

Topic	Living Among Idols
Reference	Judges 2:1-23
Date	16 September 2018
Speaker	David Adams

We see the effects of the disobedience of the people of Israel. It would be so much easier and enjoyable to listen to victorious living and accounts of how people are experiencing daily the love, the joy, the peace, the meaning in life that comes from walking with God, but that's not what the Book of Judges is about.

The message of Judges is about the total opposite. The very opposite of what happens if you walk with God, we see in Judges when people don't walk with God, we see the terrible consequences that will come our way even to the people of God. When we turn our back on the one true God, the ultimate source of life and goodness, when we turn to idols we can expect problems. When we attach our loyalties to anything higher to something else other than God, we are going to be in trouble.

The Book of Judges I must say contains a lot of terrible stories. They are just stories of sin and degradation and the further you go in the Book of Judges, it seems like the further down the people go and the worse they sin. This shows how low you can go if you turn away from God. The downward spiral is evident as you read through the Book of Judges.

Now there are some interesting adventurous heroic stories in the Book of Judges. I can remember as a child really being fascinated with stories of Samson, the strong man, or the story of Gideon and how he defeated a huge army with just a few men, or the story of Deborah. But when we look at the judges, almost all of them we see that they also had some serious flaws, failure and sins in their life and some of them turned their back on God even after God had delivered them.

Why is the Book of Judges in the Bible when it has such terrible stories?

We need to see that the Bible just paint a rosy picture of heaven, it also shows the reality of sin and the effects on our lives.

The Book of Judges shows an important period of time in the history of the children of Israel, an important in salvation history. So when we look at the

chronology of the Old Testament, which is the time leading up to Jesus, we see at the very beginning was creation, God created everything, everything was good but then the first people sinned and that good relationship with God was broken and evil entered into the world, death entered into the world, sin spread to all the descendants of earth. Later we will see roughly 2000 BC God called Abraham and he said through Abraham and through his descendants or more specifically through one descendant, Jesus, He would be bringing blessing to all peoples of the world. Abraham had a son, Isaac, who had a son Jacob, Jacob had 12 sons. Jacob is also known as Israel, so his sons and their descendants known as the children of Israel. They became slaves in Egypt, God called Moses to deliver them from slavery in Egypt, He brought them to the land that he had promised Abraham and then under the leadership of Joshua the land was conquered almost but not entirely.

At Joshua's death, God speaking through Joshua told the people to go ahead and finish the process of conquest, get rid of all of the idols, get rid of the people that will be a detriment to you, bring you down and that's where we come in our study of Judges.

The period we are looking today is an important time in the salvation history because it shows what is happening after the people who have been delivered from slavery are now settled in to the promised land that God had given them.

There is another important reason why Judges is in the Bible, it is because there are some important truths that we can learn. The important truths that we can learn in the Old testament, some of the truths are good examples that we can see but some of them are bad examples and that's what we are looking at in Judges. We can learn from the mistakes of the people. Paul in writing in the New Testament, 1-Cor 10, is talking about the disobedient people of God after they have been freed from slavery in Egypt

1 Corinthians 10:5 Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased ...6 Now these things took place as **examples for us**, that we might **not desire evil** as they did. 7 **Do not be idolaters** as some of them were; ... 8 We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, ... 9 We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, ...11 Now these things happened to them as **an example**, but they were **written down for our instruction**, ... 12 Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.14 Therefore, my beloved, **flee from idolatry**.

So I think that's one reason the Book of Judges is in the Bible, is to warn us, is to help us understand what happens when we go after other gods and the Book of

Judges will help to motivate us and encourage us to turn from idols and to chose to follow God.

The text started off where the Lord is speaking to the people and he reminds them

Judges 2:1 ..."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?**

This passage was mentioned in the sermon a couple of weeks ago when we started our study on the Book of Judges and we see that in this passage God is holding the people accountable for their sin and he points out two specific types of sin; a sin of commission and a sin of omission. The sin of commission, they did something they were not supposed to do. Do not make a covenant with these people, but they did it anyway. A sin of omission, they did not do what God told them to do. Do break down their altars, but they didn't do it. If you remember from a couple of weeks ago in the sermon the end of chapter 1 gives a whole list of examples of the people not obeying God with reasons why they did not and it is almost like a span has been put on that from the Israelite point of view, saying God this is why we didn't obey, this is why we didn't run the people out, they were too strong, they make good slaves. You remember from a couple of weeks ago. The reasons that we are given, the people giving excuses to God, why they did not obey but God tells them, you disobeyed me.

The people would say, these are the reasons why we have good reasons, we really couldn't help ourselves. Any parent with children will hear that. You tell your children to do something and they don't do it. You tell them not to do something and they do it and again making excuses. It is not just parents with children that do that, we too are sometimes like the Israelite people. God tells us not to do something and we do it and then we try to make excuses and explain, well I just couldn't help myself. We always want to explain our point of view to God. But God is going to tell us the same thing he told the Israelite people, you have not obeyed my voice. It is not that you couldn't obey, it is that you wouldn't obey. You see God had promised the Israelite people again and again that if they obeyed him, that through His power He would drive the people out of the land. Through his power, they would be able to breakdown the altars and get rid of the idol worship that was so prevalent in that land and it wasn't that the Israelites could not obey God, although we see some reasons they try to give at the end of chapter 1, it is that they wouldn't. They did not want to obey God. It is

easy to deceive ourselves. It is easy to make excuses for our disobedience and we might even be able to convince ourselves that we have good reasons and that we couldn't do any differently, but God sees our heart. He knows that it is not we can't be obedient but that sometimes we just choose not to be. We won't be obedient.

This verse was left intentionally by me.

13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. 14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

We come with excuse, God I just couldn't help myself, doesn't work with God. God tells us, he gives us an open door to escape the temptation, the deal with the trial without sinning. God will give us the strength, he will give us the opportunity if we want to take it, if we want to be obedient. So, God spoke bluntly to the people of Israel and he just told them, you have not obeyed my voice. Then he asked the question, what is this that you have done. Now that's a very strong statement and we have heard that statement earlier in the Bible.

Think at the beginning God created a beautiful world, the man and woman were placed in a beautiful garden, given everything they would need, everything is yours to enjoy except just one thing, stay away from this tree and yet the people disobeyed God. The relationship they had with God was perfect, they walked with God. The relationship they had with each other was perfect, the relationship with nature and the world was perfect, no natural disasters. Everything was great and then they sinned, destroyed everything and when God confronts them, he asked them, what is this that you have done?

They destroyed his creation. They broke the relationship with him. The relationship with each other was now broken and now the relationship with nature and the world was broken. What is this that you have done? God is now asking his people 1000s of years later. When God has freed them from slavery, given them a new start, placed them in a wonderful land, and now they have destroyed the relationship they could have had with God, the land as God has promised them is now going to be cursed because they did not obey him. **What is this you have done?**

You see, God has told the people earlier, how much that he loved them and he told them how he had brought them out of Egypt and look what he says in verse 5

5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my **treasured possession** among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a **holy nation**.

The Lord brought the people to this promised land, so much potential, so much possibility for good, they are God's special treasure, a holy nation and now they are unfaithful of God. All of this is ruined, what is this you have done and nothing was the same afterwards. Actions do have consequences and also in action things we don't do we should do. They also will have consequences. Sin does bring pain and heartache, suffering, enslavement and as we know from the scripture ultimately it will bring death. So, God told the people, after saying what is this you have done then he said

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."

It is ironic that people got what they wanted, but sometimes what we think we want isn't really what we do want. The people thought they wanted to have a covenant with these other nations, don't let them out, make them slaves, get some free labor from them. Well they got what they wanted? They got the company of these other people who then ended up being stronger than them in oppressing them and the Israelite thought it would be kind of nice to may be experiment with you know some of these forms of idol worship that appear to be so attractive. They got what they wanted, and they ended up being enslaved and snared by these idols. We see God telling them, these things will be thorns, they will be snares for you. When the people hear God's words of judgement, this is their response.

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.

When confronted with their sin, the people wept and made sacrifices or should I may be say, when they are confronted with the consequences of their sin, they wept and made sacrifices. Were they truly sorry for their sin or they just sorry they got caught and are now going to have to suffer the consequences or was it perhaps both? We really don't know; the scripture doesn't say. There is no more commentary given. We can't judge the heart of the Israelites, but we can look at our heart. When we are confronted with sin in our life, how do we react. Do we repent with true sorrow because of our sin or do we wait until the consequences

of the sin kick in and then we are sorry for because we are half into reap what we've sown?

Paul talks about this in 2-Cor 7. He talks about the people grieving to repentance. He say

2 Corinthians 7:9 As it is, I rejoice ... because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, 10 For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

So, did the Israelites truly repent, we really don't know. On the surface, it appears that they did, and it is quite possible that at that moment they truly were sorry both for their sin and for the consequences, but it is possible that they made sacrifices, performed religious rituals because they were hoping to buy God off. God will give you these sacrifices if you take away this punishment from me. God I will do this for you if you will bless me and not make me suffer and we try to then bargain with God. Not only back then but also today some people have the impression that we can bargain with God, that we can manipulate him, that we can get him to do what we want him to do. Now we can't judge the motivations, the heart of the Israelite. We don't know if the sacrifices were genuinely from repentance and faith or it was just an attempt to buy God off, but we can look at our own heart. Is my service to God motivated by his grace and love for me and my love for him. Is it motivated by my desire to see his name glorified among all nations of the earth or is my service for him more self-centered and more self-serving? Am I doing business with God with the hope that he will then do everything for me that I want him to do for me?

So, while there is nothing in this immediate passage that talks about the motive or the heart of the people. When we do get to verse 10 and following, we do see that the people of Israel once again did evil on the side of Lord and they turned away from Him and they worshipped idols.

When we get to verse 6 it is like a break has been made and we go back and start all over again. As a matter of fact, verse 6 takes us even further back then we had at the very beginning of the Book of Judges because it repeats the end of the Book of Joshua. The end was basically repeated here and talks about Joshua having convened the people and it was at this last time where Joshua met the people that he had told them chose today who you will serve. You can choose the idols that some of your ancestors worshipped years ago. You can choose the idols here in this land of Canaan but I recommend you to choose God, as for me and my house we will serve the Lord. Joshua told the people then to

put away other gods and idols. The people at that time responded, we will serve the Lord and we see that in verse 7

Judges 2:7 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.

Then in verse 8 and 9 that Joshua died, he was buried and in verse 10 we say that the generation that was basically Joshua's contemporaries, they also died and then we come to one of the most sobering text in the entire Old Testament.

2:10 ... And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel.

Imagine that, people that are faithful to God, serving God and then their children go away. What could be more heart-breaking than that? He is not just talking about just factual language. He is talking about experiential knowledge. Knowing God in a personal way, experiencing his work in your life personally on an intimate level. His knowledge is based on the personal response to God's grace or by your repent of your sin and self-centeredness, trust him in faith, acknowledge in him to be the one and only rightful Lord and master of your life. The older generation it seems knew God in this way. They served him, they followed him but the next generation did not know God. They did not serve him. They did not give their undivided allegiance to God as the one and only rightful authority of their lives. Instead, they did what was evil on the side of the Lord.

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.

These are sobering verses, really scary verses because we know all too well that that could happen again, it could happen in our lifetime, it could happen in the lives of our families, in the lives of our children, our grandchildren. Back in the early 1900s in Wales, there was a tremendous turning to God, many people came to faith and there coming to faith brought about major changes in their lives. The whole country of Wales was transformed. This revival spread to other countries and had influence on many other countries, but just two or three generations later I was in Wales and I saw very little leftover from it had been a tremendous movement of God with people serving God fervently with the passion, just a couple of generations earlier.

The first generation of Israel evidently somehow either failed to pass on their faith in an incredible believable way or else the second generation just had a hard heart and rejected it or possibly a combination of the two. The older generation had heard these words from Moses

Deuteronomy 6:5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

As a parent it is a key for us to help pass our faith on to our children. We don't have to be trained theologians and be able to answer every question that our children have about faith, but our children will notice if we truly love the Lord and here is another key that will help us as parents. The first generation of Israelite had also heard these words from the lips of Moses himself. He said the words I command you today shall be on your heart, not just in your mind, on your heart. The words of God should be in such an interval part of your life. You don't separate Sunday morning from the rest of the week. You don't just give lip service to God. The way we live at church is the way we live throughout the week. The children can see if we are consistent or inconsistent. If God's word is truly in our heart or if we tend to be hypocritical that God's word impacts all aspects of our life.

7 You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

We see here that the primary place for Christian instruction is the home. Now, we want to sometimes delegate that to the church and yes, the church can and does play a very beneficial role in the education of our children, helping them to be exposed to other people who love God, showing them the truths of who God is, but the church can't really replace the home.

Now I don't think that this text means we need to constantly be lecturing our children about God. What he is talking about here basically he is saying, your walk with God needs to influence every aspect of your daily life. The word of God applies to real life, to our daily routine, all day long, seven days a week. Our children will see our values, our priorities, our goals and they will see if those priorities are Christ centred or not. They will see how our relationships are and are our relationships affected positively by our relationship with God.

Christianity is caught as much as it is taught, not only do our children need to hear our words about the Lord, but they need to see it in our lives. Some of the first generation of Israelites may have done a great job of parenting, but for

some reason the children did refuse to follow God. Now we do need to realize that every person has to personally make the decision of following Christ. Children need to learn that they are not automatically Christian just because they are born into a Christian home. Parents help your children understand this, they need to recognize their sin, repent as God's forgiveness, like God take control of their lives. There is no guarantee that our children or our grandchildren will accept Christ. We cannot force that on them. They do have free will, they must choose to accept or reject, but we as parents can as these verses say, love the Lord with all our heart. We can let God's word penetrate our heart, so that it becomes a part of our daily life, so that our relationship to God permeates all aspects of our lives and we can pray for our children. Pray that it will not be said of the generation after us they did not know the Lord.

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. 13 They abandoned the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth.

Baals and the Ashtaroth are the gods that the people of Canaan worshipped. The altars to these gods were supposed to have broken down, but instead they adopted these gods and started to worship the gods in the same way the Canaanites were worshiping them. The Canaanites were polytheists, they believed in many gods and goddess and the most common of these was god was Baal. Baal was believed to be a powerful god who brought rain in times of drought and made animals and people fertile. The Ashtaroth was a female deity, also a fertility deity.

Baal was the god of rain, Israel was the land that is prone to drought more than it is to flood. You need rain to have crops, to have food to eat. You need rain to be able to have livestock. In other words, it makes economic sense to worship Baal. They thought that if we do then we will have prosperity. Second possible reason that they wanted to worship Baal, especially the man, sensual pleasure. You can live an immoral lifestyle and feel good about it. You could be committing adultery and think hey this is my religious duty. The people believed in a sympathetic magic. If you wanted the land to be fertile, if you wanted the livestock to be fertile then you needed to practice some kind of a fertility right. So, what do you do? You go to the temple of Baal and there you can find sacred, so to speak, prostitutes, both male and female and you can practice your fertility right with one of these people. The Canaanites practiced these things to worship their fertility god and goddesses.

So the Israelite thought that, if they serve the Baals and if they serve the Ashtaroath then this religion would provide them with both sensual pleasure as well as prosperity. What else do you want? But they were mistaken. They found out that they did not prosper, just the opposite and rather than having continuous pleasure, they suffered greatly.

2:14 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.

Not pleasure, not prosperity but distress. So, then we see God's grace, his mercy

2:16 Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them....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.

So, in these verses we see a cycle that happens over and over again. In these verses, we basically see a brief summary of the rest of the Book of Judges. Not only the rest of the Book of Judges but we also see it happening again in the monarchy, in the days of the kings some years later. This era of the judges was marked by the cyclical pattern of rebellion, oppression and deliverance. The people disobeyed God, the result is judgement, the Israelite were then oppressed by the neighboring people. They cry out to God, God raises up a deliverer and through God's power Israel is delivered then Israel experience a type of peace and then it all happens all over again and again and again and again.

It was a downward spiral, as we read further, each time that they were redeemed it seem like the people got then worse and worse and worse.

2:19 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.

So, this is the brief summary of the rest of the Book of Judges. The results of their rebellion, the results of their stubborn refusal, the anger of the Lord was brought against them and he did this in order to test them. He let these other nations remain in the land. He let these other nations get strong and oppress

them in order to test the Israelites. Whether or not they will walk in the ways of the father, they have a choice. They have another opportunity. But they failed the test again. When we have test, when we experience either divine retribution or when we just experience difficulties in life, it's a test for us and we can respond in repentance and faith and trust in God or we can respond like the Israelites in rebellion. Unfortunately, throughout the Book of Judges they continue to fail the test, they did not respond to God's grace, a sad story.

So, there are a few things that we can learn to apply to our lives today. We look to the scripture, but we too are living among idols and when we are living among idols the first thing I want to point out is that we want to focus our attention on God. It may not be obvious when we read the Book of Judges that one of the major themes in the Book of Judges is God, his love, his grace and mercy, because we get caught up in the details of these sorted stories, but in our text today we do see God's great love for his people. So, we want to remember God's love. We saw that in the very first verse where God points out that he had redeemed them from slavery. He had accepted them as his treasured possession. He made a covenant with them that he would never break. Remember God's love, he has also redeemed us from slavery to sin. He has made a covenant with us that will never end. He has accepted us as his treasured possession and he has promised us eternal life with him. God does the same for us today. We also see God's compassion when he saved the people from the hand of their enemies. God had a deep love, a great compassion, mercy for his people. He has that same compassion for us and he is willing to save us.

When living with idols we want to focus not only on God's love, we also want to remember God is a holy God. We sometimes have a skewed picture of God that needs to be balanced. God is love and God is holy. God cannot accept and tolerate sin. Back in verse 1 God said, he will not break his covenant with you and he didn't, showing his love, but he also points out his holiness, I will not drive these people out. There is judgment for sin because God is holy, there is judgement. We see the judgement again with the anger of the Lord being kindled. So, since we are living among idols, we want to also focus on God, on his great love, also on Him.

Second thing we want to be aware of is we need to be aware of the allure and danger of idols. We all struggle with idols. We are all guilty of idolatry because anything that demands our highest priority and allegiance is an idol. Everything that we love more than God is an idol. Anything that dictates our values and our actions more than God is an idol. Everything that you do not want to surrender to the lordship of Christ is an idol. An idol is something other than God that we

think will bring fulfilment to our lives. So, we worship these idols because we think they will satisfy our needs, our desires, our wants. In a sense, worshipping idols is really worshipping ourselves. We worship them in order to get what we think we want. The idol could be related to our physical desires, pleasure, materialism, wealth. It could be related to our psychological desires. The desire for power, control, desire for approval, recognition, comfort and security. An idol could be our career. An idol is something or someone or some cause that we make the center of our lives, the center of our hope and affection, something that then absorbs our time, our energy, our thoughts.

What are the idols that you are struggling with? What tends to want to claim the highest priority in your life? What idols are more important to you than God? What are you not willing to surrender to the lordship of ship?

Idols can be quite appealing, be aware of their allure. Just like Baal was appealing, sensual pleasure, prosperity, you have got it all, but their allure is misleading. We don't get what we want, idols are dangerous. They do not deliver on their promises.

Idols can be thorns and snares to us. Thorns bring pain, idolatry brings pain and suffering, can blind us to reality and idols will enslave us and ensnare us. Think of the irony, the children of Israel have just been set free from slavery and now of their own free will they enter into slavery again, this time into the slavery of idolatry. When you get enslaved by an idol it is hard to get out. It is like a drug addict who just can't do without the drugs or the alcoholic who cannot do with the drink or the compulsive gambler who is losing everything but just has to try once again. We know we need to give it up, we know that we want to be freed and need to be freed but yet on the other hand, we really don't want to give it up, because the idol become such an inordinate all consuming desire controlling our lives and we just can't part with it. If this is your condition today, you know what this verse is talking about.

So since we are living among idols, be aware of the allure, their danger and then also respond to God in repentance. Respond appropriately to him in faith. Sometimes when God blesses us, you would think we would be thankful in respond in faith, but sometimes the danger is when we are enjoying blessings, is we forget God and that's exactly happened with the people of Israel. God had warned them when you get to the promise land don't forget who it was that brought you there. Respond appropriately remembering. Paul tells us in the book of romans, God's goodness is to bring repentance.

How do you respond in times of suffering?

We see the Israelite crying out for mercy, but then they turned their back again. When we suffer, we have a test and we can pass that test and respond in faith or we can like the Israelite fail that test and go the other way. We want to respond in repentance. When we share the gospel with people, we emphasize repentance is important in order to enter into a relationship with God, but it is not just the entrance into that relationship with God, it is a continuing thing.

We need to accept God's provision for deliverance because we cannot do this ourselves. In the Book of Judges God provided deliverers but they were flawed. This is all pointing to the ultimate deliverer that God would send, Jesus Christ and in Jesus we see God's love and his holiness combined on the cross and sin is punished to death but God offers his grace, his love to all who respond in repentance and faith to Jesus.

What are the idols in your life, bring them to God, accept his provision for deliverance, let him change your heart and give up the idols.