

Judges

Chapter 2

The Angel of the Lord at Bokim

The angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bokim and said, “I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land that I swore to give to your forefathers. I said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you,² and you shall not make a covenant with the people of this land, but you shall break down their altars.’ Yet you have disobeyed me. Why have you done this?³ Now therefore I tell you that I will not drive them out before you; they will be thorns in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you.”⁴ When the angel of the LORD had spoken these things to all the Israelites, the people wept aloud,⁵ and they called that place Bokim. There they offered sacrifices 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.* See note on Ge 16:7. 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 of 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)

swore to give. See Ge 15:18; see also note on Heb 6:13. (CSB)

2:2 *not make a 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)

Disobedience and Defeat

6 After Joshua had dismissed the Israelites, they went to take possession of the land, each to his own inheritance. **7** The people served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel. **8** Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of a hundred and ten. **9** And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Heres in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. **10** After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. **11** Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. **12** They forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They provoked the LORD to anger **13** because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. **14** In his anger against Israel the LORD handed them over to raiders who plundered them. He sold them to their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist. **15** Whenever Israel went out to fight, the hand of the LORD was against them to defeat them, just as he had sworn to them. They were in great distress. **16** Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders. **17** Yet they would not listen to their judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them. Unlike their fathers, they quickly turned from the way in which their fathers had walked, the way of obedience to the LORD's commands. **18** Whenever the LORD raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the LORD had compassion on them as they groaned under those who oppressed and afflicted them. **19** But when the judge died, the people

returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their fathers, following other gods and serving and worshiping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways.²⁰ Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and said, “Because this nation has violated the covenant that I laid down for their forefathers and has not listened to me,²¹ I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died.²² I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the LORD and walk in it as their forefathers did.”²³ The LORD had allowed those nations to remain; he did not drive them out at once by giving them into the hands of Joshua.

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 (see Introduction: Literary Features). 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)

2:6 *take possession of the land.* See note on 1:1. (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 Ashtaroth, and of Molech (AE 8:131–32). (TLSB)

2:8 *servant of the LORD.* Joshua is identified as the Lord’s official representative (see notes on Ex 14:31; Ps 18 title; Isa 41:8–9; 42:1). (CSB)

a hundred and ten. For the significance of this number see note on Ge 50:26. (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 *gathered to their fathers.* See Ge 15:15; see also note on Ge 25:8. (CSB)

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)

2:11 *did evil in the eyes of the LORD.* The same expression is used in 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6. (CSB)

The particular evil of worshiping the false gods of their neighbors. (TLSB)

Baals. The many local forms of this Canaanite deity (see note on v. 13). (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)

provoked the LORD to anger. See Dt 4:25; see also note on Zec 1:2. (CSB)

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)

2:14 *handed them over to.* The same expression is used in 6:1; 13:1. (CSB)

sold them. The same expression is used in 3:8; 4:2; 10:7. (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)

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*. See Introduction: Title. 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 *prostituted themselves*. 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 *groaned ... 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)