



# Consequences

AFTER JOSHUA'S DEATH, ISRAEL FELL INTO A CYCLE OF SIN, JUDGMENT, CONFESSION, AND RESTORATION.

**Scripture Passage: Judges 2:11-23    Memory Verse: Judges 2:10**

We should never underestimate the value of strong, effective leadership. Conversely, it's wise to prepare for and protect against a void in leadership.

Nowhere does this ring true more than during the period of biblical history recorded in the book of Judges. Following decades of faithful, godly leadership, Moses and Joshua were gone. Meanwhile, the time of kings was still a few centuries away in Israel's future. So, God bridged this gap by raising up a series of regional judges, ordinary people He used in extraordinary ways. Their job wasn't easy, as the people they led usually preferred following their own carnal desires than to remain dedicated to the Lord. Yet, despite the nation's long list of repeated offenses, God remained faithful and forgiving.

As you prepare to lead this first session from Judges, consider how God has used you in His service and for His glory through the years—despite your flaws and imperfections. Thank Him for that faithfulness. And ask Him to use you to assure the adults in your Bible study that God loves them and wants to use them regardless of who they are or where they've been.



## **Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training**

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Intending to do well doesn't always result in something being well done. We recognize this to be true regarding the people of Israel when Joshua died and the era of the judges began. Before Joshua's death, the Israelites insisted they would be faithful to the Lord and never worship the gods of the Canaanites. However, as soon as Joshua and the elders who served alongside of him died, Israel broke their promise and suffered the consequences of their infidelity to the Lord. (PSG, p. 73)

**What factors might cause people to break their commitments, and how can we guard against this in our own lives?**



## Understand the Context (Judges 1:1–3:6)

Whether it be in business, education, churches, the military, or government, times of transition are risky. Complacency, vulnerability, and even iniquity can set in, especially with the wrong person in charge. Such a situation demands the right leader to step forward, set the tone, and rally the troops.

The history of the Israelites reads like a leadership roller coaster. God chose Moses to supervise the liberation of His people from Egypt and to navigate the nation through the wilderness to the borders of Canaan. Then, Joshua came along to guide them across the Jordan River, command armies in victory, and oversee the subsequent land distribution among the tribes.

But Joshua's death created a tremendous leadership void that triggered a cycle of sin, judgment, confession, and restoration. As Scripture says, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever seemed right to him" (Judg. 17:6; see also 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).

The Israelites' first step away from God was partial obedience. They failed to completely destroy their enemies and remove them from the land. The slide continued as the wayward people engaged in intermarriage and idolatry. Before long, they again became captives to their enemies, at which point they would cry out for mercy and forgiveness (6:6; 10:15).

Some scholars speculate that Samuel wrote the book of Judges. We cannot be sure, but the

narratives span a period of approximately three hundred years (1350–1050 BC). During that time, the people of God endured successive seasons of oppression and liberation. Their captors included the Mesopotamians, Moabites, Philistines, Canaanites, Midianites, and Ammonites—all people God had commanded them to drive out of the promised land. At each crisis point, God raised up judges—from Othniel to Samson—to deliver His people and draw them back to Him.

Our text for this session is preceded by a visit from a messenger sent by God (2:1). Many scholars believe this "angel of the LORD" was a Christophany, an Old Testament appearance of Jesus. But whether this was Christ Himself or an angel from God, the heavenly envoy rebuked the people for their failure to drive out their enemies and warned them of the consequences they would face.

After the messenger left, the people wept and offered sacrifices to the Lord (2:4-5). While God consistently intervened on behalf of His people, readers should be quick to remember that sin has consequences. We will be held accountable for our actions. Yet, we also should marvel at God's unconditional love and mercy, demonstrated by the way He protects us and provides for us over and over again.

**As you read Judges 2:11-23, pay attention to the cycle of sin, judgment, repentance, and restoration. (PSG, p. 74)**

# ENGAGE



**PREPARE:** Prior to the group time, move the colored circle to the first point under “Judges” on **Pack Item 2** (Poster: *Outlines of Joshua, Judges, Ruth*). Write *Joshua* → *Judges* on the board or on a large sheet of paper. Make copies of **Pack Item 8** (Handout: *Joshua, Judges, Ruth Time Line*) and **Pack Item 13** (Handout: *The Cycle of Judges*).

**ASK:**

**What factors might cause people to break their commitments, and how can we guard against this in our own lives?** (PSG, p. 73) Discuss responses.

**READ:**

Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 73 of the PSG.

**BACKGROUND:**

Direct attention to what is written on the board (or a large sheet of paper). Point out that this session represents a shift from the book of Joshua to the book of Judges. Share that while the theme of Joshua’s story was a wholehearted devotion to God, the theme for Judges is a cycle of sin, judgment, confession, and restoration.

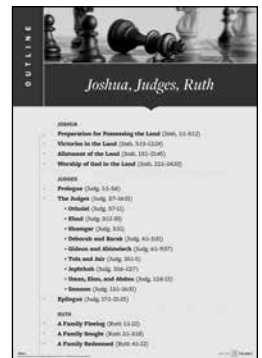
**EXPLAIN:**

Summarize this information from “Understand the Context” (PSG, p. 74) to provide more information:

“The Israelites were not supposed to make agreements with the Canaanites and coexist with them, but they did. Because of their sins, the angel of the Lord confronted Israel with a declaration of judgment. . . . As soon as Joshua and the elders who served with him died, a new “generation rose up who did not know the Lord or the works He had done for Israel” (2:10). This generation abandoned the Lord and began worshiping the gods of the surrounding peoples in Canaan. Instead of ridding the land of the Canaanites, Israel became like the Canaanites. As a result, whenever the Israelites went out to war, the Lord was against them and caused them to be defeated (2:15).”

**TRANSITION:**

*The book of Judges focuses on the cycle of sin of the Israelites—and the rescue God provided through His judges. This session starts with evil on the part of the Israelites.*



## Group Activity Option

### Music

Play the song “Dusty Bibles” by Josiah Queen. If possible, provide the lyrics. After listening, ask: **How does the lyric “We walk with our eyes closed” describe our culture today? How can God’s Word keep a believer from abandoning God?**

## The Evil (Judg. 2:11-15)

**11** The Israelites did what was evil in the LORD's sight. They worshiped the Baals **12** and abandoned the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed other gods from the surrounding peoples and bowed down to them. They angered the LORD, **13** for they abandoned him and worshiped Baal and the Ashtoreths. **14** The LORD's anger burned against Israel, and he handed them over to marauders who raided them. He sold them to the enemies around them, and they could no longer resist their enemies. **15** Whenever the Israelites went out, the LORD was against them and brought disaster on them, just as he had promised and sworn to them. So they suffered greatly.

**(vv. 11-13)** This passage begins with a general statement regarding Israel's behavior. They *did what was evil in the LORD's sight* and *abandoned* Him. The Hebrew term for *evil* relates to moral wickedness. This spiritual rebellion can take the form of internal attitudes or external actions. It also can describe results of sin.

The word translated *abandoned* is used more than two hundred times in the Old Testament and generally relates to leaving or forsaking. While it can be used in a positive context, it often carries a negative connotation that highlights the Israelites' tendency to turn their backs on God and His covenant.

Moses had warned the people to avoid forgetting God and His ordinances (Deut. 8:11). Unfortunately, Joshua's death (Judg. 2:8) created a leadership vacuum and left Israel vulnerable to the influence of its enemies. As a result, they began replacing their one true God with other gods. Rather than worshiping the One who had delivered them, provided for them, and led them into the promised land, the Israelites *followed other gods from the surrounding peoples*.

Specifically, they pledged their allegiance to *Baal and the Ashtoreths*. *Baal*, the Canaanite god of weather and nature, lured the people for obvious reasons. As an agricultural society, the residents of Canaan depended on favorable weather conditions for their crops and livestock.

*The Ashtoreths* (a female counterpart to Baal) represented the goddess of sex, love, and fertility. In this worship, prostitution was permitted, even encouraged (v. 17).

Like ancient Canaan, we live in a sex-crazed society, where promiscuity abounds. Satan offers numerous sexual counterfeits that oppose what

God created and meant to be enjoyed within the limits of the marriage bed (Heb. 13:4).

**(vv. 14-15)** As a result of their unfaithfulness, *the LORD's anger burned against Israel*. Due to their perpetual waywardness, the Israelites found themselves on the receiving end of God's *anger*. The Hebrew wording emphasizes the "heat" of God's wrath.

God is not random or impulsive in His anger, and He does not take sin lightly. Similar wording was used when His people worshiped the golden calf (Ex. 32:10). Later, when the Israelites brazenly complained in the wilderness, God's anger "blazed among them and consumed the outskirts of the camp" (Num. 11:1). Centuries later, God again poured out His anger on Israel for its idolatry and handed the city of Jerusalem over to the Babylonians (see Jer. 39).

The biblical writer noted that similar punishment was inflicted upon Israel in these early chapters of Judges. The Lord sent the disaster He had promised (Judg. 2:3). *Marauders* and other hostile groups attacked Israel; and, without God's support, the Israelites *could no longer resist their enemies*. As a result, they *suffered greatly*.

God's people should not have been surprised by their suffering. Before entering Canaan, Moses had shared the consequences and curses of disobedience (Deut. 28:15,20). Yet, readers should recall that God always has the best interest of His people at heart. His anger and punishment always have a purpose. He disciplines the ones He loves to bring people back to Him and to draw them into a deeper relationship with Him (Prov. 3:11-12; Heb. 12:5-11).

# EXPLORE Judges 2:11-15



**APPLICATION POINT:** God’s people must guard against the danger of forgetting what the Lord has done for them.

**CONTEXT:**

Highlight the “Prologue” for Judges on **Pack Item 2** (Poster: *Outlines of Joshua, Judges, Ruth*). Explain that this prologue sets the context for Israel’s sin in the rest of the book.

**SHARE:**

Provide copies of **Pack Item 8** (Handout: *Joshua, Judges, Ruth Time Line*). Point out that Joshua had divided the land around 1385 BC. Note that a few years later, Joshua died and the nation’s spiritual spiral began.

**READ:**

**Invite a volunteer to read Judges 2:11-15** as the group listens for the spiritual shift in Israel.

**RECAP:**

Identify the gods pursued by the Israelites after Joshua’s death:

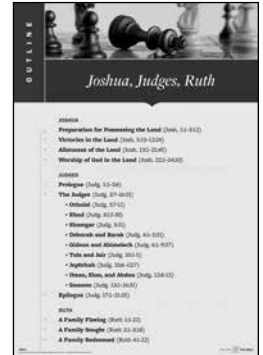
*The Israelites worshiped Baal and the Ashtoreths. “Baal” literally means “lord, master, owner, possessor, or husband.” As a proper noun, it referred to the supreme god of the fertility cult of the Canaanites. He was the storm god whose worshipers believed gave his rain to the earth so that it could bear fruit. Ashtoreth was the Canaanite goddess of fertility, love, and war. The fertility of the land depended on the sexual activities of Baal and his consort. Therefore, the false religion of the Canaanites promised its adherents material prosperity while incorporating flagrant sexual immorality into its manipulative practices. (PSG, p. 76)*

**ASK:**

**What factors contribute to a person or a group abandoning God?** (PSG, p. 77)

**TRANSITION:**

*God didn’t take Israel’s sin lightly. He had warned them that idolatry would come with consequences, and He poured out His anger on them in an effort to bring them back to Him.*



## Group Activity Option

### Bible Skill

The “angel of the LORD” appears in Judges 2:1, the first of four times in the book of Judges (see also 5:23; 6:11; and 13:1-24). Many scholars believe this was a “christophany,” an appearance of Jesus prior to His incarnation in the Gospels. Read and reflect on other possible christophanies in the Old Testament, such as Genesis 32:24-30 and Daniel 3:24-25. **Why do you think Jesus appeared in situations like these? How does the presence of Jesus affect your life each day?**

## The Cycle (Judg. 2:16-19)

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**16** The LORD raised up judges, who saved them from the power of their marauders, **17** but they did not listen to their judges. Instead, they prostituted themselves with other gods, bowing down to them. They quickly turned from the way of their ancestors, who had walked in obedience to the LORD's commands. They did not do as their ancestors did. **18** Whenever the LORD raised up a judge for the Israelites, the LORD was with him and saved the people from the power of their enemies while the judge was still alive. The LORD was moved to pity whenever they groaned because of those who were oppressing and afflicting them. **19** Whenever the judge died, the Israelites would act even more corruptly than their ancestors, following other gods to serve them and bow in worship to them. They did not turn from their evil practices or their obstinate ways.

**(v. 16)** To protect and direct His wayward people, **the LORD raised up judges**. The Hebrew word for *raised* implies being established or made powerful. It's the same word used by David to describe himself toward the end of his reign (2 Sam. 23:1).

As the book of Judges makes clear, Israel had no king at this point (Judg. 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). Instead, God appointed twelve *judges* (eleven men and one woman) to lead the people over a span of approximately three centuries. Coming from nine different tribes, some are detailed at length (such as Gideon and Samson), while others receive only a verse or two. In both cases, the writer focused readers' attention on God as the book's main character rather than the judges He used.

Much like the disciples, the judges did not come from privilege. By utilizing them, God was using unlikely, weak vessels for His purposes (1 Cor. 1:27). Outmatched and outnumbered, they succeeded when they depended on Him.

While the word "judge" often has legal connotations, these individuals primarily served as military leaders. In that position, they **saved** God's people from the attacking *marauders*.

**(v. 17)** No doubt, the people were thrilled to be rescued. However, spiritually, **they did not listen to their judges**. This brings to mind the behavior of the Jews centuries later. Despite repeated warnings, they would not listen to God's messengers, remained obstinate, and turned their backs on Him (see Jer. 6:10; 17:23; 25:4; 32:33).

Rather than obeying God, the Israelites **prostituted themselves** by following false gods. The Hebrew wording can refer to literal adultery within the marriage context or, as here, to spiritual adultery against God through idolatry. Through His covenant with His people, God saw

the Israelites as His spouse. Rejecting Him and turning to other gods was tantamount to adultery.

Also, the people **turned from the way of their ancestors**. Israel worshiped God throughout Joshua's life (Judg. 2:7). However, as the older generation faded, the new generation drifted. Again, readers are reminded of the importance of solid leadership.

**(vv. 18-19)** The rise and fall during the age of the judges defined Israel's cycle of sin. God's people remained faithful to a point, but when a judge died, they fell back into wickedness. In fact, each generation fell further into sin than the previous one. These verses identify a four-fold pattern.

First, after a judge died, the people would behave **corruptly**. They would **serve** other gods and **bow in worship to them**. They would refuse to **turn from their evil practices**, and they would become **obstinate** in their sin.

Then, as a result of the Israelites' disobedience, the Lord would remove His protection and allow the people to be overwhelmed by their enemies. In time, Israel **groaned because of those who were oppressing and afflicting them**.

In His grace, God was **moved to pity** and raised up a judge to rescue the people. Then, the nation would know peace **while the judge was still alive**. Once the leader died, though, the cycle began again.

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### Key Doctrine

#### Salvation

Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God. (See Luke 3:8; Romans 2:4-5.)

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# EXPLORE Judges 2:16-19



**APPLICATION POINT:** Believers can be assured that God’s faithfulness to act on behalf of His people is rooted in His character, not in ours.

**READ:** Call for a volunteer to read aloud Judges 2:16-19, directing the group to listen for the cycle described.

**EXAMINE:** Distribute copies of **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: The Cycle of Judges*). Encourage adults to work in pairs to review the article and to highlight the key points they see. After a few minutes, allow the pairs to share their thoughts. Use information from Judges 2:17 in the Leader Guide (p. 94) to explain the connection between spiritual prostitution and idolatry.

**RECAP:** Share more about the judges God raised up for Israel:

*The judges functioned as military deliverers who saved their people from their enemies. With that said, the true Savior of Israel was the Lord Himself who raised up and empowered these leaders to deliver their people. The emphasis is on God’s compassion for His people as they suffered from His discipline and on His power to raise up deliverers who saved them from those who attacked and plundered them. . . . The Lord repeatedly raised up judges to deliver His people from their adversaries. The Lord was with the judge, and He enabled the judge to deliver and protect the people from their enemies. The people groaned because of those who were oppressing and afflicting them, and they “cried out to the LORD” (see Judg. 3:9). However, there is no indication the Israelites ever repented of their sins against God. (PSG, pp. 77-78)*

**ASK:** What does God’s providing a deliverer tell us about God’s character? (PSG, p. 79)



## Group Activity Option

### Object Lesson: Yo-Yo

Attract attention by flicking a yo-yo up and down several times. Allow volunteers to show their yo-yo skills as time allows. As you continue, share that in Judges the Israelites were like spiritual yo-yos. Say: *They would plummet down into sin and cry out to God. God would send a judge to deliver the people, and they would move back up in their relationship with God.* Challenge adults to consider how they are spiritual “yo-yos” at times.

## The Declaration (Judg. 2:20-23)

**20** The LORD's anger burned against Israel, and he declared, "Because this nation has violated my covenant that I made with their ancestors and disobeyed me, **21** I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died. **22** I did this to test Israel and to see whether or not they would keep the LORD's way by walking in it, as their ancestors had." **23** The LORD left these nations and did not drive them out immediately. He did not hand them over to Joshua.

**(vv. 20-21)** One might think that such a demonstration of mercy would set the Israelites back on the straight and narrow. Unfortunately, such was not the case. Time and again, the cycle of sin continued, and thus, ***the LORD's anger burned against Israel.***

This brings to mind these words written during the wilderness wanderings. In Psalm 90, Moses wrote that God's anger matches the fear or reverence that He deserves (Ps. 90:11). More than once, Moses got a front row seat to God's divine retribution playing out against the children of Israel because of their disobedience.

In the era of the judges, the Israelites consistently violated their **covenant** with God, prompting divine displeasure. Eventually, God declared that He had seen enough: ***I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died.*** In a sense, God was letting the Israelites feel the negative consequences of living among a people with whom they had become so infatuated. If they wanted to be slaves to their idols of Canaan, they could become slaves to the enemies of Canaan.

**(v. 22)** Allowing Israel's enemies in the promised land to exert their dominance over His chosen people was not God's only purpose in this punishment. He had at least two other reasons for letting them endure such suffering.

First, He noted that He wanted ***to test Israel.*** He wanted to see if the stress would encourage them to ***keep the LORD's way . . . as their ancestors had*** or if they would continue rebelling against and resisting God.

The Hebrew rendered *test* can mean to evaluate the quality of an item or, metaphorically, an individual's character. The idea relates to making sure something is real or has substance. Throughout Scripture, God put His people into situations where they needed to trust Him.

Although God never tempts anyone to sin (see Jas. 1:13), He will certainly put His people through

times of testing and trials. The testing can take different forms. For example, Abraham was told to offer his son as a human sacrifice (Gen. 22), while Job endured physical pain and emotional grief. In both cases, God showed Himself faithful. Whatever situation believers might face, the Lord's purposes will always focus on making us better and molding us into the image of His Son.

**(v. 23)** The writer noted that ***the LORD left these nations*** in the promised land. In a parallel statement, he wrote that ***he did not hand them over to Joshua.*** This raises the question as to why God would allow a smattering of pagans to remain in the promised land.

One possibility is that He wanted to prepare His people for the warfare to come (Judg. 3:2). This was not Joshua's generation, the generation that had conquered Canaan. And God knew challenging days awaited His people. Perpetual oppression from their enemies would continue to plague the children of Israel during the period of the judges and beyond, so it would be helpful to train them for war.

The passage also emphasizes God's sovereignty and control over the affairs of His people. Joshua had lived a life marked by complete obedience to the Lord. Yet, the writer notes that God was the One who allowed some of the Canaanites to stay in the land. This was not a failure on the part of righteous Joshua, but God's plan to use these pagans to perfect His people. Again, 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.

Ultimately, though, God's plan was to bring His people back to Him. That is always the goal of chastisement from the Lord. He never allows His people to suffer for no reason or simply to be cruel. His passion is for His children, and He always works to bring them back under the protective umbrella of obedience.



**APPLICATION POINT:** Believers can expect their obedience to God to be tested.

**READ:**

**Call for the group to read silently Judges 2:20-23**, looking for the primary reason God brought continued punishment against the Israelites.

**ASK:**

**Why is disobedience—sin—such a big deal to God? How can sin spiral us away from God today?**

**RECAP:**

Encourage adults to express in their own words how God revealed His attitude toward sin in these verses. Highlight that He withdrew His hand of protection from the people and allowed their enemies to overwhelm them. Summarize this content from page 80 of the PSG to highlight God's motivation for allowing His people to suffer at the hands of their enemies:

“Verse 20 emphasizes how angry God was with Israel. Next, the Lord referred to Israel as ‘this nation’. This expression indicates a sense of alienation and speaks to Israel’s infidelity to God as Israel violated the covenant the Lord made with their forefathers. Consequently, the Lord emphatically declared He would no longer give the Israelites the ability to drive out the Canaanites who still lived in areas of Israel’s tribal allotments that were yet to be possessed. . . . The Lord made clear His intention in allowing the Canaanites to remain. It was to test the Israelites. Would they turn back to God and walk in His ways like their forefathers, or would they continue in their rebellion against Him? The writer then states the Lord did as He declared.”

**STATE:**

*This was not the generation that had fought the battles and conquered the land. That generation, along with Joshua and its leaders, had passed from the scene. This was a new generation of Israelites who had to learn how to trust God for themselves. When they failed, God placed them in situations that would challenge them to come back to Him. Repentance and restoration are always God’s purpose in discipline and testing.*

**ASK:**

**When and how has God tested you? How is your faith stronger as a result?** (PSG, p. 80)

## CHALLENGE

### SUMMARIZE:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 81 of the *Personal Study Guide*:

- *God's people must guard against the danger of forgetting what the Lord has done for them.*
- *Believers can be assured that God's faithfulness to act on behalf of His people is rooted in His character, not in ours.*
- *Believers can expect their obedience to God to be tested.*

### REVIEW:

Call for a few volunteers to share which statement challenges them the most this week.

### EMPHASIZE:

Draw attention again to **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: The Cycle of Judges*) and review the cycle of sin in the book of Judges. Encourage the group to keep this handout in their Bibles for reference in the coming sessions.

### DISCUSS:

Guide the group to read and respond to the second question set on page 81 of the PSG. Challenge adults to remember that God's character is the key to His discipline.

### PRAY:

Provide a few moments of silent prayer, encouraging adults to reflect on their lives and to identify how they might be caught in a cycle of sin. Urge them to confess this to God and ask for His help moving forward. Close the session in prayer, asking God to protect each adult from the same cycle of sin, judgment, confession, and restoration that the Israelites experienced for so many generations.

### AFTER THE SESSION

Send an email to challenge the group to reflect on how a cycle of sin has impacted their own walk with the Lord. Suggest they review the information on **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: The Cycle of the Judges*). Direct them to read and reflect on the first question set from page 81 of the PSG. Encourage them to find ways to hold one another accountable and point each other toward the goodness of God.

### ADULT COMMENTARY



Want to go deeper in your study?  
*Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* offers additional information and biblical insights related to the key passages.  
(Available for purchase at **Lifeway.com**.)

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