toll on them.

And what was a blast just a couple of seasons ago is now their own personal prison of their own making. And they are there, and they are in it, and they are miserable. And that's one of the best things that can happen in their lives—misery at that point—because hopefully at the place of misery, they're going to begin to call out to God.

Now, this is the pattern we see in the Book of Judges over and over again. So whenever you see that they're in terrible distress, you can know we're about to see relief come their way because that's where they needed to get.

Verse 16: *“Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. ¹⁷ Yet they did not listen (ultimately) to their judges, for they whored after other gods (your Bible may say prostituted themselves, which is really the same sort of a thing) and bowed down to them. They soon turned aside from the way in which their fathers had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the LORD, and they did not do so. ¹⁸ Whenever the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge, and he saved them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge. For the LORD (oh, I love this, For the LORD) was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them.”*

Guys, do you know God is moved? God is moved by the groaning of those who are captive to sin. When they begin to groan and they begin to cry out, oh God, help me, God is moved to compassion when He hears that. When people are thumbing their nose at Him, that's when He has a problem.

But boy, I tell you, you get a voice that begins to cry out to God in sincerity, and God is right there. And I mean right there. He cannot resist the cry of somebody who calls out and says, Jesus, help me. I have no one but you. He can't resist it. So He was moved to pity.

Verse 19: *“But whenever the judge died, they turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them. They did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways.”*

In other words, the distress that they went through only had a very short-term response in their lives, which is really sad. You always hope that there's going to be a complete change, and there can be, but in this particular case, there was not.

Verse 20, goes on, it says, *“So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he said, “Because this people have transgressed my covenant that I commanded their fathers and have not obeyed my voice, ²¹ I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died, ²² in order to test Israel by them, whether they will take care to walk in the way of the LORD as their fathers did, or not.””*

Did you hear that? That's a really interesting statement. God says, instead of now chasing out these Canaanite nations that are still in the land, I'm going to leave them there as a test. It's a test. What's it a test of? It's a test to see if they're going to follow the Lord. So it's sort of interesting. I actually got a note from

someone this last week who said that someone came up to them and said that they didn't believe God ever tests His children. That's just not true. He does all the time. And it's all over in the word. James talks about it in James chapter 1 about how the testing of our faith develops perseverance, which of course needs to finish its work. (James 1:2-4) So does God test us? Absolutely.

Now, that's different from tempting. God never tempts us. God, it says, the Bible says very clearly also in James, God doesn't tempt anybody. (James 1:13) Tempting is by purposely putting something in front of you, and drawing you, luring you to this thing, to create this temptation. It's a different sort of a situation.

But God will test us to see what's really going on in our hearts and if we're going to choose Him over this junk. Yeah, it's one of the things that we have to be careful when we're raising children that we never allow them, if we never allow our children to undergo any kind of a test while they're under our care, we actually do them a disservice. And I'm not saying you just throw them to the wolves. I'm not saying that at all.

I'm saying that there's a place in time, particularly in a teenager's life, where parents should oversee the testing process where a child is given an opportunity and sometimes they're going to fail. But that too can be a great learning experience. But there is an opportunity for them to be tested while they're still under your direction and protection.

If we never allow our children to ever experience that sort of an influence from the outside and the tests of things, and then they graduate and we go, Hey, have a great life, and they walk out and just call whammo, and suddenly just all these tests just come outta left field. It can be a very frightening sort of a situation.

But God says in this passage that He's going to allow these nations to remain so that He might see what's really in their heart if they're willing to follow the Lord. It's one thing to follow the Lord when everything's just going well, isn't it? When everything's just dialed in, but are you going to follow the Lord when following the Lord is hard? When choosing the Lord is hard.

Choosing the Lord is hard. I'll just tell you that right now. It's not easy. It's hard. Jesus said, He said that we're to take the narrow path. It's not an easy path. Now the broad path, it's easy. To go down a broad path. Yeah, no problem. Just go with the flow, sort of a thing. But to go down the narrow path, it's difficult. It's challenging every day. Every day, we have to choose whether or not we're going to follow God, every day. Are you going to follow God today? Sometimes we get so upset because we make mistakes and I thought I made the choice to follow God.

You did yesterday. What about today? Did you make a choice today? You can't rest on last week's decisions or even yesterday's decisions. You can't do that. It's like we want to do that. We Christians, we love the altar experience of coming down to the altar and just having an experience with God.

People want to do that. I'm not saying God can't touch a person miraculously and powerfully, but we long for this. We have these issues, like these besetting sins or these issues in our life. Got a marriage problem. I got, I'm addicted to cigarettes, or I'm this, or I'm that or whatever, and I just want to come down.

I want to come down and just get prayed for and just have God just come, and it's like, oh God, I'm healed, sort of a thing. And we've heard some stories about that and we want that. And many times God doesn't do it. Because if He did, he would absolutely take away the powerful lesson of choosing every day to follow Him, putting Him first in our lives.

We just, we want to cruise, we want to get over everything and cruise, and it just doesn't work that way. Now, it's not to say God can't meet you with a visitation of His spirit that does a powerful work, but let me just tell you, I found those things to be rare, frankly, because it completely takes away the responsibility of understanding what got me into this thing over years of learned behavior, doing what I mean, years of disobedience.

And God rarely wipes it away in a second. Sometimes those consequences stay with us for years, sometimes for the rest of our lives, that we might be reminded to follow Jesus, to choose to follow Him today. Lord, I choose you. I choose to follow you today. I'm still dealing with the choices I made yesterday.

I know you love me. I know I'm forgiven. I know I'm going to heaven. Doesn't mean you're not forgiven. It doesn't mean you're not going to heaven. It doesn't mean you're not a Christian. You are. You're a born-again, washed-in-the-blood lamb, child of God. But sometimes our consequences follow us down the road, don't they?

But instead of wishing them away or wanting to come to the altar and just have it all made good, maybe God has allowed that in our life to remind us, Child, are you going to follow Me today?

The last verse of the chapter says, *“²³ So the LORD left those nations, not driving them out quickly, and he did not give them into the hand of Joshua.”* Spoken there after Joshua's death.