

# Unit 2



## GOD THE JUDGE

*Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel*

### Memory Verse

*And the LORD came and stood, calling as at other times, “Samuel! Samuel!”  
And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant hears.”*

—1 SAMUEL 3:10

### Writers

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# The Judges Cycle

**THEOLOGICAL THEME:** God cares for His people too much to let them languish in their sin and idolatry forever. He will judge and He will save.

In the 1993 film *Groundhog Day*, Bill Murray plays a weatherman who is in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, to cover the annual weather prediction made by the most famous groundhog, Punxsutawney Phil. But soon he finds that he is not only stuck in this town, he is also stuck in the same day—Groundhog Day—reliving it over and over again.

As Christians, sometimes we feel like we are stuck in a “groundhog day” type of experience with God. We keep falling into the same patterns of sin. Our walk with Christ doesn’t feel like progress but more like going two steps forward and then two steps back. It’s like being on a spiritual roller coaster with God, with ups and downs that make us wonder what lies ahead.

 What are some areas in your life (family, work, church, school, etc.) where you’ve tried to bring about change, only to be disappointed in your lack of progress?

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 How do you handle the discouragement?

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The Book of Judges presents a cycle of sin and salvation that becomes a pattern for God's people. In this session, we will look at Judges 2—a summary statement for the whole book. We will see how the Israelites did what was right in their own eyes, leading to an ongoing cycle of sin, judgment, and deliverance. God raised up deliverers who brought temporary peace but ultimately demonstrated their own need for salvation. The Book of Judges shows us the idolatry that results from rejecting God's authority. Today, as those who follow King Jesus, we are freed from this pattern of sin and empowered to do what is right in God's eyes.

## 1. God's people did evil by worshiping idols (Judg. 2:11-13).

*<sup>11</sup> And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> They abandoned the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth.*

What led to such a quick descent from the faithfulness of God in Joshua's day to the faithlessness of the next generation? The young people did not "know the LORD" or what God had done for them (v. 10). They failed to remember God and His glorious rescue of their ancestors. Amnesia produces apostasy!

Perhaps this serves as a warning to us—faithfulness to God does not pass from generation to generation through genes. We don't inherit our parents' salvation, and we can't expect our children to inherit ours. For this reason, we must be diligent to pass on the knowledge of God to the next generation. We must tell our children and grandchildren about who God is and what He has done for us.

It's also important to recognize that we are called not merely to pass on *information* to our children but *the faith*. The problem with this generation of Israelites was not that they did not "know" cognitively what the Lord had done. The problem was that they did not *know God personally*. "Know" here refers to intimate knowledge. Their relationship to God was not precious to them. It's not enough to pass on information; we must pass on what we cherish.



What are some ways we can fight against “spiritual amnesia” in our own life?

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Forgetting the promises of the Lord leads to making decisions apart from the Lord. They did what was “evil in the sight of the LORD” (Judg. 2:11). God determines what is right and good and what is sin and evil—not us. This is the calling card of sin: we think we know better than God. The Book of Judges may be best known for the last verse of the book that sums up what sin is: “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (21:25).

This supposed independence leads to abandoning God in order to serve idols, and this abandonment leads to conformity. They found their new objects of worship “from...the peoples who were around them” (2:12) They forgot that they were called out of the world to be a people holy (or set apart, consecrated) to the Lord (Deut. 7:6).

We may shake our heads at the disobedience of the Israelites and chide them for their idolatry, but what if we are more like them than we would care to admit? What if our lives resemble the unconquered promised land of Canaan? What if there are places in our lives where we fail to root out rebellion and chase away our sin?

Laxity in our pursuit of holiness usually leads us to syncretism, when we blend in with the world and lose our distinctiveness. God calls us to be distinct from the world, not merely so we can be different but so we can make a difference. Our holiness is what makes an impact on the world.



### Voices from Church History

“It is not our being in the world that ruins us, but our suffering the world to be in us: just as ships sink, not by being in the water, but by the water getting into them!”<sup>1</sup>

—A. R. Fausset (1821-1910)



What are some ways we are tempted to do what is right in our own eyes?

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What are the dangers of deciding for ourselves what is right for me or right for you?

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## 2. God punished His people by giving them over to their enemies (Judg. 2:14-15).

*<sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> 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.*

God's anger over idolatry should not surprise us. It is the natural outworking of His exclusive love for His people. As we've studied the storyline of Scripture, we've seen how God describes Himself as "jealous" (Ex. 20:5)—not in the possessive and selfish way that humans often experience jealousy but jealous for us and for our good. God is angered by our sin because of the harm our sin does to us and because of the offense our sin is to Him.

### 99 Essential Christian Doctrines

#### 17. God Is Just

God establishes standards for His moral creatures that are in accordance with His righteousness, and His moral creatures will be judged according to those righteous standards (Lev. 11:44-45; Rom. 2:5-11; 2 Cor. 5:10). It would be an injustice if God were not to uphold His righteousness, for such a failure would require God to violate His own righteous character. Since humanity has sinned by failing to live up to God's righteous standards, God has taken it upon Himself to make provision by being both just and the justifier of those who place their faith in Christ (Rom. 3:25-26).

To resist the portrait of God’s anger in this passage is to miss the point. It’s like saying, “I want God to love me and be happy when I leave Him for other gods, false gods.” You can’t have it both ways. If you want God to love you, you can’t expect God to be happy when you choose idols over Him. For God to be passive and nonchalant over your sin, for Him to simply shrug His shoulders at your rebellion, would not be love at all.

 What are the consequences for persistent rebellion against God?

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 How can you help others see God’s discipline in your life as an expression of fatherly love toward you?

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God’s anger toward sin is expressed in two ways: the first is passive, and the second is active.

### ***Passive***

This is when God allows us to experience the consequences of our sin in order to show us how foolish we were to walk away from Him. In this passage, we see how God “gave them over” to the marauders (Judg. 2:14). This language is reminiscent of Paul’s words in Romans 1, which describes God’s giving idolaters over to their sinful desires.

### ***Active***

Sometimes the consequences of sin are passive—they are inherent in the sins themselves. But other times God’s punishment is more active. This is when God disciplines us and calls us back to Himself. A good example of this kind of discipline is in the story of Jonah. Jonah was rebelling against God and running away from Him, and God appointed a storm, a big fish, the sun and a scorching wind, a plant, and then a worm to drive him back to God.

In this passage, we see elements of both the passive and active sides of God’s anger toward sin. We see the passive: “he gave them over” (v. 14). We also see the active: “[He]...was against them for harm” (v. 15).

What are some bad consequences that follow naturally from our sin?	What are some consequences that are a direct result of God's discipline?
How do these consequences demonstrate God's anger toward sin and His love toward us?	

### 3. God saved His people through a chosen leader (Judg. 2:16-19).

*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 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. 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.*

When you put verse 14 and verse 16 together side by side, you may find yourself scratching your head. God handed His people over to the enemy, and then He saved them from the enemy? How does that work?

The answer, of course, is that God is both just and gracious at the same time. He “will by no means clear the guilty,” He told Moses, and He is also “slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love” (Ex. 34:6-7). God saved His people from their enemies because He was moved by their misery and groaning. These groans weren’t necessarily cries of repentance. The word translated “groaning” is used two other times in the Old Testament of the Israelites, and in both cases, the word refers to Israel groaning under Egyptian slavery (Ex. 2:24; 6:5). Groaning, in this case, is what God hears and prompts Him to deliver His people, in light of His covenant promises to Abraham.

God delivered His people from their enemies, not because His people fully turned their hearts away from idols and back to Him and not because they were truly repentant. He delivered them because of His great love. He was compassionate toward them in their misery, and so He showed them undeserved kindness through the judges He raised up to save them.

 How does kindness lead us to repentance?

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### Voices from Church History

“Whenever God brings His deliverances they are so supernatural that we are staggered with amazement.”<sup>2</sup>

—Oswald Chambers  
(1874-1917)

The cycle of the judges continued after each moment of deliverance. As you see at the end of this passage, whenever the judges died, Israel returned to their sin and their downward spiral of corruption.

It’s often said that the way you can discover a person’s true nature is to take away external constraints: no rules, no filter, no teacher, or no chance of being caught. In the case of the Israelites, once the judges disappeared from the scene, the people slipped headlong into sin again. Even God’s kindness in delivering them didn’t always lead them to faithfulness. “The people served Yahweh,” according to Judges 2:7, but by Judges 3:6, the people “served their gods.”



What Israel needed wasn't a temporary deliverer but a Savior who would change their hearts. The good news for us is that in the person of Jesus Christ, God is both our great Judge and our great Savior. In Christ, we are set free from these continuing patterns of sin and destruction and set loose for God's mission in the world.



How can we strengthen each other and create patterns of righteousness?

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## Conclusion

The Book of Judges recounts a dark time in Israel's history. The cycle gets worse and worse because the rise of the judges was like putting an adhesive bandage on a serious wound. The external circumstances may be better for a while, but the root problem continues on.

As believers, we know that Christ has redeemed us from this endless cycle of sin and despair. So when we struggle with remaining sin, we are to confess quickly (Jas. 5:16) in light of God's patience (2 Pet. 3:9). His kindness toward us is what shows us His loving heart—even in the times He disciplines us and calls us back to Himself. God is our faithful Judge, and thankfully, He is also our everlasting Savior.



### Voices from the Church

"Repentance is a transformation of our loyalties, from a world of idols to the one true King."<sup>3</sup>

—Daniel Montgomery and Michael Cospir

**CHRIST CONNECTION:** The judges saved people from the consequences of their sin but could not change the cause of their sin. Jesus is the Savior and Judge who takes upon Himself the consequences for our sin and then offers us new hearts that seek His righteousness.

# HIS MISSION, YOUR MISSION

**MISSIONAL APPLICATION:** God calls us to identify and resist the prevailing idolatries in our society so that our distinctiveness will back up our proclamation of the gospel.

1. What can we do at church or at home to pass on the faith to the next generation?

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2. How can we develop the desire to resist sin and the temptations of the Enemy?

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3. How can we help people who are trapped in patterns of sin and despair?

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