

FOLLOWING THEIR OWN GODS

+ SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

Patterns of sin can develop a firm hold on people, but even though sin brings condemnation, God is gracious to provide deliverance.

+ BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

Judges 1–12

+ SETTING:

The people of Israel were now well established in the promised land. With the Lord on their side and fighting for them, the Israelites conquered and put to flight the pagan peoples of the land. Furthermore, the land had been allotted to the tribes so that they could settle down and make their homes. For all intents and purposes, the Lord had fulfilled all of His promises, but the Israelites began to fail in theirs. After Joshua and that generation died, a new generation rose up who had not been taught about the Lord and what He had done for them. The result: They did what was evil in the Lord's sight, again and again.

DAY 1

READ:

Judges 1–2

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Judges 2:11-19

NOTES

The movie *Edge of Tomorrow* tells a fictional story of Major William Cage, a military officer stuck in a time loop in which he dies fighting aliens only to reawaken on the same day. Day after day, Major Cage wakes up, fights invading aliens, and dies in battle. His life is stuck on repeat. Eventually, Cage partners with other soldiers, defeats the invading aliens, and breaks the time loop.

Like Major William Cage, the Israelites in the Book of Judges find themselves stuck in a “time loop” of sorts:

- The people would sin and abandon God.
- God would then use the surrounding nations to punish Israel for their idolatry.
- Next, the Israelites would groan and cry out to God for deliverance.
- Finally, God would raise up judges to rescue the people and ensure a time of peace. But the people would repeat this same cycle by abandoning God after the judge died and chasing after the idols of the surrounding peoples.

The cycle of sin that plagues humanity was in full force and on full display in Judges.

Many Christians can relate to Major William Cage and Israel. Each day, the same sins surface in their lives. They battle these sins—pride, lust, anger, impatience, and a host of other sins—only to find themselves defeated. Then they wake up the next day and begin the battle again. Their spiritual life is stuck in an endless “time loop.” Maybe you can relate and some indwelling sin repeatedly trips you up. Thankfully, God has given us everything we need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). God’s Word, His Spirit, His church, and His grace enable us to break the cycle of sin in our lives.

**What patterns of sin are present in your life right now?
What steps can you take to break the cycle?**

DAY 2

READ:

Judges 2

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Judges 2:8-10

NOTES

According to the A.D.A.M. Medical Encyclopedia, memory loss—also known as amnesia—is “unusual forgetfulness,” such that a person “may not be able to remember new events, recall one or more memories of the past, or both.”¹ Sometimes people struggle to remember events in the distant past. Distance and age have a tendency to make our minds fuzzy about details. Other times people cannot remember events in the recent past, and this would seem to be the more concerning of the two.

The Israelites experienced “memory loss” in the Book of Judges. After Joshua and the generation that conquered the promised land died, the next generation did not know God or His works. They forgot about His gracious deliverance from slavery in Egypt. They forgot about His gracious provision in the wilderness. They forgot about His gracious gift of the land of Canaan. The people of Israel forgot God, and so they abandoned Him. They worshiped idols instead. In this, Israel shows us the danger of forgetting.

If Christians aren’t careful, they can forget about God. They can forget about His works in the past and His promises for the future. Both forms of forgetfulness are dangerous. When we forget about God’s works in the past, we are tempted to abandon Him and to pursue idols. When we forget about His promises for the future, we lose sight of what’s important and become “eternity amnesiacs” who live for what is temporary and seek for satisfaction where it cannot be found.² Let’s remember God and avoid spiritual amnesia.

As you reflect on God’s actions in your life, how can you use those memories to fuel your love for and devotion to God today?

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“The greatest danger, because it is such a subtle temptation which enables us to continue as church members and feel that nothing is wrong, is not that we become atheists, but that we ask God to co-exist with idols in our hearts.”³

-Tim Keller

DAY 3

READ:

Judges 2:1-23

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Judges 2:11-15

NOTES

Marvel's The Incredible Hulk franchise features a giant green rage monster. When the renowned physicist Bruce Banner's gamma radiation experiment fails, Banner is transformed into his alter ego, the Hulk. Any time Banner's heart rate rises or he finds himself in danger, he transforms into the Hulk and begins to destroy everything in sight. One emotion in particular seems to trigger Banner. When he becomes angry, Banner transforms into the Hulk and becomes incredibly strong, which is why one of Banner's famous catchphrases is "You wouldn't like me when I'm angry."

In Judges 2:11-15, God becomes angry with His people. The temptation is to read this passage and envision God like the Hulk, saying, "You wouldn't like me when I'm angry." But God's anger is not an unbridled rage that turns Him into a monster like the Hulk. God's anger is grounded in His holiness and His love. Because God is holy, He cannot allow sin to go unpunished. Because God is loving, His anger is kindled when His people disobey. When Israel abandoned God and worshiped idols, God's righteous anger was kindled, and He worked against His people instead of acting on their behalf.

Generally, Christians are less comfortable discussing God's anger than they are God's love, but Scripture teaches about God's anger toward sin. His wrath is being stored up until the day of wrath when God will execute His righteous judgment (Rom. 2:5). Thankfully, Christ is the propitiation—the wrath-bearing sacrifice—for our sins (1 John 2:2; 4:10). Jesus' death on the cross made reconciliation with God possible. Through Christ, believers move from being children under wrath (Eph. 2:3) to being adopted into God's family and made members of God's household (Eph. 1:5; 2:19). The knowledge of God's anger toward sin and Christ's sacrifice to rescue us from God's righteous judgment should motivate us to love God and run from sin.

Why should we reflect on God's anger toward our sin and our salvation from His judgment?

DAY 4

READ:

Judges 3

FOCAL PASSAGES:

Judges 3:7-8,12-14

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #98: NATURE OF HELL

For those who are not found in Christ at the time of their death, the Scriptures say that God's condemnation remains upon them (John 3:36) and that they will be judged according to their deeds done on earth (Heb. 9:27). The punishment that awaits unbelievers in hell is an eternal, never-ending suffering that comes from sins committed against an infinite God (Matt. 25:41,46). In hell, sinners are forever separated from God.

God communicated the consequences of sin at the beginning of creation. He told Adam—and by extension, Eve—that if they ate from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, then they would die (Gen. 2:17). In the very next chapter, Adam and Eve, along with creation itself, experienced the devastating consequences of sin. This was not an isolated incident. The rest of the Old Testament bears witness to the fact that sin leads to pain and suffering and death and a host of negative consequences:

- Moses struck the rock instead of speaking to it as God had said and was punished with not being able to enter the promised land (Num. 20:1-13);
- Saul kept the best of the flocks from a victorious battle instead of killing them as God had said, and he lost his rule over the kingdom (1 Sam. 15);
- David committed adultery, and the child born to him died (2 Sam. 11-12); and
- Gehazi, the prophet Elisha's assistant, lied and subsequently became a leper to his death (2 Kings 5:15-27).

Those who sin and rebel against God must face the consequences of their sin. For the Israelites in Judges, God used the pagans who remained in the land to punish His people. God was active in the process as He handed them over, sold them, was against them, and brought disaster on them (Judg. 2:14-15; 3:7-8,12-14).

The lesson is simple but important: Sin does not pay. When we disobey God, the fallout is always bad. Sin may provide temporary pleasure, but sooner or later the effects of sin will take their toll (cf. Heb. 12:25). Yet we are not without hope. If we confess our sin, God is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us (1 John 1:9). Let's remind ourselves of the consequences of sin, earnestly pursue holiness, and quickly confess our sins.

What are some practical ways you can remind yourself of sin's consequences in order to pursue godliness?

DAY 5

READ:

Judges 4–5

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Judges 4:1-3

NOTES

In July 1965, The Beatles released their single “Help!” The song was a hit in both the United States and the United Kingdom, holding the top spot in both countries for three weeks. The simple lyrics written by duo John Lennon and Paul McCartney expressed a common cry for help with which listeners resonated. We all struggle to some degree with the vulnerability required in asking for help, but we all need help nonetheless.

In the Book of Judges, the Israelites regularly needed help because their sin had incited God’s anger and led to His judgment (Judg. 2:14-15). Therefore, the other nations oppressed them so that they suffered greatly and groaned under the weight of God’s discipline (2:15,18). Furthermore, the Israelites were unable to deliver themselves from their enemies. They needed divine help, so they cried out to the Lord (4:3), and God graciously raised up human judges as His instruments to deliver them.

Christians need to be reminded regularly of their inability to save themselves, to forgive their own sins, or to clean up their own messes. We are not the solution—we are part of the problem. So we need outside help. The good news of the gospel is God intervened in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Through faith in Christ, our sins are forgiven. Through faith in Christ, we receive the Spirit of God and are enabled to obey the commands of Scripture. Through faith in Christ, Christians receive the help we so desperately need!

In what areas of your life will you ask for God’s help today? Do so now.

GROUP

NOTES

POINT 1: God's people are quick to abandon Him (Judg. 2:8-13).

It seems the Israelites failed in their _____ to pass on to the next generation the _____ of who God is and what He had done for them.

? *What are some ways we can pass on to others the truth of who God is and what He has done for us?*

When God's people _____ about God, they quickly _____ Him and worship other gods.

? *What are some idols we are tempted to worship in place of God?*

POINT 2: God's people face consequences for their sins (Judg. 2:14-15).

God's severe punishment of the Israelites for their rebellion and idolatry was in keeping with His _____ promises and for the people's _____.

? *What are some of the consequences of sin?*

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #98: NATURE OF HELL

For those who are not found in _____ at the time of their death, the Scriptures say that God's condemnation remains upon them (John 3:36) and that they will be judged according to their _____ done on earth (Heb. 9:27). The punishment that awaits _____ in hell is an eternal, never-ending suffering that comes from sins committed against an infinite God (Matt. 25:41,46). In hell, sinners are forever _____ from God.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"As God is the fountain of all righteousness, he must necessarily be the enemy and judge of man so long as he is a sinner."⁴

-John Calvin (1509-1564)

POINT 3: God's people are saved through a rescuer He provides (Judg. 2:16-19).

God raised up judges to rescue His people, but the primary problem plaguing the Israelites was not one of _____ oppressors but of _____ idolatry.

God rescued His people because of His faithfulness and _____, but the people continually returned to their idolatry. The Book of Judges reveals the fleeting nature of human deliverance and the ultimate need for a deliverance of the _____, which we find in _____.



What are some ways Christians can reflect God's love and compassion for sinners?

MY RESPONSE

Because we have been forgiven of our rebellion through Christ, we identify and resist the prevailing idolatries in our society so that we may live as a peculiar people, supporting our proclamation of the gospel.

- **HEAD:** What are some ways you can remind yourself of the foolishness of sin and idolatry?
- **HEART:** What sins do you need to confess so God's compassion—rather than His anger—is kindled?
- **HANDS:** How will you live "distinctly" this week? Who will you tell about Jesus?

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"For God is not gracious and merciful to sinners to the end that they might not keep his Law, nor that they should remain as they were before they received grace and mercy; but he condones and forgives both sin and death for the sake of Christ, who has fulfilled the whole Law in order thereby to make the heart sweet and through the Holy Spirit to kindle and move the heart to begin again to love from day to day more and more."⁵

-Martin Luther (1483-1546)