

EXPOSITION OF JUDGES

Message #3

Judges 2:1-23

On several occasions when I have been looking for certain theological books that I want in my library, I have driven to Grand Rapids, Michigan and made my rounds to the theological book publishers. Almost always, I will take a drive by the old Calvin College Campus on Franklin Street, which is where I spent years studying at the Grand Rapids School of the Bible and Music. The curriculum of that school was put together by John Miles, who basically copied the curriculum used by Lewis Sperry Chafer when he was at Dallas Theological Seminary. Mr. Miles loved Dr. Chafer and told me, shortly before he died, that he was one of the people he was looking forward to seeing when he got to heaven.

When Mr. Miles retired as president of the school in 1986, two new presidents arose who did not embrace the philosophy that God so richly blessed. Neither one had to trust God for the buildings, like Mr. Miles, because the buildings were already there. Neither one had to take a stand for the Word of God and its doctrines, because that stand was already in place. All those two needed to do was to keep the school on the same course and God would have blessed it. But neither did that. They started to toy with other ideas and drift away from what brought the dynamic blessings of God to that institution. They wanted to bring in more secular courses for secular accreditation. In just a seven year span of time the school was gone. A school that once trained thousands of men and women for ministry was ruined by a second and third president who didn't follow the example of a man like John Miles.

That very same kind of thing happened in Israel's history in the book of Judges. When Joshua was alive and focused on believing God and taking the Promised Land, God was blessing and great things were happening. But as soon as Joshua was gone, things went downhill fast. People started toying with new novel ideas about living in the land with the enemies. They did not obey God like Joshua, and, as Gary Inrig said, "the second generation experience *became* a second-hand experience." When we come to **Judges 2** we learn an important principle:

WHEN GOD'S PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN FOCUSED ON UNDERSTANDING AND APPLYING GOD'S WORD LEAVE, THOSE LEFT NEED TO MAINTAIN THAT SAME FOCUS OR ELSE THE GREAT BLESSINGS THEY HAVE EXPERIENCED WILL BE REMOVED, AND THEY WILL FIND THEMSELVES IN A DISASTER.

It has been observed that the greatest battle you and I will ever face is the battle with ourselves. Israel was its own worst enemy and at times so are we our own worst enemy.

God is a very gracious God who gives His people plenty of time to repent. If God's people will truly humble themselves and confess their sin and do honest business with Him, He will give them victory. However, if they do not respond to Him, He will shut things down. This is true nationally, ecclesiastically, and individually.

Judges 2 sets the stage for the rest of the book. This text breaks down into eight parts:

PART #1 – God rebukes His people for not obeying His Word. 2:1-5

When this chapter opens, it does not open with God praising His people for a bunch of victories. It opens with “the angel of the LORD” addressing Israel. You will notice that this angel of the LORD is a member of the Godhead because of the use of the personal pronouns “I” and “Me.” The One who made a covenant with Israel was God, and the One who did all of the things described in **verse 1** is God. So some member of the Godhead is the angel of the LORD. That Person is none other than Jesus Christ, who appears in human form in O.T. times prior to His incarnation (a theophany).

Now the first thing the angel of the LORD does is move from “Gilgal to Bochim.” Gilgal is mentioned some 38 times in the O.T. It was the very place where God appeared to Joshua and told him that He would go before him and give Israel victory in this land (Joshua 5:9-15). Gilgal was a place of memorial, victory, and blessing. But Bochim is a word that means place of weeping. **The names of these two places are important because they inform us that if we obey God, God will lead us to victory and blessing; but if we do not obey God, God will lead us to depression and weeping.** God will never break a covenant with His people, but He can break His people.

In **Judges 2:1-2a**, the angel of the LORD comes to God’s people and informs them that He was the One who led them out of Egypt, He was the One who brought them into the Promised Land, He was the One who promised to never break His covenant with Israel, He was the One who told them to not make covenant deals with the Canaanites, and He was the One who told them to tear down their altars.

But notice at the end of **verse 2**, “you have not obeyed Me.” Now they could have said, just a minute, we had a few victories here and there. God says, “you have not obeyed Me.” I told you to get the evil cancer out of the land and you are still fooling around with it. Chapter 1 is nothing more than a catalog of failure to do what God wanted them to do.

In **verse 3**, God informs them that He is not going to drive out their enemies, which He hasn’t to this day; and these nations will be a thorn and a snare, which they are to this day. God says, okay, you want to compromise and not obey Me, then I am still your God but you will have consequences. You want to compromise My Word, then you’ll reap what you sow. According to **verses 4-5**, when the people heard this, they lifted up their voices and started to cry. There was a real emotional outburst. In fact, they named the place “Bochim” which means weeping ones. Five applications:

- 1) Halfhearted obedience will leave you depressed and weeping. The most miserable people you will ever meet are believers who refuse to totally yield their lives to Jesus Christ.
- 2) Some believers are always emotional, always sorry, always weeping, but they do not change. One commentator said you could actually call this book of Judges “the book of weeping.”
- 3) It is possible to persist in disobeying God to the point where He says, fine, I will let you be dominated by this problem for the rest of your life, even if you cry, weep, and are sorry.
- 4) We must take steps to eliminate the enemies or we will miss the blessings of God.
- 5) Even when God’s people have made a mess of things, God is still in a covenant relationship with His people.

PART #2 – Joshua dies and he was one who had truly obeyed God’s Word. **2:6-10**

Joshua was a great man of God. He had led Israel into the Promised Land and into the great blessings of God. He was a fearless soldier, a great organizer, a dynamic leader, and a skilled administrator; **but the thing that made Joshua so powerful was his love for the Word of God and his willingness to specifically obey it.**

According to **verse 7**, when Joshua was alive all of Israel wanted to serve the Lord. He made an impact on his elders. But according to **verses 8-9**, Joshua died at the age of 110 and he was buried within the boundaries of his own inheritance. What this means is that those children of Israel could have and should have remembered Joshua and all that God used him to accomplish. But according to **verse 10**, another generation arose who did not know the LORD or even the great things God had done. As Gary Phillips said, this generation “snubbed God” (*Judges*, p. 43).

How is it possible that in such a short time spirituality could become so pathetic? It starts with compromising God’s Word. Don’t fully obey God. Don’t get serious about His Word. Take your blessings for granted. Settle for status quo experiences. Become complacent and you’ll end in a disaster.

Joshua proves that one man or one woman who dedicates himself or herself to carefully understanding and applying God’s Word can make a major difference in the lives of many people.

PART #3 – God’s people forsook God and did evil in God’s sight. **2:11-13**

Not only did God’s people forget Joshua, they forsook God. That word “forsook” (**2:12, 13**) means they left God, they deserted God (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 616). God’s people abandoned their God who had done so much for them and with them. Not only did they forsake God, but they did evil and they worshipped Baal (**2:11**). **In fact, the Hebrew text reads they did “the evil” in the sight of the LORD.** The evil was the evil of all evils; they indulged themselves in the sin of all sin; they turned their back on God to pursue idolatry and got involved in sexual immorality. Baal worship featured temple prostitution, fertility rites, drunken sexual orgies, homosexuality, snake worship, and even human sacrifices.

According to **verse 11** they served all the different kinds of Baals. The noun “Baal” is used 71 times in the O.T., 53 times it is singular and 18 times it is plural. Baal worshipped involved many different false idols, and according to **verse 13**, they also worshipped Baal’s female counterpart Ashtaroth. This was the goddess of fertility. These are God’s own people caught up in evil idolatry and immorality. Here is really the heart of the problem; they worshipped false gods. They adopted the heathen deities of the Canaanites. Dr. Leon Wood said this religion was known for its lewd worship. It had immoral deities, prostitute goddesses, cultic bulls and serpents (*Distressing Days of the Judges*, p. 143).

Do you see why God wanted these people out of this land? Compromising God's Word will always lead to disaster. Failure to obey the Word of God will end with one doing evil in the sight of the Lord. Second generation children who come from Christian homes had better take a very serious look at this text. It is possible to grow up being taught the things of God but so reject them that, when you are away from your parents, you do evil in the sight of God.

When God's people start dabbling with that which is immoral, I can guarantee us that God takes serious notice of it. It cost His people in the O.T. and it can cost them in the N.T., which is why God says in the N.T. we are to "flee immorality" (I Corinthians 6:18).

PART #4 – God's anger burned against His own people. **2:14-15**

Now I want us to clearly understand something about the anger of God. When God's people make God angry, it is not some emotional anger that is due to hurt feelings; this is a holy anger that comes from a righteous God that is aimed straight at the sin and rebellion of His own people. Gary Inrig said, "God and evil cannot coexist" (*Hearts of Iron, Feet of Clay*, p. 39).

Look at what **verse 15** says, "Wherever they went, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil." God's sovereignty is over everything and everyone and God can use evil people as pawns to make His own people's lives miserable.

You cannot hide from God. You may think, I can live my life in a state of rebellion against God and everything will be okay. No it won't. God will never bless you or your life. He can make your life so miserable that you never smile.

When you read these verses you realize that when God's anger burns against His own people, He will cause their world to completely cave in. When God's people anger God, they will forfeit many blessings. God can and will permit His own people to be enslaved and oppressed if they refuse to obey Him and His Word.

PART #5 – God in His grace raised up a judge who delivered His people. **2:16**

Here is an amazing demonstration of grace. God's people did not deserve to get out of their horrible situations. They had made their own decisions that put them in their situations. But God in His amazing grace did this for His people in spite of themselves. God does not break His covenant with His people even when they deserve it.

There have been so many times in our lives when God has not given us what we deserve. There have been so many times in our lives when God demonstrated His amazing grace. One of the most "life-changing experiences" that you can ever have is to ask God to put the pieces of your shattered life back together.

If you are a believer who has made terrible decisions and you find your world has caved in because of it, run straight to your God and ask for His help and His grace. He stands ready to deliver His own.

PART #6 – God’s people would not listen to God’s judge or God’s Word . **2:17**

Look at this verse. They did not learn. They would not listen. God would graciously forgive and deliver His people, and “quickly” they would go right back to their old ways. It was like they never learned. They did not say we need to walk in the ways of God so we may experience His blessings. They went right back to their old habits, like a dog that returns to its vomit.

PART #7 – God raised up a judge who delivered His people, but when that judge died the people went right back to their own rebellion . **2:18-19**

God raised up judges. God was with those judges. God worked through those judges. They would cry to God and God would hear their prayers; and just as soon as the judge died, they went right back to their old evil habits. In fact, they became worse than they initially were.

Look carefully at what is revealed in **verse 18**; God is moved by the groaning of His people. When you admit your sin, and when you are sickened by your sin, and when you cry out to God in confession of your sin, you touch the heart of God.

PART #8 – God’s anger did not allow His people to have victory over enemies. **2:20-23**

God is immutable in that He does not change, but He is not immobile in that He does move. If God’s people choose to walk in their own ways, He will move one way. If God’s people choose to walk in His ways, He will move another way.

God says, I am running a continual test with My people to see if they are really interested in obeying Me and My Word. If God’s people want victory and blessings, all they need to do is to turn to this gracious God and cry out to Him and obey His Word.

God will permit His people to make up their minds whether or not they want to obey Him and His Word. God will let you self-destruct if that is what you want to do, or He will step into your world and bless you if you ask Him to. It is up to you.