

*DHW*

## BIBLE STUDY CLASS

### LESSON 2

### JUDGES 2

#### INTRODUCTION

Chapter one flashed back to the time when Judah claimed the land inheritance allotted to them, and also sadly recorded that the rest of the tribes had not fully complied with the commands of the LORD their God that they should destroy or drive out the Canaanites. In the opening verses of chapter two, the LORD expressed His displeasure and disappointment with Israel. Under the leadership of Joshua, the children of Israel obeyed and stayed true to the LORD. But the present generation forgot about the LORD, and became the “prodigal nation.” The LORD gave them over to the ways which Israel chose to go even though they were self-destructive. The LORD permitted this so that Israel would learn her lesson the hard way. However, the LORD would be true to His covenant-promise and in His own time and ways, Israel would be brought back to Him. In the meantime, the restraint was removed and the slippery slide of Israel’s spiritual decline began. Time and again, the children of Israel then went through a cycle of rebellion, retribution, repentance, restoration, and rest. They enjoyed peace for a period and when the judge who ruled them died, they slid back to their sinful ways.

The following outline helps in our study:

- a) The LORD visits and rebukes the children of Israel (2:1-5)
- b) A new generation emerges that does not know the LORD (2:6-10)
- c) The children of Israel break the covenant of the LORD (2:11-13)
- d) The LORD expresses His wrath against Israel (2:14-15)
- e) The LORD keeps His covenant-promise with Israel (2:16-18)
- f) The LORD determines to test Israel’s integrity (2:19-23)

The faithfulness of the covenant-keeping God and the unfaithfulness of His covenant-breaking people begin with this chapter.

#### STUDY THE WORD

##### The LORD Visits and Rebukes the Children of Israel

An “angel of the LORD” came up from Gilgal to Bochim (v.1). This was an appearance of the “angel of the LORD.” The precise nature of the appearance is not described, except that it was in human form. The first identity of the “angel of the LORD” can be correctly inferred from what He said. He did not say, “God made you to go up out of Egypt . . .” but He said: “*I* made you to go up out of Egypt.” He used the first person throughout: “*I* swear. . . and *I* said, *I* will never break *my* covenant with you. . . . have not obeyed *my* voice: . . . wherefore *I* also said, *I* will not drive them out from

before you” (italics for emphasis, mine). This means that the “angel of the LORD” was none other than God Himself! And, to be more precise He should be identified as the pre-incarnate Christ, the Second Person of the Godhead. For the LORD to appear temporarily in human form to men must have meant that it was very important. This was certainly true of this incident.

The fact that the LORD came from Gilgal to Bochim was not a mere choice. Gilgal was a place where great and important events transpired between the LORD and the children of Israel. It was the first place where the children of Israel set foot on the Promised Land proper after the miraculous crossing over the Jordan River (Joshua 4:14-17). It was there that the LORD told Joshua to erect a memorable pillar of twelve stones (Joshua 4:1-8). It was there when the LORD told them to circumcise the men, and they obeyed, and after which they renewed the observance of the Passover. It was there that the LORD Himself appeared to Joshua as “captain of the host of the LORD” promising victory in his conquest of Canaan (Joshua 5:14-15). Gilgal was a place of blessing and victory.

Bochim (pronounce, *bo-keem*) means “weeping.” After the LORD rebuked the children of Israel, they wept. The LORD reminded them of their deliverance from bondage in Egypt, and the fulfilment of His promise to bring them to the land which they now had. The LORD reassured them that He will never break His covenant-promise with them. The LORD also reminded

them of His commands that they should not have any treaty with the Canaanites and also to break down their pagan altars. The LORD rebuked them for their disobedience to His commands. The LORD then pronounced His judgment upon them that He would not drive the inhabitants of the land, but they would be as “thorns in your sides” and that their gods would be a snare to them (v. 3)<sup>1</sup> Note that the charge was not about the failure of the children of Israel to drive out the Canaanites because that was God’s work, but it was about their disobedience to His commands. In view of the fact that the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD, God did not turn His back on His people. The LORD appeared to them at Bochim not to tell them He was going to break His covenant with them, but to rebuke them so that they would repent and return to obey His commands.

If children of Israel chose to disobey the LORD and to live according to their own ways, that was their decision. But they had to live with the consequences of that decision. The LORD told them that He would not drive the Canaanites out of the land. The LORD used two images to describe the consequences of their disobedience and unbelief. The inhabitants of the land would be “as thorns in your sides” and “their gods shall be a snare” to them. A thorn does

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<sup>1</sup> The LORD just reiterated the command He gave at Mount Sinai (Exodus 23:32): Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor with their gods. 33 They shall not dwell in thy land, lest they make thee sin against me: for if thou serve their gods, it will surely be a snare unto thee.

not immediately cause serious damage, but it is a constant irritant that detracts and wears a person down. A snare catches a person off guard when he least expects it, imprisoning him suddenly and completely.<sup>2</sup> The children of Israel had to experience the eventual consequences of compromise.

When the people realized what the LORD was saying, they began to weep. They then offered sacrifices to the LORD. The children of Israel had a second chance provided their weeping and the offering of sacrifices were the expression of true and real repentance. The children of Israel did the things that God expected them to do—weep in repentance, and offer sacrifices to the LORD. But they would continue to do what they had been doing. Outwardly they showed a form of godliness that paid lip service to the LORD God, but denied the power thereof. God cannot be mocked for a man shall reap what he sows.

### **A New Generation Emerges that Does Not Know the LORD**

This section looks back to the time when Joshua was the military and spiritual leader of Israel. The land had been conquered and the children of Israel went to the portion of land which had been allotted to them. The people served the LORD during the time when Joshua was with them. This is a great testimony of Joshua. It does not refer to his military skill as a strategist, or his gifted administrative skill as an organizer. But it testified to his effort to keep the children of Israel

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<sup>2</sup> Harris, Brown & Moore, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, p.152.

in the place of God's blessing, for the people served the LORD all the days of his life. This was also true of the elders who outlived Joshua and who had witnessed all the stupendous and miraculous works of the LORD that He did for Israel. Joshua died at the ripe old age of one hundred and ten, and was buried in Timnath-heres in the mount of Ephraim. All that generation who had been with him had also passed away.

Now a new generation of Israelites emerged who did not know the LORD. They did not also know the works which He had done for Israel. This intimates that there was a breakdown in transferring of the knowledge of the LORD their God to the new generation of people. The priests who lived among the twelve tribes had the responsibility and duty to teach the people the "whole counsel of God."<sup>3</sup> The fathers of the people had the sacred duty of reaffirming the work of the priests.<sup>4</sup> Apparently they had failed to do it. This new generation had forgotten Israel's basic confessional statement of faith: "Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God is one LORD" (Deuteronomy 6:4). The apostasy of the children of Israel had nothing to do with the geography and economy of the land, but it was that they forgot the LORD their God. They compromised with the

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<sup>3</sup>Leviticus 10:11 And that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses.

<sup>4</sup> Deuteronomy 6:7 And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

inhabitants of the land because they had not been reminded of God's truth and His holiness. They had become complacent about the only One, Living and True God. They had forgotten how to walk in fellowship with Him. They took many things for granted. It took only three generations from Moses to the present for the children of Israel to suffer from "spiritual amnesia" and to surrender their rich religious heritage.

### **The Children of Israel Break the Covenant of the LORD**

The children of Israel's apostasy became full bloom. They were not truly repentant when they wept and offered sacrifices before the LORD. Their repentance was superficial. And Israel sinned "in the sight of the LORD." This was the height of disrespect for the LORD. They did the very thing that the LORD had warned them not to do. They had been commanded not to worship and serve other gods and even to bow down before them. The children of Israel were guilty of these very sins, and these deeds were "evil" in the sight of God. They worshipped and served Baalim.<sup>5</sup>

The children of Israel forsook the LORD their God and followed other gods. They were insane to commit this abominable sin. The LORD had delivered them from Egypt where they endured the most grievous oppression, and were subjected to the most degrading servitude from which

they could never have rescued themselves. And the LORD with a display of stupendous power, justice and mercy, delivered them. And they forgot and forsook Him! It was insane on their part. They "followed" the gods of the people round about them, and "bowed themselves" to them. What could be more foolish! The gods were idols, the products of a craftsman, made from wood, stone, or iron. *They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them* (Psalm 115:5-8). When the new generation of Israelites did not know the LORD apostasy sets in. The Canaanite gods were attractive to them. They could see the idols. The idols were placed on altars high above the ground. The Canaanite gods appealed to their senses. Baal was the sun-god their protector. Ashtaroth was the Canaanite goddess, the consort of Baal. Ashtaroth was the goddess of fertility and sex. They appealed to their senses.

### **The LORD Expresses His Wrath against Israel**

The children of Israel provoked the LORD to anger because the LORD is a holy and jealous God. The LORD pronounced His judgment upon the children of Israel. The LORD delivered them into the hands of the raiders who would periodically attack and plunder their goods. The LORD sold them to their enemies. They

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<sup>5</sup> The name 'Baalim' is the plural form of 'Baal'. It means 'lord', or 'master.' It is the general name of the gods of the Canaanites. Normally, the word is used with another word to give a more specific meaning, like, Baal-peor, Baal-zebub, Baal-berith, Baal-zephon.

were to be their masters instead they were now subjected to them. They were no longer strong and mighty as when the LORD had been with them. They became weak and a prey to the people around them. Wherever they went, the LORD would not bless them. The hand of the LORD which once protected and gave them power over their enemies, was now turned against them. The LORD used the Canaanites on all sides to chastise the children of Israel until they acknowledged Him and cried to Him for deliverance. The LORD was not only *not* with them but was also against them.

#### **The LORD Keeps His Covenant-Promise**

“Nevertheless” is a word of relief in the present context. It introduced the thought of the mercy of the LORD towards His people. The LORD raised “judges” who would deliver His people from their raiders and enemies. These “judges” were like the modern judges. They were chosen and specially appointed by the LORD to deliver the children of Israel from their adversaries. The LORD their God is both merciful and long-suffering, not desiring that any should perish, but they all would come to repentance—about turn and turn to Him.

And yet the children of Israel would not listen to the judges. They persisted in “whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them.” Worshipping gods other than the LORD God is termed as spiritual adultery, fornication, and whoredom. Israel was guilty of committing these sins against the LORD. They

deserved the death penalty. But “it repented the LORD” (v.18). The LORD changed His purpose not to punish them because of “their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them.” They cried to the LORD to deliver them from their enemies. And for the duration of the governorship of the judges, the people followed the LORD. And when the judge died, they returned to their old corrupt ways. They went back to worship and serve Baal and Ashtaroth, and to bow themselves to them. They were simply a stubborn people.

#### **The LORD Determines to Test Israel’s Integrity**

Rebellion quickly occurred again. Their evil practices and ways were even more corrupt than their fathers (v.19). The LORD was angry again towards the children of Israel because, once again, they sinned against Him by breaking His covenant, and disobeying Him. The LORD resolved not to drive out the remaining inhabitants of the land which Joshua had left. Instead, the LORD allowed these people to live among the Israelites in order to test them whether they would keep the way of the LORD and walk therein (v.21). The father of the prodigal son gave to his son all the inheritance due to him. His son left him. It hurts the father but the hope of the father is that his son might learn the truth and return to him. The son has to learn the truth in the hard way. The LORD is doing the same to Israel His chosen people. They had rejected and followed the ways of the Canaanites. They had to learn the hard way to return to the LORD.

### PRACTICAL VALUE

The special revelation given about the LORD our God is that He is a long-suffering and merciful God. God Himself assured that He will never, *never* break His covenant-promise which He made with the children of Israel. If Israel is faithless, He will still remain faithful. Now, how do we know that our sins have been forgiven? We know because God declares it in His Word. How can we know that we have eternal life and a place in His everlasting Kingdom? We know because God said so in His Word. God said it and that settles it. He never goes back on His Word. We can completely trust His Word. There is however one important thing which we need to ensure. While God is true to His Word, are we true to our confession about God and all that He says in His Word about us?

Gary Inrig in his commentary on this chapter, shares about the second –generation experience which he names it the Second-Generation Syndrome. He says the second generation has a natural tendency to accept the status quo and to lose the vision of the first generation. The parents' fervour for the Lord Jesus Christ becomes the children's formalism and the grandchildren's apathy. This syndrome is illustrated in the book of Judges. Already in this chapter, when Joshua and all the elders who were his contemporaries passed away, the next generation who knew not the LORD began to stray away and compromise with the beliefs and practices of the other peoples that were diametrically against the LORD their God. Sin has a way of de-sensitizing

our mind, heart and will. If it is left to its encroaching influence, the person would gradually and eventually self-destruct.

We thank God that He is Sovereign. Sometimes He allows us to make our own choices including those choices that would destroy us. He is still in control. He lets us go through the pain and suffering so that we will learn what is good and acceptable to God. He accomplishes His purpose in this way. So it was with the children of Israel. God allowed the Canaanites to be a thorn in their sides and a snare in their path so that they would learn that the LORD was their most powerful, just, holy, loving, and caring God.

For the church to have mature believers, its members must know God and His will through diligent and intense study of His Word. We have read how the “new generation” of Israelites fell away and sinned against God, and suffered pain and great loss. If we the church and all her members are to be strong and to be in the favour of the LORD our God enjoying His blessings, we must be serious about studying His Word in order to know and experience Him. The pastors, elders, deacons and other leaders of the church have a sacred duty to impart the Word of God to the next generation. They must set the example. In this regard, this is also true to all parents who want their children to know God and walk in His ways.  
AMEN