

Commentary on Judges 2:11-19

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Series*) for **Sunday, July 10, 2011**, is from **Judges 2:11-19**. Five **Questions for Discussion** follow the *Bible Lesson Commentary* below.

Judges 2:11-19

(Judges 2:11) Then the Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and worshiped the Baals;

In spite of all that God had done for them throughout their history, the Israelites persisted in turning from loving, obeying, and worshiping the true God only. They turned to serving and worshiping the gods of those they did not kill in battle or drive out of the Promised Land. The priests and priestesses of these false gods encouraged practices that made the worshipers feel good temporarily and promised success apart from doing what was morally right. These practices led to the spread of many diseases and eventual death. Sometimes worshipers sacrificed their own children and the children of others to appease the anger of their false gods or to achieve a desired blessing from them. All of these practices were evil.

(Judges 2:12) and they abandoned the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; they followed other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were all around them, and bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger.

The Israelites began their worship of these false gods as their neighbors tempted them or “evangelized” them away from the true God by making false promises and appealing to their emotions instead of their reason. The Israelites failed in their calling to lead others to the true God by their example and by their teaching the truth about God. When the Israelites added the worship of these idols to their worship of God, they actually abandoned God, Who demanded they worship Him exclusively. Their memory of all that God did for Israel in the past faded away as they reveled in the pleasures of debauchery and refused to learn from their ancestors, who knew and followed God before them. As they committed themselves more and more to the worship of false gods, they neglected to teach their children about the true God and His leading the people out of slavery in Egypt and the Ten Commandments. They provoked the LORD to exercise His just punishment upon them, as He had punished the peoples in the Promised Land before them.

(Judges 2:13) They abandoned the LORD, and worshiped Baal and the Astartes.

The writer of the Book of Judges once again emphasized that their rebellion against God had led them to their abandonment of the LORD and right living

entirely. They replaced the true God in their lives with the male and female gods and goddesses of their neighbors. According to their priests' teachings about these gods and goddesses, their followers were to do as their gods did. These gods and goddesses practiced immorality of the most revolting kinds; worshiping them involved practicing these immoral behaviors as part of their worship service. The pleasures of sin appealed more to the Israelites than honoring God by living holy and moral lives.

(Judges 2:14) So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers who plundered them, and he sold them into the power of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies.

Most Israelites did not recognize their suffering as God's punishment. The author of the Book of Judges taught that God "gave them over" to their enemies or ceased protecting them and allowed their enemies to hurt them economically and in other ways. Their false gods failed them because they were powerless, but almighty God kept His promise to discipline them when they sinned. God punished them through their enemies, who exercised power over them, deprived them of their independence, enslaved them economically and physically, stole their crops, and imposed high taxes they had to pay as tribute.

(Judges 2:15) Whenever they marched out, the hand of the LORD was against them to bring misfortune, as the LORD had warned them and sworn to them; and they were in great distress.

God not only allowed them to suffer the natural consequences of their sins, such as disease and death, but God also intervened in their lives to punish them through others. God did not punish them using divine miracles, as He had punished Pharaoh in Egypt. God did not punish them in a way that appeared directly from the hand of God. Instead, God punished them indirectly through their enemies. They experienced misfortunes and hardships and their suffering increased daily because they could not overcome their enemies without the help of God. God designed their suffering so they would return to God and call out for His help.

(Judges 2:16) Then the LORD raised up judges, who delivered them out of the power of those who plundered them.

The author of the Book of Judges revealed a history of cycles that repeated during the time of the Judges and thereafter. The cycle is temptation and sin, turning away from God to serving idols, abandoning God, suffering the natural consequences of sin, suffering caused by God giving them up, and suffering from their enemies to plunder them economically and in other ways, to God eventually sending a judge or leader who would deliver them from their enemies and oppression. After some years of peace and prosperity with through the leadership of the judge, the cycle repeated.

(Judges 2:17) Yet they did not listen even to their judges; for they lusted after other gods and bowed down to them. They soon turned aside from the way in which their ancestors had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the LORD; they did not follow their example.

The people wanted to be saved from their oppressors, but they did not really want to be saved from their sins or return to obeying God according to the Ten Commandments and the moral law of God. They preferred the pleasures that the pagan gods offered them in their worship services and their immoral standards. They preferred to believe the lie of personal prosperity that the idols offered to them rather than accept the personal responsibility that the true God demanded through His Law. Those who first entered the Promised Land left a good example as a whole, but their children and grandchildren did not follow their example.

(Judges 2:18) Whenever the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge, and he delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD would be moved to pity by their groaning because of those who persecuted and oppressed them.

Pity (or love and compassion) moved God to do for the oppressed Israelites what they did not deserve because of their sins. Moved by grace and mercy, God raised up the judges. In spite of some of the sins and weaknesses of some of these judges, God used them to save His people from endless persecution and suffering. As far as we know, in many cases, the judges did not also teach the Law of God and call the people to repentance and to the faith and absolute obedience that those who followed Joshua maintained.

(Judges 2:19) But whenever the judge died, they would relapse and behave worse than their ancestors, following other gods, worshiping them and bowing down to them. They would not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways.

As long as the judge offered peace and security and perhaps told the people to obey the true God, the people quit worshiping idols. As soon as the visible representative of God died, the people returned to their worship of idols. They became worse and worse, not better and better. They did not return to the type of loyalty that Moses and Joshua inspired and demanded from the Israelites.

Five Questions for Discussion

1. In what ways does the Book of Judges illustrate the need to teach the whole Bible, both the Old Testament and the New Testament?
2. In what ways do some people or groups today repeat cycles similar to the cycle the Israelites repeated? Why do these cycles seem inevitable? How can those who follow the true God help their families avoid becoming enslaved to these cycles?

3. In what ways does God punish people and groups today that they may not recognize as God's punishment? What needs to happen so people will see that their suffering is the result of God's punishment for their sins?

4. How might you respond to someone who said to you, "Your suffering is the result of sin in your life. You need to repent of your sins, and turn back to God, and then you will be healed or saved from your suffering?" What might Jesus have said if someone had said this to Him or given Him this advice?

5. Why are good leaders so important? What are the qualities of a good leader?

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