

CONSEQUENCES: JUDGES 2:11-23

Introductory Activity

Ask the group members to share a story about a time they quit something. It could be anything.

Introduce: Maybe you quit a job. Maybe you quit a habit. Maybe you quit doing something good. Very rarely do we just quit something, though. Often, we replace. A job. A habit. A hobby. With something else.

Explain: Today, we are going to begin our study in the book of Judges. The book opens with a series of examples where Israel quit something. In chapter 1, we learn they quit winning battles. In chapter 2, we learn they quit worshipping God. And similar to our example of quitting jobs, habits, or hobbies and replacing them with something else, Israel is going to replace worshipping God with something much worse.

Summarize and Transition: The book of Judges picks up where the book of Joshua concludes. The people have conquered the land to an extent that they're able to settle it. There are still Canaanites in the land. We will talk more about that as we go along, but the Israelites have enough control to apportion the land and settle in it. We are going to pick up our study in chapter 2. This chapter and the first portion of chapter 3 act as a kind of summary for the entire book of Judges. It explains the defeats in chapter 1 and gives us a basic outline of what will follow. The rest of the book, which spans nearly three hundred years, is mostly examples of what chapter 2 describes. So, let's pick up today and see what the book of Judges is all about.

1. THE EVIL (JUDG. 2:11-15)

Read (or have someone read) Judges 2:11-15.

Explain: We see here an example of the Israelites abandoning the Lord and forgoing worship of Him. To understand this, we need to go back up in the passage and see how they got here.

Read or have someone read Judges 2:7. (See Notes Box.)

Explain: The narrator tells us that during Joshua's lifetime, the people continued to worship the Lord. And even after Joshua died, they worshipped him throughout the lifetime of the other elders. However, as we've seen previously, whenever there is a change in leadership, there is a possibility of confusion and change. That is what happened with Israel. Look at verse 10.

Read or have someone read Judges 2:10. (See Notes Box.)

Explain: We do not know how the first generation to live in the land forgot the Lord and did not know His works. But we might surmise that they

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This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *Explore the Bible Commentary* (ETBC)
- *Preaching the Word: Judges and Ruth* (Preaching)
- *New American Commentary: Judges* (NAC)

Judges 2:7

⁷The people worshiped the Lord throughout Joshua's lifetime and during the lifetimes of the elders who outlived Joshua. They had seen all the Lord's great works he had done for Israel.

Judges 2:10

¹⁰That whole generation was also gathered to their ancestors. After them another generation rose up who did not know the Lord or the works he had done for Israel. ¹

stopped doing what God instructed them to do. You see, God had given the Israelites multiple mechanisms to remember who He was and what He had done. In Leviticus 10:11, we learn that the Levites were to “teach the Israelites all the statutes that the Lord has given to them through Moses.” If the next generation forgot the ways of the Lord, it is *possible* the Levites failed in their duty. We also know that God gave the Israelites religious celebrations, like Passover, and physical memorials, like the 12 Stones at Gilgal, to help them remember His actions and teach their children what He had done. The Israelites may have abandoned these celebrations and ignored these memorials and thereby stopped using them to teach their children. Even the injunction we find in Deuteronomy chapter 6 to saturate their lives with God's Word was meant to help them remember His instructions. If the Israelites were still doing what was commanded in Deuteronomy chapter 6, it appears that the purpose and intent of the passage had been lost on them.

Consider: We should stop and consider our own lives and the practices. Of our families and church. What are some methods and practices we can put in place in our homes and in our church to help the next generation remember the ways and works of the Lord?

Explain: If we still have children in our homes, we can saturate our lives with God's Word and the stories of His actions. We can teach our children the actions of God recorded in Scripture. But more tangibly, we can also tell our children about God's work in our personal lives. This can include sharing our personal testimony with our children. If you are a grandparent, you can continue helping young people learn the works and Word of God by providing wise counsel gleaned from your own life. And again, your personal testimony and story of God's faithfulness can be used to teach the next generation. You might have already paid the stupid tax for bad decisions made in your younger years. You can share what the Lord taught you through those times to help the next generation learn to make wise choices. In our churches, we can also help the next generation learn the ways and works of God. We do this through intentional, age-appropriate ministries to kids and students. These ministries should be built on God's Word and include Scripture memory and learning biblical content. We can be a part of this by volunteering and ministering in children's and student ministries. You might not be one who can consistently teach and encourage young people, but you can fill in on occasion. You can also celebrate the ministry that others are doing and support them in their ministry. One of the most important things we can do for our children is to consistently be in community with other believers. This includes coming to church consistently on Sunday mornings and being involved in a small group. Unfortunately, something went wrong in Israel, and they failed to pass on the faith to the next generation. Verse 11 tells us that the next generation did evil in the sight of the Lord

Proverbs 21:2
All a person's ways seem right to him, but the Lord weighs hearts

Isaiah 33:22
For the Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our King.
He will save us

In this, we can be reminded that **God Decides What Is Right**. The verse does not say they did evil in their own sight or evil in the sight of the Canaanites. It says they did evil in the sight of the Lord. Scripture is clear that it is God who determines right from wrong.

Read: Proverbs 21:2 and Isaiah 33:22. (See Notes Box.)

Explain: A generation that does not know the Lord and does not know His works is a generation that forgets and forgoes His statutes. Our world is not much different. We have replaced the laws of God with moral relativism, in which I choose what is right and I choose what is wrong. The passage goes on to tell us what choice the people made. It says, “They worshiped the Baals and abandoned the Lord, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt.” (vv. 11b-12a)

In their decision, we can be reminded that **God Provides What Is Right**. The people did not just abandon a god. They abandoned their God, and it was their God who brought them out of Egypt, who provided for them in the wilderness, and promised to provide for them in the promised land. If we consider the theology of the Canaanites for a moment, we might see the “reasonableness” of the Israelites’ decision. In the theology of the Canaanites, Baal and the Ashtoreths provided for them. They were the gods who provided the harvest. The Israelites had experienced Yahweh as a deliverer God. He was the God who provided in the wilderness. He was the God who provided in battle. But the Israelites had not yet seen God provide in the harvest. Entering the land of the Canaanites, it would only seem “reasonable” for them to adopt the gods who provide the harvest in that land. It would seem reasonable to conform to the way of the world around them. However, the reasonableness of this decision is illogical because it is the God of Israel who created the earth and created the plants that would provide the harvest. Moreover, He is Jehovah Jireh, God who provides.

Consider: We too can have a mistaken theology like the Israelites. Just as they were conformed to the world around them, we too can become conformed to our world. We can forget that God, not our job, not our bank account, not our wealth, is our provider. What are some practices that we can put in place to consistently remind ourselves that God is our provider?

Explain: Developing an attitude of gratitude will help us consistently remember that God is the one who provides for us. Moreover, practicing the spiritual discipline of good stewardship and sacrificial giving can remind us that everything we have comes from God. All of our resources flow from God, and He desires that some flow through us to others for the advancement of His Kingdom.

The people of God willfully abandoned the Lord and replaced Him with false gods. His response to their actions can reveal to us that **God Always Does What's Right**. God had promised in both Deuteronomy and Leviticus

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Consequences: Judges 2:11-23

that if his people turned from his ways, there would be consequences. Leviticus 26:17 says, “I will turn against you, so that you will be defeated by your enemies. Those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee even though no one is pursuing you.” It is ironic to note that the gods they turn to could do nothing for them. While the God they quit worshipping had done and could do so much. Moreover, the people they sought to imitate and later integrated with became the ones to oppress them.

Summarize Transition: The narrator of the book of Judges tells us that the people did evil by quitting the Lord. And their evil actions and God’s response can remind us that God is always right. And God always does right. We see the rightness of God consistently in the Book of Judges through the various cycles of sinfulness, discipline, and rescue. The next passage reveals this cycle.

2. THE CYCLE (JUDG. 2:16-19)

Read (or have someone read) Judges 2:16-19.

Explain: There are 12 judges recorded in the book of Judges. We should not think of these judges as men and women in black robes presiding over a courtroom. Instead, they functioned as deliverers. Daniel Block says a better name for the book would be “Book of Saviors/Deliverers.” (NAC, 23) In the coming weeks, we will study two of these judges specifically. But today, let’s just look at the cycle in which these judges functioned. I outline the cycle as having 6 stages:

1. Sinfulness of the People
2. Distressful Consequences
3. Groaning by the People
4. Calling of and Deliverance by a God-empowered Judge
5. Relative Obedience while the Judge Lived
6. Downward Slide into Sin after the Judge Died

We have already looked at Stages 1 and 2 in the previous passage. Let’s walk through the following stages and see what we can glean.

Stage three: The Groaning of the People. We should note that this cycle is not one of repentance. Instead, it is a cycle of mercy. Consistently throughout the book, the people call out to the Lord because of their distressful circumstances that came as a consequence of their sin. Only in chapter 10 do they acknowledge their sin. Even then, it is God’s mercy that leads Him to raise up a judge.

Application: We should carefully assess our hearts when we come to the Lord about our sin and the consequences we experience. Our motive should be repentance before the Lord, not just an alleviation of our distressful circumstances.

Stage 4: The Calling and Deliverance by a God-empowered Judge. In the book, we learn about 12 judges. There are six minor and six major judges. The

distinction between minor and major is a reference to the amount of space they take up in the book, not their significance. Each judge was established by God as the leader. This means he or she acted on behalf of God. Moreover, he or she was empowered by God to act. This only makes sense if we consider the reason the judges were needed in the first place. Remember that when the people conquered the land, they did so in the power of God. It was only when God refused to empower them further that they began to lose battles and suffer oppression. So, it only makes sense that God would supernaturally empower the judges.

Stage 5: Relative Obedience while the Judge Lived. As we said before, the people never really practiced true repentance of their sin. They were probably thrilled to be saved from the consequences of sin, but they did not truly return to the Lord. They followed the judges while they lived. But the people's obedience during the life of the judge was relative obedience. Verse 17 tells us, "They did not listen to their judges." As a result of their failed adherence to the judge's guidance, they would suffer again because they sinned again.

Stage 6: Downward Slide into Sin after the Judge Died. The people did not just fall back into sin when the Judge died. Verse 19 tells that "Whenever the judge died, the Israelites would act even more corruptly than their ancestors." The book is a downward spiral into greater and greater sinfulness.

Summarize and Transition: This cycle reveals two important truths. First, it is in God's nature to provide a savior for His people. During the 300-year period of the judges, He did this by raising up and using flawed men and one woman. In the NT, we see that He offered the ultimate Savior in Christ. Second, we see that it is human nature to sin, and when there is no safeguard against sin, people will fall deeper and deeper into immorality. The Lord never wanted this for the people of Israel, and He does not want it for us. We must guard our hearts and maintain a right relationship with the Lord. The people of Israel did not do that, and they faced the consequences. The next passage will again address the situation in Canaan.

3. THE DECLARATION (JUDG. 2:20-23)

Read (or have someone read) Judges 2:20-23.

Explain: We should remember that this chapter is a summary of what is going on in the land, and the rest of the book provides specific examples from the history of the nation. In this passage, we can see one of the reasons the sin of the people was so despicable. In verse 20, God refers to "this nation." In doing so, He expresses His "sense of alienation from His people. (NAC, 133) In the previous passages, we saw first that the narrator says they abandoned the Lord and prostituted themselves to the false gods. It is as if God is their spouse and the people have defiled the marital

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relationship. This image is most visibly seen later in the life of the prophet Hosea. We should also remember that verse 10 says they “did not know the Lord or the works he had done for Israel.” The Lord had done so much and provided so much to the nation. Their refusal to faithfully follow Him was disgraceful. God had done nothing to deserve their actions. Moreover, He had done the opposite. His work in the life of the nation should have caused the people to follow Him with diligence.

Application: We should be reminded that the Lord has demonstrated His great love and provision to us through our unmerited salvation. This should be a motivating factor in our diligent faithfulness to Him.

Explain: In response to their faithlessness, we see repeated here the consequences that God levied against the people. He declared that He would not drive out the peoples left in the nation upon Joshua’s death. The book outlines several reasons that these nations were left in the land, and they all relate to both the spiritual and temporal experience of the people. Remnants of the various nations remained in the land because of the people’s faithlessness, resulting in the removal of God’s blessing. Without God’s empowerment, Israel could no longer defeat them. Chapter 3 tells us they were left to teach the following generation how to fight (Judg. 3:2). Here, in chapter 2, the Lord declares that these nations would be a test for Israel. “This generation had not fought the physical or spiritual battles of the conquering generation. They had to prove their own loyalty to God—and the remnant of Canaanites was part of God’s plan.” (ETB LG,

Summarize and Transition: This summary passage reveals again that God cannot tolerate sinfulness among His people. He had promised them blessings and faithfully kept His word. He had also promised curses if they abandoned Him. He was faithful to keep that promise as well.

CONCLUDE

We began our lesson talking about quitting things. The Israelites quit worshipping the Lord, and they faced the consequences. The Lord intended those consequences to draw them back to Himself. The hardhearted conformity of the nation to the sinfulness of the native population prevented them from truly returning to Him. The cycle of sin, judgement, and salvation reveals God’s desire to grow His people and save them from their sin. We should be challenged to:

- Faithfully follow God and resist conformity to the sinful culture.
- Thank God for His mercy
- Move forward and upward in our Christlikeness through the transformation offered by the Spirit.