

Spiritual Background on the Time of the Judges

Judges 2

Judges 2 - *“Then the Angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said: ‘I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers; and I said, ‘I will never break My covenant with you. ² And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.’ But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this? ³ Therefore I also said, ‘I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you.’” ⁴ So it was, when the Angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voices and wept.*

⁵ Then they called the name of that place Bochim; and they sacrificed there to the LORD. ⁶ And when Joshua had dismissed the people, the children of Israel went each to his own inheritance to possess the land.

⁷ So the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD which He had done for Israel. ⁸ Now Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died when he was one hundred and ten years old. ⁹ And they buried him within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Heres, in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash. ¹⁰ When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel.

¹¹ Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals; ¹² and they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger. ¹³ They forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. ¹⁴ And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel. So He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. ¹⁵ Wherever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for calamity, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn to them. And they were greatly distressed.

¹⁶ Nevertheless, the LORD raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them. ¹⁷ Yet they would not listen to their judges, but they played the harlot with other gods, and bowed down to them. They turned quickly from the way in which their fathers walked, in obeying the commandments of the LORD; they did not do so. ¹⁸ And when the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them out of 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 them and harassed them. ¹⁹ And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn way.

²⁰ Then the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and He said, “Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and has not heeded My voice, ²¹ I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, ²² so that through them I may test Israel, whether they will keep the ways of the

LORD, to walk in them as their fathers kept them, or not.”²³ Therefore the LORD left those nations, without driving them out immediately; nor did He deliver them into the hand of Joshua.”

Background Notes

Judges 1 gave us the **political background** of the period of the judges. Israel had conquered the Promised Land under Joshua's leadership, but many pockets of enemy resistance had not yet been eliminated. The land had been divided up among the twelve tribes of Israel, and each tribe was responsible to fully conquer and occupy its respective territory.

God didn't want his people contaminated by the idolatry and immorality of the Canaanites. He wanted the pagan influence to be conquered completely - but the various tribes did not fully drive out the enemy. God had promised Israel that if they would obey Him in this area, they would never suffer defeat. But Israel didn't fully obey the Lord, and throughout the time of the judges Israel never finished the job of fully conquering and occupying the land.

Judges 2 gives us the **spiritual background** of the period of the Judges. In Judges 2 we see that because of this disobedience, God permitted the surrounding nations to come in and oppress Israel (v14-15).

In the first part of the chapter it looks like Israel was about to get its act together. Almost. The people wept when the angel of the Lord confronted them with their disobedience, and they sacrificed to the Lord (v4-5). But when Joshua died, the people forsook the Lord and began to serve the pagan “gods” of Canaan. This cyclic pattern continued throughout the period of the judges. When God raised up a judge to lead the land there would be a temporary time of spiritual recovery, but when the judge died the people of Israel reverted to their old ways (v18-19).

Doctrinal Points

1. There are five steps in the Israel's sin cycles.

Judges 2 gives us the five steps of typical “Sin Cycle” that Israel went through seven times during the time of the judges.

1. **The people would sin by rebelling against the Lord** (sin or rebellion).
2. **The Lord would allow an enemy of Israel to gain control, plunder and oppress Israel** (servitude or retribution).
3. **The people would cry out to the Lord because of the oppression, and the Lord would hear** (supplication or repentance).
4. **The Lord would raise up a “judge” and deliver the people from the enemy** (salvation or restoration).
5. **The Lord would give a measure of rest and revival as long as that judge lived.** (silence or rest).

As soon as that judge died, the people would revert to their old ways and the cycle would repeat itself. In the book of Judges there are seven such sin cycles, beginning in chapter 3. If you like alliteration, you could outline the five-step cycle with either “S” or “R” as in the alliterated words in the parentheses above (1-5). There are seven sin cycles in the book of Judges.

2. There can be sin cycles in the lives of believers.

The sin cycle that Israel went through again and again during the times of the judges can also take place in the life of a believer. It doesn't have to, but it will take place if we wander away from the Lord. The Lord will bring discipline into our lives. When we repent of our sin and cry out to the Lord for forgiveness, He brings deliverance and restoration to our lives. Then there is rest of soul -- until the next go-around, if we wander away from Him again. Certainly this is illustrated for us in the book of Judges, and this is part of the teaching of the book of Judges. Let me give you a New Testament reference for each of the step of this insight.

1. The sin stage: James 1:14-15 - *“But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”*

2. The discipline stage: Hebrews 12:5 - *“And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: “ My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.”*

3. The repentance and calling out to the Lord stage: 1 John 1:9 - *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

4. The restoration to fellowship stage: 1 Peter 5:6 - *“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time...”*

5. The rest of soul stage: Matthew 11:28 - *“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”* That's the “rest of salvation” that comes through our salvation from sin. In verses 29-30 we have the comes the “rest of soul”: *“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”* What a blessed stage this is!

Once again, we don't ever have to go around the sin cycle. We can stay continuously in the “rest of soul” stage **if we obey the Lord**, and don't wander away from Him. Unfortunately, there can be sin cycles in the lives of believers when we disobey and walk away from the Lord.

Practical Application

Have you had a first-generation experience?

Verse 7: *“So the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD which He had done for Israel.”* And verse 10: *“When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel.”*

Joshua's generation had seen with their own eyes the great miracles that the Lord had done for Israel during the conquest of the Promised Land. They had seen the waters of the Jordan dried up; they had seen the walls of Jericho fall down; they had seen the sun stand still in the sky so that Israel had enough time to conquer the enemy. But now a new generation had been born. The new generation had not **seen** these great works of the Lord - they had only **heard** about the miracles. They didn't have a “first-generation experience” themselves.

Have you had a “first-generation experience”? You've heard about the great works of the Lord in your parents' generation or in your grandparents' generation, but maybe you've never seen it for yourself. You can have a first-generation experience - if you are willing to step out in faith.

One of my first-generation experiences has been in connection with “Growing Christian Ministries.” For twenty-six years [spoken in 1998], we've seen the Lord support this ministry. We've never appealed for funds, and yet we've never been “in the red.” We've seen the Lord at work first hand - it's a first-generation experience! Until I stepped out in faith to begin this ministry, I had heard that the Lord would support a ministry like this, but I had not yet had the first-generation experience.

Have you had a first-generation experience? It can happen in many areas – not just in seeing the Lord support a ministry financially. Have you had the first-generation experience of leading another person to Christ?

Again, the question for all of us: have you had a first-generation experience?