

This may seem like a strange passage for Easter Sunday –
but that is why I have highlighted the key term from verse 16 and 18 –
“And the LORD raised up judges.”

In the LXX, the same word “egeiro” is used that is used in the NT
for all the passages that speak of how God raised Jesus from the dead.

In one sense, Judges is not speaking of being raised from the *dead* –
these judges are “raised up” in order to deliver Israel from their foes.

Indeed, the problem in our chapter is that these judges keep dying –
and so their being “raised up” is only a temporary fix.

But there is another sense in which it is a sort of “resurrection.”
Because the wages of sin is death.
Israel’s rebellion ends in death and exile.

We need a judge – we need a deliverer who will be raised up – never to die again!
And we need one who will change our hearts – who will raise *us* up –
that we might live before him!

2:1-5 is the hinge between the two introductions to Judges.
If chapter 1 is the “historical” introduction to the book,
then chapter 2 is the “theological” introduction.
Chapter 1 sets the historical context of a conquest that started out well (Judah),
but then flopped (everyone else).
Chapter 2 then explains the pattern of what went wrong.

And chapter 2 begins with the angel of the LORD going up from Gilgal to Bochim.

1. The Angel of the LORD – Rebellion and Weeping (2:1-5)

Now the angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bochim.

The angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bochim.

Who is the angel of the LORD?

The word for angel (mal’ak) means messenger or envoy.

Later in Judges Gideon will send *mal’akim* (messengers) to the northern tribes.
So here, this is God’s messenger.

The mal’ak Yahweh speaks in 5:23 (in the song of Deborah),
and appears to Gideon in Judges 6 and Manoah and his wife in Judges 13.
He is plainly a divinely appointed envoy of the heavenly court.

He speaks for God with full divine authority.

But to understand the mal'ak Yahweh, we must go back to Exodus 23.

In Exodus 23:20-21 God promised to send his "mal'ak" before Israel:

"Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way
and to bring you to the place that I have prepared.

Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice;
do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgressions,
for my name is in him."

We have seen before that God's Spirit was sent to dwell with Israel
in the glory-cloud that led them through the wilderness,
and which descended upon the tabernacle and filled the Holy of Holies.

But God's presence with his people was guaranteed not only by the Spirit's dwelling,
but also by the Messenger who speaks for God.

Word and Spirit.

That's not a NT invention.

God's Word and Spirit dwelt with Israel in the conquest!

And God warned his people to heed this messenger.

We usually translate it "angel" forgetting that "angel" means "messenger."

The Angel of the LORD, then, is no one else but the second person of the Trinity.

He is God's messenger who went before Israel to guard them and to guide them.

He is the one who spoke to Israel, calling them to repentance and faith.

But the Messenger of Yahweh comes up from Gilgal to Bochim.

You have to watch the geography in Judges.

Gilgal was the place where Israel crossed the Jordan and entered the Promised Land.

Gilgal was the place where Israel had been circumcised and kept the Passover,
when they first entered the land.

Gilgal was the place where God "rolled away the reproach of Egypt." (Josh 5:9)

The ark has since settled at its new home in Shiloh,
but the Messenger of Yahweh does not come from Shiloh.

He comes from Gilgal.

He was last heard from at Gilgal.

Think back to Joshua 5.

It was at Gilgal that Joshua encountered the commander of the LORD's army.

It was at Gilgal that the conquest of the land was planned.

And the Messenger of the LORD has been watching from Gilgal
as Israel turns away from its divine mission.

So now he comes to Bochim.

Bochim, which means “weepers” is not named until verse 5,
after the weeping of the people of God.

But the place name signifies the movement of the angel of the LORD
from the place of Israel’s glory to the place of Israel’s humiliation.

And he declares to Israel the word of the LORD:

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.”

Israel has failed to do what God has said.

God will not break his covenant.

God will be faithful to his covenant!

But God had said that if Israel refused to obey – if they worshiped other gods –
he would bring the curses of Egypt upon his own people!

And so the Angel of the LORD says that God will no longer go before them.

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.^[a] And they sacrificed there to the LORD.

In one sense, the people do what they should do:

they weep at the message – and they sacrifice to the LORD.

But as we will see throughout the book of Judges,
the response of God’s people is less than it should be.

If you think about what repentance is,

they have some sense of their sin;

they have some apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ –

they have some “grief” over their sin;

but there is no clear statement that they turn away from their sin.

And this is the point of what follows:

2. The Death of Joshua – and That Generation (2:6-10)

⁶ 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. ⁸ And 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. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel.

Verse 6 brings us back to the beginning.

“When Joshua dismissed the people, the people of Israel went each to his inheritance to take possession of the land.”

And at first, as the book of Joshua tells us, all went well.

And so Joshua died and was buried at the age of 110 in the hill country of Ephraim.

But then arose a generation

“who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel.” (2:10)

This raises all sorts of questions.

Why did they not know the LORD?

If their parents were so faithful, why did they not teach their children adequately?

Well – maybe they did!

But teaching your children does not guarantee that they will believe!

On the other hand,

do you have to see it with your own eyes in order for it to be “real” to you?

If so, then the second generation is in trouble!

Then again, so are we—because it has been nearly 2,000 years since God acted in history to redeem his people!

As we go through the pattern of the judges we will discover that while presenting a tale of woe, Judges is not about despair.

We are not left in this cycle of rebellion and judgment.

There is hope for the future.

And this is why I say that the book of Judges is all about Christmas.

Because it is all about the coming of the Son of David!

Let us look at the pattern of the judges to see why.

3. The Pattern of the Judges (2:11-23)

Verses 11-23 provide the literary pattern for the book of Judges.

The literary pattern has five parts (the A, B, C, D, E, F in your bulletin).

Over the course of the book of Judges, this literary pattern will fall apart.

There are six cycles in the book of Judges:

Othniel (3:7-11)

Ehud (3:12-20)

Deborah (4-5)

Gideon (6-9)

Jephthah (10-12)

and Samson (13-16).

Each of these cycles will use the literary pattern of chapter 2 –
but each cycle will degrade slightly.

The earlier cycles use the literary pattern verbatim.

As we continue through the book, we will see the literary pattern fall apart –
even as Israel falls apart!

So pay attention to the literary pattern of verses 11-23 –
because it is setting up for us the story of the whole book.

A. Rebellion (2:11-13)

¹¹ And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals. 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.

The very heart of rebellion is idolatry–
worshiping the gods of the nations around you, instead of the LORD.
It is called the first commandment for a reason!
You shall have no other gods beside me!

We may not be tempted to worship Baal.
But we are tempted to worship the gods of the people around us!

If you turn away from the LORD – you can have more fun!
If you turn away from God – you can do what you want!

It's *exactly* what Baal and Asherah were all about.

B. Judgment (2:14-15)

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 hand of their surrounding enemies, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. ¹⁵ Whenever they marched out, the hand of the LORD was against them for harm, as the LORD had warned, and as the LORD had sworn to them. And they were in terrible distress.

And just as Deuteronomy 28 warned,
when Israel rebelled, judgment fell.
God is faithful to his covenant—both in blessing and in cursing.

The wages of sin is death.
You may think that following other gods is more fun.
But in the end, it leads to misery and death.

C. Deliverance (2:16-18)

¹⁶ *Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them.*

Here is the first mention of “judges” in this book.

“What is a judge?”

What do the judges do?

Do they try cases?

Not that we know of.

(But then again, the elders and priests were called to do that)

None of the individuals in the book are called “judges”

but instead the verb is used: “they judged Israel.”

“Judge” should not be thought of as a judicial term,
but as “deliverers.”

2:16–“Then the LORD raised up judges,
who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them.”

The verb “to judge” can either have a judicial sense
(with respect to leading in internal affairs)

or a more general sense of “deliver”

(with respect to leading in external affairs).

So “governors” or “deliverers” might be a more accurate title for the book.

And of course, that fits very nicely the theme of the book.

There is no king in Israel.

This is the age of the judges.

The ad hoc deliverers who saved God’s people from the hand of plunderers.

But:

¹⁷ *Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they whored after other gods 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 was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them.*

But notice WHY God raised up judges!

“The LORD was moved to pity by their groaning
because of those who afflicted and oppressed them.”

God had mercy on his people because of their groaning.

In one sense, they deserved their misery!

The wages of sin is death!

But God has pity on those who are afflicted.

He does not treat our sin as we deserve.

He sees our misery and our distress –
and he hears our pleas for mercy!

But there's a problem:

D. Relapse (2:19)

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.

What is the problem?

The judge dies, and the people return to their sins.

Unfortunately, our children don't just learn our wisdom and our good habits!

They are just as quick (if not quicker) to learn our folly and our bad habits...

And...

E. Judgment (2:20-23)

²⁰ 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." ²³ So the LORD left those nations, not driving them out quickly, and he did not give them into the hand of Joshua.

This summarizes the word of the Angel of the LORD that we heard earlier.

God decides to leave the remaining nations,
and use them to test Israel –
to see whether they will walk in the way of the LORD – or not.

God often tests us.

The testing of your faith is a good thing!
It can be a hard thing – for sure!

But as James tells us,

“you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.
And let steadfastness have its full effect,
that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (1:3-4)

Without testing – without trials – you don't really learn and grow.

But at the same time, *our trials* take a different form than those in the book of Judges.

And the difference is all about Easter!

The difference is all about Jesus sitting at the right hand of the Father!

But I have *good news* for you!

We are not in the same situation as Israel.

We are not stuck with judges who die – and stay dead...

We have a king who has been raised from the dead
and seated at the right hand of the Father!

4. Conclusion – the Nations Left to Test Israel (3:1-6)

3 Now these are the nations that the LORD left, to test Israel by them, that is, all in Israel who had not experienced all the wars in Canaan. ² It was only in order that the generations of the people of Israel might know war, to teach war to those who had not known it before. ³ These are the nations: the five lords of the Philistines and all the Canaanites and the Sidonians and the Hivites who lived on Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal-hermon as far as Lebo-hamath. ⁴ They were for the testing of Israel, to know whether Israel would obey the commandments of the LORD, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses.

The opening verses of chapter 3 conclude this section,

by naming the nations that the LORD left –

including the Philistines – along with the Canaanites and Sidonians and Hivites.

It's worth noting that the earlier references to the coastal cities
had generally omitted reference to the Philistines.

From what we know of the period, that's because the Philistines only arrived in Canaan
shortly after the Israelites.

They seem to be Aegean peoples – probably displaced by the Trojan War
and the Bronze Age Collapse.

But as the book of Judges continues, they will become more and more important.

Verse 4 reminds us that the purpose of these nations being left is to test Israel –
to know whether Israel would obey the commandments of the LORD.

But they didn't:

⁵ So the people of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁶ And their daughters they took to themselves for wives, and their own daughters they gave to their sons, and they served their gods.

We need to beware the pattern of the Judges.

Jesus came to break that pattern!

So you don't have to imitate your fathers!

But it's worth noting that if you really want to be like your fathers –
you can do that.

But please don't.

It's not worth it!

The pages of history are filled with stories of people who chose to walk that way.
It's been tried before.

It didn't work in the days of the Judges –
and it still doesn't work today!