

People Choose Sin

Focal Verses • Judges 2:10–19

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will: RECOGNIZE that God gives us choices to follow Him or not; REFLECT on how human sinfulness leaves us in need of God's help; and ASK God to help us to obey Him.

In Focus

Everyone at the office gambled, including those who announced their belief in God. Bets were taken for college games and professional games. Marcus' coworkers regularly picked numbers to play the lottery, yet they did not understand why he refused to participate. He kept thinking about how his father had lost their home as a kid because he had gambled away his savings. He thought about the example he wanted to set for his own son as a believer. The organizer of the gambling pools cornered Marcus, stating there was no harm in supporting his favorite sports team; besides, half of the money was going to the good cause of stocking the office refrigerator with snacks.

Marcus thanked his coworker for his invitation to gamble but decided to regularly donate money for the items he consumed from the office refrigerator instead. On some occasions, he also brought in items that he had purchased to add to the office's snack supply. Marcus did not judge what the other believers were doing. He simply established an example in the workplace for them to follow if they chose to.

Marcus felt that he should not gamble but instead live out his faith in the workplace. He did not force his beliefs on others, but he lived out what he believed was right.

Was Marcus making a godly choice or was he being too extreme? How do Marcus' actions reflect his witness as a believer in the workplace?

Keep in Mind

“And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel” (Judges 2:10, KJV).

Say It Correctly

Ashtoreth – ASH-tuh-reth

Astarte – 'star-t

Ishtar – ISH-tahr

KJV

Judges 2:10–19

2:10 And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.

11 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim:

12 And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger.

13 And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth.

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14 And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies.

15 Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed.

16 Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them.

17 And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the Lord; but they did not so.

18 And when the LORD raised them up judges, then the LORD was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the LORD because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them.

19 And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way.

NLT

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2:10 After that generation died, another generation grew up who did not acknowledge the LORD or remember the mighty things he had done for Israel.

11 The Israelites did evil in the LORD's sight and served the images of Baal.

12 They abandoned the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They went after other gods, worshiping the gods of the people around them. And they angered the LORD.

13 They abandoned the LORD to serve Baal and the images of Ashtoreth.

14 This made the LORD burn with anger against Israel, so he handed them over to raiders who stole their possessions. He turned them over to their enemies all around, and they were no longer able to resist them.

15 Every time Israel went out to battle, the LORD fought against them, causing them to be defeated, just as he had warned. And the people were in great distress.

16 Then the LORD raised up judges to rescue the Israelites from their attackers.

17 Yet Israel did not listen to the judges but prostituted themselves by worshiping other gods. How quickly they turned away from the path of their ancestors, who had walked in obedience to the LORD's commands.

18 Whenever the LORD raised up a judge over Israel, he was with that judge and rescued the people from their enemies throughout the judge's lifetime. For the LORD took pity on his people, who were burdened by oppression and suffering.

19 But when the judge died, the people returned to their corrupt ways, behaving worse than those who had lived before them. They went after other gods, serving and worshiping them. And they refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways.

The People, Places, and Times

Bochim. The name (which means “weeping”) of the place where the angel rebuked the Israelites for breaking their covenant with God (Judges 2:5, NLT).

Baal. The deity of fertility storms and rains and thought to control vegetation and agriculture. Ashtoreth. The name of the goddess the Israelites chose to worship instead of God.

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Ashtoreth. was believed to be the mother goddess of love, war, and fertility. She was also known as Astarte or Ishtar (1 Kings 11:5–8).

Judges. Leaders selected by God to deliver and guide the Israelites to remain obedient to their covenant with God.

Background

The book of Judges begins with the success and failures of Israel's military campaigns in Canaan (the Promised Land). The new generation of Israelites, the generation that was in the land of Canaan after the death of Joshua, receives a sudden appearance from the angel of the Lord, who pronounces judgment on the new generation of chosen people for their disobedience and unfaithfulness. The Israelites' disobedience included not totally removing the Canaanites from the land. God noted their unfaithfulness to the Living God and their increasing propensity to worship other gods—their increasing propensity to be disobedient.

Evidence of God's anger is seen when God hands over the Israelites to their enemies. Yet God still shows His mercy and compassion toward His chosen people. He raises up judges to help deliver His people from their enemies and bring His chosen people back to a loving, covenant-keeping God.

At-A-Glance

1. The Israelites' Unfaithfulness to God (Judges 2:10–14)
2. God's Punishment of the Israelites and His Mercy (vv. 15–16)
3. The Israelites' Cycle of Sin and God's Continued Mercy (vv. 17–19)

In Depth

1. The Israelites' Unfaithfulness to God (Judges 2:10–14)

The Israelites continued a pattern of abandoning their faith in the one true God, the One who led them out of Egypt. They did not learn from the mistakes of their parents and ancestors. God was the one who drowned Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea, the one who fought for their ancestors (Exodus 14:13–31, KJV), the one who made bitter waters sweet when they were thirsty (15:22–25), and the one who fed their ancestors bread from heaven (manna) when they were hungry (16:4–14). They violated the first two of the Ten Commandments: "I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (20:2–3).

Instead, they chased after other gods; they worshiped the Canaanite gods Baal and Ashtoreth. God called the Israelites' behavior evil, and He deemed what they had done as an abandonment of the one true God. Their disobedience of God's commandments stirred His anger against the people He had chosen to represent Him to the rest of the world. God would not and did not tolerate the Israelites adding idols to their worship of Him. They could not possibly bow to an idol and still truly believe that He was the one true God. Therefore, His anger with the Israelites results in judgment on them. God gives the Israelites over to the "marauders" (their enemies, Judges 2:14). He delivers them into the power and hands of their enemies and removes His divine defense from around them.

When Israel ignored God's boundaries and chose sin, they faced the consequences for their choices. Was God fair to do this? Why or why not?

2. God's Punishment of the Israelites and His Mercy (vv. 15–16)

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Every time the Israelites went out to battle their enemies, they lost. God's arms of protection were no longer around them. In fact, before God's judgment against them when they went out to battle, it was the Lord Himself who fought against their enemies. They were no match for the omnipotent (all-powerful) God. But the Israelites' disobedience demanded judgment, and God judged His chosen people. The Lord was now moving against the Israelites because they had chosen to move against God's will. They had changed sides in the battle, while God remained faithful. They had to suffer the consequences of their choices. They had to pay their own sin penalty.

How does it make you feel to imagine God moving against Israel's plans when they work against God's plans?

3. The Israelites' Cycle of Sin and God's Continued Mercy (vv. 17–19)

Even though the Israelites break their covenantal relationship with God, He remains faithful to them. Despite their disobedience to God's commands, He still loves them and shows them mercy and compassion. Because of this love, mercy, and compassion, the Word tells us that He raises up judges who deliver the Israelites from their enemies. For a time, the judges return Israel to worshiping God. But over the long haul, God's chosen people do not listen to the judges and return to worshiping idols. The Children of Israel continue in a cycle of sin: (1) rebelling against the one true God; (2) experiencing God's punishment which involves their enemies overrunning them; (3) crying out to God for deliverance after which He raises up a God-fearing judge to deliver the Israelites from their enemies; (4) remaining loyal to God until the appointed judge's death—they were loyal as long as they were near the appointed judge; (5) forgetting about their covenant with God after the judge's death; (6) again suffering punishment because God allows their enemies to overtake them; and (7) crying out yet again to God for deliverance. In essence, the Israelites allowed what appealed to their sensual nature and more short-range benefits to steal their affection for the one true God. They were drawn to worshiping gods who did not insist that the people be morally accountable for their behavior. In fact, not only were male and female prostitution allowed in idol worship, it was encouraged as a form of worship.

Sometimes, we want what we want and want nothing to stand in our way of getting it. This kind of thinking and action can cause destruction. Following the one true God demands discipline and accountability. However, God feels compassion for the Israelites, hears their cries while they are oppressed, and provides judges who guide the Israelites back to worshiping the one true God. God's actions show that, indeed, He is a promise-keeping God. He delivers His children over and over when they choose sin and oppression. He is true to His Word.

How can we avoid the cycle of sin that judges clearly point out?

Search the Scriptures

1. Why is it relevant to have faith in God (Judges 2:11–13)?
2. Does God really become angry? Does God really punish (vv. 14–15)?
3. Why are God's love and mercy important (v. 16)?

Discuss the Meaning

We should recognize and note that God does become angry with humankind for repeated offenses of disobedience. There is no debating that He is a God of love, mercy, and compassion, but He is also a God of judgment. The Israelites experienced God's anger firsthand when God delivered them into the hands of their enemies. This loss of favor or punishment lasted until the Israelites returned back to worshiping the

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one true God. What is your response to the idea that God gives us choices and consequences? Do you think God still gives choices and consequences today? Why or why not?

Liberating Lesson

As with the Israelites, God has given us the opportunity to live responsibly before Him in a covenantal relationship. He allowed Adam and Eve to choose to obey Him, He did the same for the Israelites, and He does the same for us today. As we look around at the suffering in our world, much of it is due to the fact that too many people have chosen sinfulness and selfishness instead of God's will. Too many who say they are believers have chosen to go their own way.

We must always remember that our own way leads us down the path of sin and destruction.

Application for Activation

Take some time this week to journal about what godly choices and self-seeking choices you have made that stand out to you. They can be minor or major in terms of impact. How can you receive God's deliverance to disrupt any destructive cycles this year? Write about what the cycle is and what the corrective choice needs to be for you to return to God's will for you in that area of your life.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do?

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned?

More Light on the Text

Judges 2:10–19, KJV

10 And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.

Joshua and his generation had passed away and the next generation abandoned their covenant with the Lord. This means that Joshua's generation had failed to pass down the faith to their children in lasting ways. They had failed to follow the commands in Deuteronomy 6 to consistently teach, remember, and obey God's law so their children would be faithful to the covenant. The next generation not only didn't know God but had not been told the story of God's works in the lives of their ancestors. This is a repeated problem thus far in the Biblical narrative; Joseph's descendants don't remember the promises God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at Mount Sinai.

The Children of Israel forsake the Lord even after the deliverance from slavery in Egypt, and the generation of Moses dies in the wilderness because they forget the Lord's provision and protection and choose to worship idols. Now, as the Children of Israel enter the land God promised to Abraham generations before, they are again forgetting their covenant with God and running after idols. Joshua had just reminded their parents of their relationship with God, and they had promised to serve the Lord. Simply put, God is faithful to people, and people continue to be unfaithful to God.

11 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim:

Joshua served the Lord faithfully and lived to be 110 years old. However, the next generation did not know the Lord. They "did evil in the sight of the LORD." The word "evil" in Hebrew is *ra`* (rah) and

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means “bad, unpleasant, displeasing” behavior. After Joshua and Moses, the Lord raised up judges to lead His chosen people—the Israelites. The judges were God’s chosen leaders who were to deliver them from the hands of their enemies. The book of Judges shows what happens when a nation falls into moral decay and also shows God’s great mercy when His people repent and turn back to Him.

If the Israelites had obeyed God and only worshiped and feared (reverenced or respected) Him as their eternal God, they could have enjoyed a long life in the land that God had promised them (Canaan). However, Israel kept repeating their cycle, which went from the blessings of God to the consequences of sin to deliverance and back again. Judges were needed because Israel had a problem with apostasy. They simply were not loyal to the one true God. They did not obey His commands.

12 And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and provoked the LORD to anger.

God wanted Israel never to forget what He did when He delivered them from bondage (slavery) in Egypt. But they forsook the Lord and committed the sin of idolatry. The word “forsook” in Hebrew (*‘azab*, aw-ZAB) means “left, abandoned, forsaken, neglected, apostatized.” In essence, they deserted the Lord their God. Therefore, they needed “atonement” (Heb. *kaphar*, kaw-FAR), which means “propitiation” or “reconciliation” that would satisfy the demands of an offended, holy God because of their sin. Since the penalty for sin is death, the Israelites needed help in their dire situation.

It is important to note that in the Old Testament, sacrifices never removed a person’s sins. According to Hebrews 10:4, “It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin” (NIV). Their sins were covered but not removed. Rather, their sins were only pushed aside instead of standing between them and God. So because Israel once again forgot the One who had brought them out of the sin, suffering, and slavery experienced in Egypt, the Israelites’ cycle of sin continued, and ultimately, they needed a sinless Savior to remove them. Israel seemed to forget regularly what God already did. Pharaoh had made life miserable for Israel, but a compassionate, merciful God heard their cry. He used Moses to deliver them from a life of slavery. He redeemed them from bondage and delivered them with a mighty hand. Yet somehow, the new generation, like their forefathers and foremothers, forgot how God used miracle after miracle to set them free.

If we do suffer from “spiritual amnesia” and forget what God has done, we have the opportunity to turn back to Him for forgiveness. The Word of God reminds us to confess our sins because He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). When we truly repent (have heartfelt sorrow for our sins and turn to God), He is able to get us back on the right track.

13 And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth.

Baal was the god worshiped by the Canaanites and Phoenicians. Baal literally means “lord.” Ironically, Jesus is known as the King of kings and Lord of lords! The worship of Baal was so defiled that it involved prostitution and sometimes even child sacrifice. Ashtoreth (wife of Baal) was a goddess and represented many female deities. She was a physically beautiful goddess of war and fertility. The Babylonians worshiped her as “Ishtar,” the Greeks as “Astarte” or “Aphrodite,” and the Romans as “Venus.” Worship of this goddess involved extremely lascivious behavior (1 Kings 14:24; 2 Kings 23:7).

Unfortunately, as Israel forgot the saving acts of the Lord, the chosen people got caught up in their sinful ways and began to chase after these false gods. We often hear the phrase, “There is nothing new under the

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sun.” The words “worship” and “prostitution” should never be connected. How could Israel mix sinfulness with the goodness of the Lord and the blessings of true worship? Israel’s actions show that when people turn away from God, they can sink into shameful and unfaithful acts under the guise of worship!

14 And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies.

The word “anger” in Hebrew ‘aph (af), means “wrath.” In essence, God was sick and tired of the Israelites’ foolishness and disobedience, which provoked His wrath. So He “delivered” (Heb. *nathan*, naw-THAWN) them, meaning He “designated” or “appointed” or “assigned” them to be defeated by “spoilers” (Heb. *shacah*, *shasah*, shaw-SAW), “plunderers,” or enemies. When a parent tells his or her child to stop doing something, the parent is normally doing it for the good of the child. When the Lord disciplines us, He, too, does it for our good. We know we have come to know Him if we obey His commands (1 John 2:3–5).

Israel had a long history of falling away and not doing what God commanded them to do. They were to remain loyal to God and love Him through their actions, but they did just the opposite.

15 Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed.

We see illustrated in this verse that God’s Word is true and is always truth. Wherever the Israelites went, God’s hand was not with them but against them. Since they did not want to go with God, they found out what it was like to go against Him and for His hand to be against them. The old saying goes, “When it rains, it pours!” Because the Israelites rejected the righteousness of their God, it was really raining on Israel. Wherever they went, God’s hand “was against them for evil.” The fact that the chosen people continued to do what they wanted to do tells us that, to some degree, they were taking God for granted. Secondly, their continual turning away from the faith showed they had left their First Love—God! Whenever we do this, we invite the evil one into our lives. Needless to say, Israel was “greatly distressed” (Heb. *yatsar*, yaw-TSAR), meaning they were “vexed” and “besieged” because the hand of the Lord was against them for their evil acts. However, they had no one to blame for their sin but themselves. Our holy (set apart from sin) God will not tolerate sin, including from His chosen people.

16 Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them.

We see the merciful, compassionate, loving God, who kept His covenant with Israel despite their disobedience and breaking of their covenant with Him. Israel was given another opportunity to get its house in order. God “raised up” (Heb. *quwm*, koom), meaning “set up” or “brought on the scene,” judges to deliver them from their enemies. This shows that, indeed, the Sovereign God is in control of what happens to His people. When they were disobedient, He allowed their enemies (“spoilers,” v. 14) to overtake them. Now, He assigned judges to deliver them from the hands of their enemies.

17 And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the LORD; but they did not so.

It is amazing that Israel continued to go their own way—doing what they wanted to do—and kept on worshiping idol gods. Why were the Israelites so prone to go “a whoring” (Heb. *zanah*, zaw-NAW), meaning “committing adultery” and “behaving like harlots” with their sinful pursuit of belief in other

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gods? They were supposed to be faithful to the one true God. They were to give their complete allegiance to Him by loving Him with the totality of their beings. So why did they refuse to listen to the judges that God was using to help them find their way back to Him? In chasing other gods, the chosen people were saying that their God was not good enough or able to meet all their needs.

18 And when the LORD raised them up judges, then the LORD was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the LORD because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them.

As long as God's judges reigned over Israel, the people held to their covenant with Him, and He (the all-powerful God) delivered them from their enemies. God's compassion, love, and mercy are so profound that He "repented" (Heb. *nacham*, naw-**KHAM**) for His people, meaning He "was sorry" or "suffered grief" that His chosen people were suffering at the hands of their enemies. Part of the Lord's grief was due to the Israelites' "groanings" (Heb. *nâ'aqah*, neh-aw-**KAW**), which they expressed in response to being "oppressed" (Heb. *lachats*, law-**KHATS**), meaning that which "afflicted" or "crushed" them. They were "vexed" (Heb. *dachaq*, daw-**KHAK**), meaning they were "oppressed" by their enemies. He heard their cries of despair and met their need. In other words, He delivered them; they could not deliver themselves. When we obey God's voice—His commands and edicts—God's presence and power are always with us. Just as He had used Moses and Joshua, the Lord used those judges to guide the Children of Israel in the right direction. What a blessing to have God directing us in the way that we should go—in the way that we should live!

19 And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way

Indeed, the story of Israel contains a great deal of tragedy. They constantly returned to their sinful ways—their disloyalty—and in following after idol gods, the Israelites "corrupted" themselves even more than their fathers and mothers had done. The word "corrupted" in Hebrew is *shachath* (shaw-**KHATH**) and means "marred, spoiled, injured, ruined, rotted." Sadly, this generation of Israelites was far worse than the generation before them. They, too, found a way to disobey God and do things that really made God angry. They did not cease from their stubborn ways. "Stubborn" in Hebrew is *qasheh* (kaw-**SHEH**) and means "hardhearted, cruel, obstinate, difficult, stiff-necked." Thus, the Israelites kept on sinning and ignited further the ire of God.

Israel's story is sad because they turned their backs on a loving God. They did not totally surrender their whole beings to God, who loved them unconditionally—without reservation. The good news is we serve a God of a second chance—a God who remained with Israel through its waywardness—its rebelliousness. God will do the same thing for us if we repent our sins and put our trust in Him.

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Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Numbers 5–7
Psalm 22:6–10

TUESDAY

Numbers 8–10
Psalm 22:11–18

WEDNESDAY

Numbers 11–13
Psalm 22:19–24

THURSDAY

Numbers 14–15
Psalm 22:25–31

FRIDAY

Numbers 16–17
Psalm 23

SATURDAY

Numbers 18–20
Psalm 24:1–4

SUNDAY

Numbers 21–22
Psalm 24:5–10