



### 03 Message Judges Chapter 2 – The Choice to Follow the Lord is the choice to let Him lead?

*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. <sup>2</sup> 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? <sup>3</sup> 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.' "<sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> Then they called the name of that place Bochim; and they sacrificed there to the LORD. <sup>6</sup> And when Joshua had dismissed the people, the children of Israel went each to his own inheritance to possess the land. (Judges 2:1-6, NKJV).*

Last Wednesday night we talked about a movement towards disobedience. Remember that most scholars think this reference in verse 1 was the pre-incarnate Christ (a Christophany). God was telling them that they had broken their end of the bargain, and because of that the Lord said, "I won't drive out the people of the land."

When they heard this angel of the Lord, the people wept. I think they were probably genuine in their weeping, but there are actually people who can fake crying. Fake crying doesn't really come from the spirit. It is a technique of manipulation. Perhaps you've met people who can turn crying off and on like a kitchen faucet. The people in the text appeared to be sorry for situation. But they might have just been "sorry that they got caught." That's a worldly sorry that we've all seen when a politician expresses "sorrow" for something they've been caught doing. Godly sorrow calls out for true repentance which is not only a change of mind but a change of direction. We see from their subsequent actions that the nation of Israel was not truly repentant. Again and again in the book of Judges we will see them crying out to God to deliver them from their present misery.

There are three words in the New Testament that give us the full meaning of repentance. The verb **metamelomai** denotes a change of mind that produces regret but

not necessarily a change of heart or action. This is the word used describing the guilt felt by Judas after he betrayed Jesus. Secondly, the verb **metanoeo** means to “change one’s mind and purpose as a result of knowledge.” The related noun is **metanoia** which denotes true biblical repentance which includes: (1) a sense of awareness of one’s own guilt, sinfulness, and helplessness, (2) taking hold of God’s mercy in Jesus, (3) a change of attitude and action regarding sin (which gets you turned in another direction), and (4) a radical and persistent pursuit of holy living in which you walk in obedience to God and his commands (1 Peter 1:13-16; 2 Timothy 2:19-22). We do not see this kind of repentance in the actions of Israel throughout the book of Judges.

*<sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> Now Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died when he was one hundred and ten years old. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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. (Judges 2:7-10, NKJV).*

Wow. It is amazing that an entire generation arose that DID NOT KNOW THE LORD NOR THE WORK WHICH HE HAD DONE. We are reminded again and again that God has no grandchildren. Everyone of us has a choice to accept or reject the Lord. It doesn’t say that they didn’t know “about the Lord.” They probably knew all about Him, but knowing the Lord is far more than just “knowing about the Lord.” It is realizing your own spiritual need and letting that be filled by Jesus and His finished work on the cross. Being raised in the knowledge of the Lord is not “knowing the Lord.” “Knowing the Lord” speaks of an intimate relationship with the Lord. It’s a “knowing” such as the Bible describes as the intimacy between a husband and a wife.

Being able to quote the bible doesn’t mean that you “know the Lord” in an intimate way. As I’ve explained, when you believe and receive the gift that Jesus paid it all for you, you receive the first deposit of your inheritance by receiving the Holy Spirit. You then get to know God by spending time in His word and spending time in prayer. Your life can become, in many ways, an on-going conversation with Him. The Holy Spirit lives within you to comfort and guide you. Submission to the Spirit is much of what Paul the Apostle is talking about in Romans chapter 12 in which he implores us to present ourselves as a “living sacrifice” that is holy and acceptable. After you’ve walked with the Lord for a long time, you gain a feel for what’s consistent with God’s thinking even if you don’t find the specific answer for your specific problem in the Bible. It is a matter of

becoming “brain washed” so to speak as your thinking is bathed in the truth of God’s Word.

We can learn about Him and know His character by spending time with Him. When you have the Holy Spirit and you open His Word, your mind is bathed in His thinking. We must encourage our kids, our nephews, our nieces, and any young person in the sphere of our influence to help them know the Lord. They are not going to get all that they need at youth group. It’s not just the youth pastor’s job. We should all do what we can to make sure that they don’t leave this group here at Union Grove without knowing not only *about* God, but *how* to know Him in a deeper and better way.

The text tells us that this second generation in Israel made their own choice to reject Him. We can lead and teach our children, but at the end of the day, they have a choice of whether or not they’re going to know and serve the Lord. We have close friends that did EVERYTHING they could do to raise their children in the Lord, but several of the kids have just rejected the Lord. In the end, the choice to know and follow the Lord is an individual choice, but we should do all that we can to influence that choice in the the young people within our scope of influence. Let’s read on.



*<sup>11</sup> Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals; <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> They forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> 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. (Judges 2:11-15, NKJV).*

So, why did they turn to Baal? Serving Baal was all about serving self and one’s own sexual desires. Does that sound familiar in American society today? Their belief was that to stimulate the productivity of the ground etc, the gods needed to be stimulated and aroused. Those who followed Baal would go to a “temple” and have sex with male and female temple prostitutes in front of statues of Baal and Ashtarte. The idea was that the male and female gods would watch and get aroused and somehow they also would then have their own sexual experience that would stimulate the crops and bring

productivity to the land. It was all just superstition, but notice how it centered on self and on pleasure. Sin always appeals to our flesh.

We often raise our kids to know the Lord, but the world gets the upper hand and wins out because it appeals to their flesh. Many who were raised knowing "about God" are living in sin. They've seen what the world has to offer and they've chosen it. It becomes evidenced by those engaged in sexual relationships outside of marriage. It is the pull of the pleasures of addictions of the flesh that feel good for a moment, but then dominate a person. When we choose the world there are always consequences. It was no different for the Nation of Israel. This cycle of sin will end up repeating itself seven times throughout the Book of Judges.

The wickedness of Israel took them into a terrible place. It took them into bondage. In fact, the name "Baal" itself means "dominator." God NEVER dominates. He LIBERATES! God wasn't just punishing them to hurt them. Rather, God was trying to get their attention to understand where their choices, passions, and sins had taken them. Likewise, when we choose to not follow the Lord, He allows the natural consequences of our sin to take us into defeat and bondage. God allows those things to get our attention. The writer of Hebrews tells us that even believers are chastened when we get outside of the will of God. *"For whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."* (Hebrews 12:6, NKJV).

I think it's interesting that their lack of holiness resulted in them being powerless against their enemies. My friend Don Cartledge, a pastor I've known for years, introduced me to the idea of there being power in holiness and I think he is right. God was just doing exactly what He had told them He would do in their disobedience. "Terrible distress" is one of the best things that can happen to a disobedient believer. I've often prayed "God make this person miserable in their sin and do it quickly so they will come back to You." Sometimes we have to be brought to the ends of ourselves to come back home to Him. It is very difficult to share the Lord with someone in the intense pleasure of their sin. I remember John Echols used to tell me, "The problem with sin is that it is fun!" What John didn't follow up with is that it may be fun for a moment but misery is the end for a believer caught up in sin.

"Sin is enjoyable for a season" but then it inevitably sets in and makes a person miserable. It becomes a prison of a person's own making. Hopefully, in the depths of misery, a person will call out to the Lord for deliverance. When you are a child of God, He loves you. Don't ever buy into the idea that just because He loves you, He is always pleased with you. Look at this in a positive way. He tells us that we can be transformed by the "renewing of our minds," thereby proving what is good, acceptable, and the

perfect will of God (Romans 12:2).

*<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, the LORD raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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. (Judges 2:16-19, NKJV).*

God hears the groaning of someone crying out to Him. And over and over again in the Book of Judges, God is moved to pity Israel. Unfortunately, each time they were delivered, they fell deeper into sin and they wouldn't give up their sin and their stubborn ways. God also hears us when we cry out to Him. As believers, all of our sins were forgiven (paid for) at the cross, but the sweet fellowship we enjoy is often disrupted when we walk in and sow to the flesh. That fellowship is restored by simply admitting to God that your thoughts, words, or deeds are sin. I do this by admitting it and thanking Him that it has been taken care of at the cross (1 John 1:9). It is not so much that He comes back to me (He never left me) as it is that I come back to Him.

*<sup>20</sup> 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, <sup>21</sup> I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, <sup>22</sup> 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." <sup>23</sup> Therefore the LORD left those nations, without driving them out immediately; nor did He deliver them into the hand of Joshua. (Judges 2:20-23, NKJV).*

So God left the nations in the land as a test to see if Israel was going to follow Him or follow the gods of the surrounding nations. God tests us as well (1 Peter 1:6-7, 2 Corinthians 5:7, 2 Corinthians 12:9). Testing is not the same thing as tempting. God doesn't purposefully put things in front of us to make us sin. When we were raising our kids, Sandy and I purposefully gave them some freedom to be tested (or tried) to help them figure out who they were in the Lord. This gave them the opportunity for us to correct them and protect them. We pretty much let them bring home anyone they wanted to bring home, so we could figure out how they would be swayed.

Are you going to follow the Lord when it is hard? Jesus said that we're to take the narrow way that's not an easy way at all. It can be difficult and challenging but it is JOY to follow the Lord. And when we are in harness with Him, the burden is light (Matthew 11:30).

I have to choose to follow the Lord daily. I may decide to "follow Jesus" but unfortunately I just can't decide to do that once and for all. My flesh gets in the way. Each day will bring its own trials, but He is sufficient. His grace is sufficient. I awake. I thank Him that once again I am alive, and I make that choice again to say, "Lord, move me today with your Holy Spirit to be centered in your will. Lord, this day wherever you lead I'll go." Will you come and go with me?

Let us pray.

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