

People Choose Sin

HOW CAN PEOPLE ESCAPE THE CYCLE OF SIN?

Focal Verses • JUDGES 2:10–19

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will: **RECOGNIZE** that God gives us choices to follow Him or not; **REFLECT** on how human sinfulness leaves us in need of God's help; and **ASK** God to help us to obey Him.

In Focus

Everyone at the office gambled, including those who announced their belief in God. Bets were taken for college games and professional games. Marcus' coworkers regularly picked numbers to play the lottery, yet they did not understand why he refused to participate. He kept thinking about how his father had lost their home as a kid because he had gambled away his savings. He thought about the example he wanted to set for his own son as a believer. The organizer of the gambling pools cornered Marcus, stating there was no harm in supporting his favorite sports team; besides, half of the money was going to the good cause of stocking the office refrigerator with snacks.

Marcus thanked his coworker for his invitation to gamble but decided to regularly donate money for the items he consumed from the office refrigerator instead. On some occasions, he also brought in items that he had purchased to add to the office's snack supply. Marcus did not judge what the other believers were doing. He simply established an example in the workplace for them to follow if they chose to.

Marcus felt that he should not gamble but instead live out his faith in the workplace. He did not force his beliefs on others, but he lived out what he believed was right.

Was Marcus making a godly choice or was he being too extreme? How do Marcus' actions reflect his witness as a believer in the workplace?

SCAN FOR VIDEO



Keep in Mind

“And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel” (Judges 2:10, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV **Judges 2:10** And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.

11 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim:

12 And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger.

13 And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth.

14 And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies.

15 Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the

LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed.

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.

The People, Places, and Times

Bochim. The name (which means “weeping”) of the place where the angel rebuked the Israelites for breaking their covenant with God (Judges 2:5, NLT).

Baal. The deity of fertility storms and rains and thought to control vegetation and agriculture.

Ashtoreth. The name of the goddess the Israelites chose to worship instead of God. Ashtoreth was believed to be the mother goddess of love, war, and fertility. She was also known as Astarte or Ishtar (1 Kings 11:5–8).

Judges. Leaders selected by God to deliver and guide the Israelites to remain obedient to their covenant with God.

Background

The book of Judges begins with the success and failures of Israel’s military campaigns in Canaan (the Promised Land). The new generation of Israelites, the generation that was in the land of Canaan after the death of Joshua, receives a sudden appearance from the angel of the Lord, who pronounces judgment on the new generation of chosen people for their disobedience and unfaithfulness. The Israelites’ disobedience included not totally removing the Canaanites from the land. God noted their unfaithfulness to the Living God and their increasing propensity to worship other gods—their increasing propensity to be disobedient.

Evidence of God's anger is seen when God hands over the Israelites to their enemies. Yet God still shows His mercy and compassion toward His chosen people. He raises up judges to help deliver His people from their enemies and bring His chosen people back to a loving, covenant-keeping God.

At-A-Glance

1. The Israelites' Unfaithfulness to God (Judges 2:10–14)
2. God's Punishment of the Israelites and His Mercy (vv. 15–16)
3. The Israelites' Cycle of Sin and God's Continued Mercy (vv. 17–19)

In Depth

1. The Israelites' Unfaithfulness to God (Judges 2:10–14)

The Israelites continued a pattern of abandoning their faith in the one true God, the One who led them out of Egypt. They did not learn from the mistakes of their parents and ancestors. God was the one who drowned Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea, the one who fought for their ancestors (Exodus 14:13–31, KJV), the one who made bitter waters sweet when they were thirsty (15:22–25), and the one who fed their ancestors bread from heaven (manna) when they were hungry (16:4–14). They violated the first two of the Ten Commandments: "I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (20:2–3).

Instead, they chased after other gods; they worshiped the Canaanite gods Baal and Ashtoreth. God called the Israelites' behavior evil, and He deemed what they had done as an abandonment of the one true God. Their

disobedience of God's commandments stirred His anger against the people He had chosen to represent Him to the rest of the world. God would not and did not tolerate the Israelites adding idols to their worship of Him. They could not possibly bow to an idol and still truly believe that He was the one true God. Therefore, His anger with the Israelites results in judgment on them. God gives the Israelites over to the "marauders" (their enemies, Judges 2:14). He delivers them into the power and hands of their enemies and removes His divine defense from around them.

When Israel ignored God's boundaries and chose sin, they faced the consequences for their choices. Was God fair to do this? Why or why not?

2. God's Punishment of the Israelites and His Mercy (vv. 15–16)

Every time the Israelites went out to battle their enemies, they lost. God's arms of protection were no longer around them. In fact, before God's judgment against them when they went out to battle, it was the Lord Himself who fought against their enemies. They were no match for the omnipotent (all-powerful) God. But the Israelites' disobedience demanded judgment, and God judged His chosen people. The Lord was now moving against the Israelites because they had chosen to move against God's will. They had changed sides in the battle, while God remained faithful. They had to suffer the consequences of their choices. They had to pay their own sin penalty.

How does it make you feel to imagine God moving against Israel's plans when they work against God's plans?

3. The Israelites' Cycle of Sin and God's Continued Mercy (vv. 17–19)

Even though the Israelites break their covenantal relationship with God, He remains faithful to them. Despite their disobedience

to God's commands, He still loves them and shows them mercy and compassion. Because of this love, mercy, and compassion, the Word tells us that He raises up judges who deliver the Israelites from their enemies. For a time, the judges return Israel to worshiping God. But over the long haul, God's chosen people do not listen to the judges and return to worshiping idols. The Children of Israel continue in a cycle of sin: (1) rebelling against the one true God; (2) experiencing God's punishment which involves their enemies overrunning them; (3) crying out to God for deliverance after which He raises up a God-fearing judge to deliver the Israelites from their enemies; (4) remaining loyal to God until the appointed judge's death—they were loyal as long as they were near the appointed judge; (5) forgetting about their covenant with God after the judge's death; (6) again suffering punishment because God allows their enemies to overtake them; and (7) crying out yet again to God for deliverance. In essence, the Israelites allowed what appealed to their sensual nature and more short-range benefits to steal their affection for the one true God. They were drawn to worshiping gods who did not insist that the people be morally accountable for their behavior. In fact, not only were male and female prostitution allowed in idol worship, it was encouraged as a form of worship.

Sometimes, we want what we want and want nothing to stand in our way of getting it. This kind of thinking and action can cause destruction. Following the one true God demands discipline and accountability. However, God feels compassion for the Israelites, hears their cries while they are oppressed, and provides judges who guide the Israelites back to worshiping the one true God. God's actions show that, indeed, He is a promise-keeping God. He delivers His children over and over when they choose sin and oppression. He is true to His Word.

How can we avoid the cycle of sin that judges clearly point out?

Search the Scriptures

1. Why is it relevant to have faith in God (Judges 2:11–13)?
2. Does God really become angry? Does God really punish (vv. 14–15)?
3. Why are God's love and mercy important (v. 16)?

Discuss the Meaning

We should recognize and note that God does become angry with humankind for repeated offenses of disobedience. There is no debating that He is a God of love, mercy, and compassion, but He is also a God of judgment. The Israelites experienced God's anger firsthand when God delivered them into the hands of their enemies. This loss of favor or punishment lasted until the Israelites returned back to worshiping the one true God. What is your response to the idea that God gives us choices and consequences? Do you think God still gives choices and consequences today? Why or why not?

Liberating Lesson

As with the Israelites, God has given us the opportunity to live responsibly before Him in a covenantal relationship. He allowed Adam and Eve to choose to obey Him, He did the same for the Israelites, and He does the same for us today. As we look around at the suffering in our world, much of it is due to the fact that too many people have chosen sinfulness and selfishness instead of God's will. Too many who say they are believers have chosen to go their own way. We must always remember that our own way leads us down the path of sin and destruction.

Application for Activation

Take some time this week to journal about what godly choices and self-seeking choices you

have made that stand out to you. They can be minor or major in terms of impact. How can you receive God's deliverance to disrupt any destructive cycles this year? Write about what the cycle is and what the corrective choice needs to be for you to return to God's will for you in that area of your life.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

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Say It Correctly

Ashtoreth. ASH-tuh-reth, -reth.

Astarte. -'stär-t .

Ishtar. ISH-tahr.

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 43

Numbers 5–7

Psalm 22:6–10

DAY 44

Numbers 8–10

Psalm 22:11–18

DAY 45

Numbers 11–13

Psalm 22:19–24

DAY 46

Numbers 14–15

Psalm 22:25–31

DAY 47

Numbers 16–17

Psalm 23

DAY 48

Numbers 18–20

Psalm 24:1–4

DAY 49

Numbers 21–22

Psalm 24:5–10