

Judges

Chapter 2

Israel's Disobedience

Now the angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, “I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. 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 break down their altars.’ But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done? 3 So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you.” 4 As soon as the angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the people of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept. 5 And they called the name of that place Bochim. And they sacrificed there to the LORD.

2:1–5 Because Israel had not zealously laid claim to the land as the Lord had directed (see 1:27–36), he withdrew his helping hand. On this note the first half of the introduction ends. Although the actual time of the Lord’s rebuke is not indicated, it was probably early in the period of the judges and may even have been connected with the event in Jos 9 (or possibly Jos 18:1–3). (CSB)

2:1 *angel of the LORD.* The role of the angel of the Lord in this passage parallels that of the unnamed prophet in 6:8–10 and the word of the Lord in 10:11–14, calling his people to account. (CSB)

went up from Gilgal to Bochim. In Jsh 5:13–15, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joshua to announce the upcoming conquest of the land. The angel now reappears to remind Israel that the campaign begun on a triumphant note is in danger of failure. (TLSB)

Gilgal. The place where Israel first became established in the land under Joshua (see Jos 4:19–5:12). (CSB)

On the west bank of the Jordan River, to the east of Jericho. (TLSB)

out from Egypt. The theme of Exodus, frequently referred to as the supreme evidence of God’s redemptive love for his people (see Ex 20:2). (CSB)

What follows is classic covenant language, as the Lord reviews His saving acts on Israel’s behalf. (TLSB)

2:2 *make no covenant.* To have done so would have broken their covenant with the Lord (see Ex 23:32). (CSB)

After reviewing the Lord’s kindness, covenant formulas list the obedience the Lord asked for in response. (TLSB)

2:3 *I will not drive them out.* The Lord would repay the Israelites with exactly what their actions allowed. The presence of these peoples and their gods would become “thorns” and “a snare”—painful burdens and treacherous temptations to their spiritual well-being. (TLSB)

2:4 *lifted up their voices and wept.* Not necessarily a sign of true repentance. Any genuine repentance at Bochim was short-lived. (TLSB)

2:5 *Bochim*. Apparently near Gilgal. (TLSB)

sacrificed. To their credit, the people offered sacrifices. This was done at the tabernacle, now located at Shiloh (Jsh 18:1); the distance there was not great. (TLSB)

2:1–5 Israel’s failure to drive out its Canaanite opponents is not caused by military weakness but rather by spiritual weakness. Because of spiritual weakness, believers today also experience suffering, disappointments, and even death. Yet the Lord faithfully calls us to repentance amid our sufferings. He suffered for our sins and renews us by the Gospel. • O Lord, “make us glad for as many days as You have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil” (Ps 90:15). Amen. (TLSB)

The Death of Joshua

6 When Joshua dismissed the people, the people of Israel went each to his inheritance to take possession of the land. **7** And 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 work that the LORD had done for Israel. **8** And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of 110 years. **9** And they buried him within the boundaries of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash. **10** And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel.

2:6–3:6 The second half of the introduction continues the narrative of Jos 24:28–31. It is a preliminary survey of the accounts narrated in Jdg 3:7–16:31, showing that Israel’s first centuries in the promised land are a recurring cycle of apostasy, oppression, cries of distress and gracious deliverance. The author reminds Israel that she will enjoy God’s promised rest in the promised land only when she is loyal to him and to his covenant. (CSB)

2:7 *all the days of Joshua*. A reminder of the great beginning of conquest under Joshua and his peers (e.g., Jsh 5:13–6:21; 8:1–29; 10:29–11:23). Luther noted that when a godly nation loses its reverence for God, “another nation far worse and more godless takes its place.” Though people may remain outwardly religious, “they devise acts of worship that are horrible monstrosities.” Israel succumbed to “loathsome idolatry” in the worship of the Baals, of Ashtaroah, and of Molech (AE 8:131–32). (TLSB)

2:8 *servant of the LORD*. Joshua is identified as the Lord’s official representative. (CSB)

2:10–15 The Lord withdraws his help because of Israel’s apostasy. He “sells” the people he had “bought” (Ex 15:16) and redeemed (Ex 15:13; cf. Ps 74:2). (CSB)

2:10 *who knew neither the LORD... Israel*. They had no direct experience of the Lord’s acts (see Ex 1:8). (CSB)

The author anticipates even worse trouble because the families had failed to teach the faith to their children, as God called them to do. (TLSB)

2:6–10 The Israelites know who the Lord is, but they no longer experience His blessed presence among them. Despite Israel’s favored history, paganism is never far from the surface. Where the Law shows us our sin, the Gospel shows us the Father’s loving heart in Jesus. He cures our spiritual blindness and leads us to seek Him and worship Him with new hearts. • “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.... Restore to me the joy of Your salvation” (Ps 51:10, 12). Amen. (TLSB)

Israel's Unfaithfulness

11 And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals. 12 And they abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the LORD to anger. 13 They abandoned the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroath. 14 So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them. And he sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. 15 Whenever they marched out, the hand of the LORD was against them for harm, as the LORD had warned, and as the LORD had sworn to them. And they were in terrible distress.

2:11 *did what wasevil in the eyes of the LORD.* The particular evil of worshipping the false gods of their neighbors. (TLSB)

Baals. The many local forms of this Canaanite deity. (CSB)

2:12 *other gods.* Others called their gods by different names, but their beliefs and worship practices were similar The Lord is a personal being, not a mere inanimate force or divine principle. He loves us, eagerly desires fellowship with us, is outraged at our sin, and has spared no expense to restore us to fellowship with Him. (TLSB)

2:13 *Baal.* Means “lord.” Baal, the god worshiped by the Canaanites and Phoenicians, was variously known to them as the son of Dagon and the son of El. In Aram (Syria) he was called Hadad and in Babylonia Adad. Believed to give fertility to the womb and life-giving rain to the soil, he is pictured as standing on a bull, a popular symbol of fertility and strength (see 1Ki 12:28). The storm cloud was his chariot, thunder his voice, and lightning his spear and arrows. The worship of Baal involved sacred prostitution and sometimes even child sacrifice (see Jer 19:5). The stories of Elijah and Elisha (1Ki 17–2Ki 13), as well as many other OT passages, directly or indirectly protest Baalism (e.g., Ps 29:3–9; 68:1–4, 32–34; 93:1–5; 97:1–5; Jer 10:12–16; 14:22; Hos 2:8, 16–17; Am 5:8). (CSB)

Ashtoreths. Female deities such as Ashtoreth (consort of Baal) and Asherah (consort of El, the chief god of the Canaanite pantheon). Ashtoreth was associated with the evening star and was the beautiful goddess of war and fertility. She was worshiped as Ishtar in Babylonia and as Athtart in Aram. To the Greeks she was Astarte or Aphrodite, and to the Romans, Venus. Worship of the Ashtoreths involved extremely lascivious practices (1Ki 14:24; 2Ki 23:7). (CSB)

2:15 *against them for harm.* The hand of the Lord, which had richly blessed them, would now be turned against them. (TLSB)

2:11–15 Israel’s sad reversal of fortune is more than a coincidence. They made God their enemy because of their unfaithfulness. Without sincere faith, it is impossible to please God and rightly receive His blessings. God exposes our faulty motives so that He can bring us to a greater appreciation of His grace. • Dear Lord, direct our hearts in sincerity so that we receive Your blessings with grateful hearts. Amen. (TLSB)

The LORD Raises Up Judges

16 Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. 17 Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they whored after other gods and bowed down to them. They soon turned aside from the way in which their fathers had walked, who had obeyed

the commandments of the LORD, and they did not do so. 18 Whenever the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge, and he saved them from 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 afflicted and oppressed them. 19 But whenever the judge died, they turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them. They did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways. 20 So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he said, “Because this people have transgressed my covenant that I commanded their fathers and have not obeyed my voice, 21 I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died, 22 in order to test Israel by them, whether they will take care to walk in the way of the LORD as their fathers did, or not.” 23 So the LORD left those nations, not driving them out quickly, and he did not give them into the hand of Joshua.

2:16–19 The Lord was merciful to his people in times of distress, sending deliverers to save them from oppression. But Israel continually forgot these saving acts, just as she had those he had performed through Moses and Joshua. (CSB)

2:16 *judges*. There were six major judges (Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah and Samson) and six minor ones (Shamgar, Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon and Abdon). (CSB)

Hbr *shophetim*. Not officers of law courts, but temporary military saviors for their people. Unlike priests and kings, they did not come to their office because of tribal or family background; the Lord raised them up. (TLSB)

2:17 *whored after other gods*. Since the Hebrew for Baal (meaning “lord”) was also used by women to refer to their husbands, it is understandable that the metaphor of adultery was commonly used in connection with Israelite worship of Baal (see Hos 2:2–3, 16–17). (CSB)

Faith in God is never mere intellectual agreement to doctrinal statements; it always involves trust and a living relationship. (See p 2016.) Unbelief is unfaithfulness to God and abandonment of His faithful promises. Devotion to the Baals included various practices in which Baal’s worshipers “prostituted” themselves. Cf Hos 4:14. (TLSB)

2:18 *groaning ... oppressed*. The language of the Egyptian bondage (see Ex 2:24; 3:9; 6:5). (CSB)

God responded to the people’s prayers, even though they were offered selfishly or from shallow motives. (TLSB)

2:20–23 The Lord decided to leave the remaining nations to test Israel’s loyalty. (CSB)

2:22 *test Israel by them*. The Lord protected the people, even though they would fail the test of faithfulness. (TLSB)

2:16–23 Unfortunately, Israel’s repentance does not last long. Yet even in these dark times, God does not withdraw His mercy from His people but raises up a series of champions to be their “saviors.” God does not forgive us because of our faith—as if faith were a good work to make up for all we have done wrong. God forgives us entirely for the sake of and through the merits of our Savior, Jesus (Rm 5:17–19). • O Lord, grant us the rhythm of repentance and forgiveness in our day-to-day lives. Grant also sincerity and faith through Christ, our Savior. Amen. (TLSB)