

Judges 2:6-3:11 • In the Shadow of the Judges

Introduction

God never declared Abraham a king or ruler or anything more than “the father of a multitude of nations.” (Genesis 17:5) It was an example of the kind of relationship God expected between Himself and man as Father and child. In the kingdom of God, every individual sets as his own King God the Father and no other. Moses began life as an Egyptian ruler and had to be completely changed so that as God’s appointed deliverer no man’s allegiance was given to an earthly leader, but the One in heaven. So the example continues as the first, obedient generations of Joshua’s time die and pass and new generations rise to take their place.

⁶When Joshua had dismissed the people, the sons of Israel went each to his inheritance to possess the land. ⁷The people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, who had seen all the great work of the LORD which He had done for Israel. ⁸Then Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of one hundred and ten. ⁹And they buried him in the territory of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. ¹⁰All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel.

¹¹Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals, ¹²and they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked the LORD to anger. ¹³So they forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtaroth. ¹⁴The anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies around them, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. ¹⁵Wherever they went, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had spoken and as the LORD had sworn to them, so that they were severely distressed.

[Read v.2:6-10]

Q: What is the context upon which the history of the judges is based?

A: Joshua and his generation died out. Those who came after were not part of the wanderings in the wilderness; they had not suffered the hardships nor had they experienced the miracles (crossing the Jordan, Jericho, the sun standing still, etc.), nor had they been a part of the entrance into the Promised Land.

Application: What’s a contemporary example? (E.g., the “pre-boomers” – those who experienced WWII, and the “baby boomers” – those who have had life presented to them on a platter.)

[Read v.2:11-15]

Q: What did the Israelites do that provoked the Lord to anger?

A: They began to serve other gods.

Q: Did God give them warnings about that? Did He predict it would happen, and did Moses warn the people that it would happen?

A: Yes. (Choose any section of verses between Deuteronomy 28:15-68 for the warnings.) The predictions that it would happen can be found in Deuteronomy 31:16-18 and 29.

The LORD said to Moses, “Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers; and this people will arise and play the harlot with the strange gods of the land, into the midst of which they are going, and will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them. Then My anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide My face from them, and they will be consumed, and many evils and troubles will come upon them; so that they will say in that day, ‘Is it not because our God is not among us that these evils have come upon us?’ But I will surely hide My face in that day because of all the evil which they will do, for they will turn to other gods.

–Deuteronomy 31:16-18

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*“For I know that after my death you will act corruptly and turn from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days, for you will do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking Him to anger with the work of your hands.”
—Deuteronomy 31:29*

Application: Do we ever disobey God even though we know there are consequences for doing so?

Q: Who was responsible for the sinful actions of the people?

A: The people themselves, not the leaders.

Q: Why did God leave the people without anointed leaders like Moses and Joshua?

A: Two reasons. First, the people had all the “leading” they needed. They were out of Egypt and through the wilderness (Moses & Aaron) and into the Promised Land (Joshua & Phinehas). Now they are asked only to remain faithful to God’s Word (the Law), for they have been promised that if they do so God will eventually give them the rest of the land. Second, it is a test of their faithfulness.

Q: In all the reading of Judges 1-10, what is the conspicuously missing element in regards to leadership of this theocratic nation?

A: The priesthood! It is nowhere to be found. Ultimately, the blame must be placed on the priesthood as well as the people.

Application: Make application today in regard to the role of the church and Christians in society.

[Read v.2:16-23]

Q: What did God do to help the Israelites, and what was the people’s response?

A: God raised up judges (shamefully, not priests), and not just one or two. A total of 15 judges are mentioned in Scripture, including Eli and Samuel in 1 Samuel. Unfortunately, after the deliverance by a judge, the people just lapsed back into idolatry.

Q: What can we infer about God’s original intention regarding a relationship with Him in the appointment of judges? Why didn’t He designate a king, or prophet/leader like Moses, or even a high priest?

A: Ultimately we are all responsible individually, regardless of how others—or even the group—act. The primary role of a judge is to decide whether one’s actions are in accordance with God’s Law—**GOD’S** standards of behavior. **God** is supposed to be the One and Only Ruler.

There was no need to “appoint” a high priest because that system was already in place. Every member of the priesthood was **ALSO** individually responsible to follow God’s Law.

In both cases it was not a test of knowledge, but faith.

Application: How do Christians end up getting into the same cycle? [Hint: They (we) get involved in sin, things go bad, they (we) cry out to the Lord, He helps them (us) out of the situation, and they (we) lapse right back into sin.]

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¹⁶Then the LORD raised up judges who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them. ¹⁷Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they played the harlot after other gods and bowed themselves down to them. They turned aside quickly from the way in which their fathers had walked in obeying the commandments of the Lord; they did not do as their fathers. ¹⁸When the LORD raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge and delivered 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 oppressed and afflicted them.

¹⁹But it came about when the judge died, that they would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them and bow down to them; they did not abandon their practices or their stubborn ways.

²⁰So the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He said, “Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers and has not listened to My voice, ²¹I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died,

²²in order to test Israel by them, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk in it as their fathers did, or not.”

²³So the LORD allowed those nations to remain, not driving them out quickly; and He did not give them into the hand of Joshua.

Q: How does God describe the actions of the people in verse 17?

A: “They played the harlot...” There is a big difference between **soliciting** a prostitute and **being** prostitute. Israel was the latter.

Q: Why did they fall back into the sins?

A: Because they did not “listen” to the judges. The biblical definition of “listening” or “hearing” is to put what is heard into practice; to be obedient. Merely hearing the words or acknowledging them is not enough—one must put it into practice, otherwise one does not really “hear” or “listen”.

Application: Make application regarding “listening” to the pastor or those in an accountability group.

Q: In verse 18, compare the disobedience of the people to the compassion and patience of God.

A: When they were continually disobedient, God was continually “moved by pity.”

Application: Make application in regards to when our children disobey us. [Hint: When they are hurt from disobedience, parents suffer because of the pain the children are experiencing.]

Q: In verse 19, how would the “children” respond? What’s the progression?

A: They would then act worse than those before them. This is a moral slide downhill.

Application: Make application in regard to contemporary society and our culture today.

Q: (vs. 20-23) Why did the Lord allow the nations to remain?

A: They served as a test of Israel’s faithfulness and resolve. [Note: the reference to Joshua in v. 23 is a reference to the nation of Israel.]

³Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to test Israel by them (that is, all who had not experienced any of the wars of Canaan; ²only in order that the generations of the sons of Israel might be taught war, those who had not experienced it formerly). ³These nations are: the five lords of the Philistines and all the Canaanites and the Sidonians and the Hivites who lived in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal-hermon as far as Lebo-hamath. ⁴They were for testing Israel, to find out if they would obey the commandments of the LORD, which He had commanded their fathers through Moses. ⁵The sons of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; ⁶and they took their daughters for themselves as wives, and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods.

⁷The sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth. ⁸Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, so that He sold them into the hands of Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia; and the sons of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years. ⁹When the sons of Israel cried to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the sons of Israel to deliver them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. ¹⁰The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel. When he went out to war, the LORD gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand, so that he prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim.

¹¹Then the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

[Read v.3:1-11]

Q: What was the other reason God left the nations there?

A: (v.1-4) So that the next generation would learn how to fight and to test Israel's obedience to His Word.

Q: And how did the Israelites do?

A: (v.5-8) Not well. Going against God's commands, they intermarried with these nations which led to their serving false gods instead of the One True God. This resulted in God's judgment being brought on them through the king of Mesopotamia.

Q: When did things begin to change for the better for Israel?

A: When Israel turned back and "cried to the LORD". (v.9)

Q: What might be significant in Othniel's description not just as a judge, but "a deliverer"?

A: Old Testament judges had a dual role of delivering Israel both physically and spiritually. Othniel would not only free Israel from bondage to Mesopotamia, but act to keep everyone obedient to God's Word.

Q: How did God equip the judges?

A: The Spirit of the Lord was upon them. (v.10)

Q: So why was there rest for only 40 years?

A: The people were only obedient in the presence of Othniel. When he died, they fell back into sin. Their obedience was not from the heart, therefore their heart always wandered back after other gods.

Q: Is this a problem with the leader or the people?

A: The people. Obedience—or faithfulness—must extend into one's private life, not just in the shadow of leadership.

Application: *What most does the evangelical church need today? Leaders filled with the Spirit? No, but people filled with the Spirit.*