



**Adult Sunday School Lesson for October 1, 2006  
Released on September 27, 2006**

**"God Sent Judges"**

**Printed Text: Judges 2:16-23**

**Background Scripture: Judges 2:6-23**

**Devotional Reading: Deuteronomy 6:4-9**

**Judges 2:16-23**

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.**

20 And the anger of the LORD was hot against Is'ra-el; and he said, Because that this people hath transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice;

**21 I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Josh'u-a left when he died:**

22 That through them I may prove Is'ra-el, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk therein, as their fathers did keep *it*, or not.

**23 Therefore the LORD left those nations, without driving them out hastily; neither delivered he them into the hand of Josh'u-a.**

## **INTRODUCTION**

During the three centuries following the death of Joshua, Israel's history followed a cycle repeated over and over again. The people fell into apostasy and came under the domination of a pagan nation until the people cried to God and He sent deliverers, or judges, to free them. They then served the Lord for a time before again apostatizing, starting the cycle again.

Among Israel's judges were thirteen men and one woman. These included Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah, Barak, Gideon, Abimelech (though many would not include him), Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, and Samson. Some count Deborah and Barak as one because they worked together.

These individuals were not so much judges changed with settling disputes as they were deliverers, or saviors, appointed by God to deal with oppression by Israel's enemies.

Joshua died when he was 110 old. After he and his generation passed off the scene, another generation rose up that was not in close communion with the Lord and what He had done for Israel.

Our text for this lesson deals with the institution of the judges. It is a general description of how God used them to help Israel.

## **LESSON BACKGROUND**

The book of Judges records the history of Israel from the time of Joshua's death until the time of Samuel, Israel's last judge (see 1 Samuel 7:15). This is roughly the time period 1400–1050 BC. During this time period, Israel had no king but was instead guided by judges. Judges were men and women who arose providentially in times of national crisis to deliver the nation. They seemed to be endowed with the Spirit of God in a special way (at least some of them). The judges were a colorful cast of characters, including the woman-warrior Deborah, the fleece-man Gideon, the left-handed assassin Ehud, and the ancient "superman" Samson.

The judges of Israel served several functions. At times they were judicial arbiters. More often they were national deliverers, frequently as military leaders. Judges were not like kings in that there was no hereditary succession. The one son of a judge who tried to succeed his father in this manner failed (Abimelech, son of Gideon; Judges 9).

Furthermore, the judges of Israel did not function like kings by imposing taxes or negotiating treaties with other nations—functions expected of kings. Israel's judges had no standing army but relied on the tribal leaders of Israel to provide men when military action was necessary. The judges did not have grand palaces or courtiers. They were seen as regular citizens with extraordinary responsibilities. The period of the judges is in many ways the record of Israel's "Dark Ages." The Israelites had become a settled nation, living in cities and villages. They were

farmers, not nomadic shepherds like the patriarchs. Yet this is a time of crisis between faith and culture, between covenant loyalty and the enticing sins of the Canaanites.

Chapter 2 gives a preview of the book and outlines a cycle that is repeated many times in the period before Israel has a king. The cycle is tragically repetitive: apostasy leads to crisis, which leads to repentance, which leads to deliverance, which drifts back to apostasy. The verdict of the book of Judges is that this was a time of moral chaos. "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

## **TODAY'S AIM**

**Facts:** to examine how God raised up leaders to meet the need of His people at every crucial moment in their history.

**Principle:** to show that God raises up the right people at the right times to do His work in this world.

**Application:** to demonstrate that when we turn away from God, He often sends the right people before us to turn us back to Him.

### **1. How many judges did God raise up in Israel (vs. 16)?**

After the death of Joshua, there was a new generation of Israelites that arose. Unlike the generation before them, this new generation were not believers and were not in tune with the God of miracles and victory. They were nothing like their parents who knew of the miracles of God and were devoted to faith, duty and purity. They were ignorant to the experiences of their parents and gave in more easily to corruption. They followed the gods of the people who were all around them and this made God very angry so he delivered them into the hands of their enemies and they became very distressed. This, however, was designed by God as a chastisement to lead the people to repentance. These people continually forsook God but He did not forsake them. That is why He raised up judges from time to time (13 total) to lead the Israelites in their opposition to oppression and grant them the deliverance they needed.

### **2. How would you define the role of the judges?**

The role of the judges were not like the role of judges we have today. These judges were used to lead the Israelites in their opposition to oppression and grant them the deliverance they needed. At times, they served as arbiters. More often they were national deliverers, frequently as military leaders. Since Israel operated under a theocratic monarchy, God served as King and He appointed those judges. They were in leadership positions only for a limited time.

### **3. How did judges differ from kings?**

These judges that God appointed were only in position for a limited time. They did not function like kings by imposing taxes or negotiating treaties with other nations – functions expected of kings. Israel's judges had no standing army but relied on the tribal leaders of Israel to provide men when military action was necessary. The judges did not have grand palaces or courtiers. There were seen as regular citizens with extraordinary responsibilities. Kings however, came from a royal family line and reigned until their time was up or they died off. Judges, however, had no royal family line to succeed them as earthly kings did and served locally instead of on behalf of an entire country or nation.

### **4. What sins characterized Israel during the period of the judges? (vs. 17)**

During the period of the judges, Israel's behavior and character was very much out of control. First, they chased after gods worshiped by pagans in the land of Canaan. They bowed down to them, thus violating the first two of the Ten Commandments – "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" and "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, ...Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them" (Exod. 20:3-5; cf. Deut. 5:7-9). The second way the Israelites displayed their sinfulness was by turning quickly out of the way followed by their ancestors. Those worthy predecessors had obeyed the commandments of the Lord. These new sons and daughters of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and

Moses deliberately took detours from the path marked out for them and wandered off into heathen territory controlled by Satan and his host of demons. Here are some of the idol gods the Israelite's sought after: the golden calf in the wilderness (Ex .32), flared up again, spurious gods of Canaan were many. El was the supreme Canaanite deity, a god of uncontrolled lust and a bloody tyrant. His name meant "strong, powerful." Baal, son and successor of El, was "lord of heaven," a farm god of rain and storm, his name meaning "lord, possessor". His cult at Phoenicia included animal sacrifices, ritual meals, and licentious dances.

Then there was Ashtaroath which is a plural form and feminine. In Canaanite religion she is the consort of Baal. She is a fertility deity who is thought to control the fertility of both women and of fields. There were also many other gods besides these that attracted worship. Let us be mindful that there are idols in today's time and they come in many forms. Anytime we allow anything or anybody to displace our devotion to God, His Son, and the Holy Spirit can develop into spiritual idolatry. One of the disturbing developments in our world today is the growth of pagan religions, occult organizations, and New Age teachings.

### **5. What does Judges 2:18 mean when it says that God repented of what He planned to do?**

In Judges 2:18 when it says that God repented of what He planned to do, let us not misunderstand it's meaning. Today we think of repentance as a humble response to personal sin. But God does not repent in this way because God is without sin. The issue, rather, is that of the Lord's compassion as He relents from His anger. He heard the groaning of the Israelites, due to them being oppressed and harassed by their enemies and His wrath yielded to His mercy. He was drawing back and giving

the Israelites new opportunities for freedom from time to come. We should know that God is never overwhelmed by anger (see Hosea 11:9). His ear is always open to our cry, and His love is ready to be poured out upon us. We are responsible for the results and should never blame Him if our waywardness brings His chastisement upon us.

**6. How did the Israelites react to the various deliverances from their enemies? (vs. 19)**

After God delivered Israel time after time and even after the judges died, they continued in their waywardness. Not only did they return to their sinful ways but they did so with much energy. They were just plain old stubborn, full of pride and unwilling to admit to error. They had an unrepentant heart and failed to realize the condition they were in. Just as many people do today who continue living in their sinful ways, knowing that there is a God but refusing to obey His Word. They are caught up in the world of "self-gratification" and have become their own idol under the hands of Satan.

**7. What emotion did the waywardness of the Israelites create in the Lord? (vs. 20)**

Verse 20 declares that "the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel." This is a blunt statement that cannot be reduced to something less severe. Since God does not change, we can be sure that He is just as angry with sinners today as He was then. That is a most sobering thought.

**8. What did Israel suffer as a result of not driving pagan people out of Canaan? (vs. 21)**

At the beginning of Judges Chapter 2, an Angel of the Lord had given the Israelites these instructions – "Ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this? Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you". This, of course, was one of several warnings given to the Israelites. See, Numbers 33:55 and Josh. 23:13. The Lord God warned them that if they would not drive out the inhabitants of the land, they would become thorns in their sides and will ensnare them and trap them. Because God cannot lie, this too came to pass and the Israelites suffered at the hands of the Canaanites.

**9. How did God use the heathen in Canaan to test His people? (vs. 22-23)**

God allowed the heathens in Canaan to remain in the land, alive and functioning in the midst of His chosen people, in order to detect, or reveal, Israel's spiritual character or lack of it. They served as a thermometer to show whether the Israelites were spiritually warm, tepid, or cold. If the Israelites sternly resisted pagan beliefs and practices, and refrained from intermarrying with the heathen and if they tried to turn these wicked people toward Jehovah, these would be signs that all was well. If the Israelites held themselves aloof and tolerated pagan activities, this would indicate spiritual neutrality. If they forsook the way of the Lord and moved over the line into pagan worship and practices, their apostasy would be evident. It was the latter that all too often happened. As we look at our society today, we are very

much aware of the sinful nature that is around us but we must remain faithful to the true and living God so that we are not enticed by the tricks of the devil. Although, sometimes we find God allows us to be tested by placing us in spiritually hostile environments. That does not make God guilty of tempting us. "Let no man say when he is tempted (tested), I am tempted of God (to do evil): for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust (passion), and enticed" (Jas. 1:13-14). If we endure the testing with faith and patience, God uses these situations to develop our spiritual muscles and make us mature. If we fail the tests, God is grieved, we ourselves are weakened, and our testimony is diminished. As a result, unbelievers are not attracted to our Saviour, and Satan and the forces of evil score a win. Let us as believers remember that we are to let our light shine so that men will see our good works and glorify our Father which is in Heaven.

### **10. Under whose leadership did Israel eventually gain control of its borders and expand them?**

It was not until the ascension to power of King David and his son Solomon that adequate control was established over Canaan and the boundaries were extended through military prowess, political alliances, and wise administration.

### **CONCLUSION:**

The Bible is an account of God's pursuit of His lost children. It is also the story of humanity's flight from God and continual quest of other gods.

Our society embraces the worship of a surprising array of other gods. We see open worship of the gods of the occult and the pagan deities of nature. We see the worship of sports and entertainment. We see the worship of technology and of materialism. Our generations are not pursuing a single false god but many!

The Bible labels such vain pursuit as idolatry. Today's lesson gives the inevitable results. First, we kindle the anger of God (Judges 2:12). Second, we suffer the withdrawal of God's blessings (2:14). Third, God begins to oppose us or may even fight against us (2:15). But, fourth, God sends a rescuer (2:16). As Christians, we realize that this gets to the core of the gospel. We have strayed in sin, incurred the wrath of God, and experienced the withdrawal of His blessings. Our deliverer, Jesus Christ the Savior, rescues us from much more than national peril. He wants to save us, individually, from sin and the curse of eternal death.

### **Prayer:**

Mighty God, we marvel at Your eternal consistency. You always keep Your promises. May we be faithful and receive promised blessings rather than curses. If we are caught in the downward spiral of sin, please, dear God, intervene in our lives and rescue us as Your judges delivered Israel. We pray this in the name of Your mighty Son, Jesus, amen.

**Thought to Remember:**

Those of each new generation must build a relationship of faith and obedience with God.

**Anticipating Next Week's Lesson: "God Leads Through Deborah"** Study Judges 4:1-24.

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