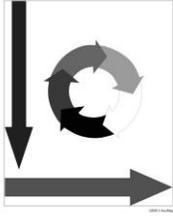


Week Fourteen: A Kingdom Stumbles - Judges 2:11-23; 21:25



Overview

After the deaths of Joshua and the elders who ruled with him, the twelve tribes of Israel begin an immediate downward spiral away from the LORD. “Another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what He had done for Israel” (Judges 2:10). They begin to follow the dictates of their hearts and disobey God by intermarrying with the

Canaanites and worshiping their idols. Noticeably absent from this period is any mention of the Book of the Law (this is the reason why the people are faithless) and an altar is only mentioned three times. Gideon builds an altar to the LORD (Judges 6:24, 26), Manoah and his wife worship at an altar, and the children of Israel build an altar and worship the LORD after the near destruction of the tribe of Benjamin.

The blessings and curses God gave in the wilderness promise certain oppression to His people should they disobey Him. Israel’s period of the Judges is characterized by disobedience, judgment, oppression, and deliverance from oppression. God had promised also that the time would occur in Israel’s history that they would demand a king like those of the people around them (Deut. 14:14ff). The **Judges Era** produces such a climate for that demand.

During these dark days, however, God’s providence and power surface in unexpected ways. He raises up amazing rulers to lead the people, and He prepares a Moabite girl to enter the line of Judah and become the great-grandmother of Israel’s future king (keeping His promise regarding Judah in Gen. 49:9-10). This lesson explains and covers the sin cycle that characterizes the approximately 350 years of the Judges Era.

Lesson Objective:

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will appreciate God’s redemptive work among a defiant and sinful people as He uses unusual people to rescue them, keeping the promises made to His people in previous generations.

Key Truths

Sin always leads to spiritual decline within and oppression from without.

The lack of Bible literacy creates a vacuum where sexual immorality and idolatry thrive.

God responds positively and redemptively to those who humble themselves before Him.

God uses unusual people during seasons of judgment to accomplish His purposes.

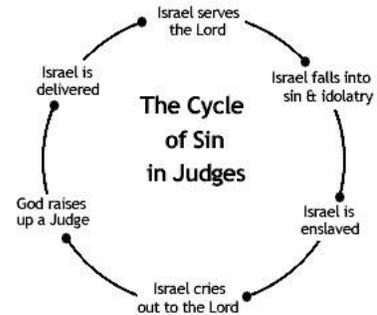
Even in the midst of some of the darkest days in Israel’s history God is at work to keep promises that He made to Abraham.

Lesson Outline

The Judges period lasts approximately 350 years and is characterized by sin cycles. Judges 2:11-23 describes the sin cycle.

1. The Sin Cycle Explained (Judges 2:11-23)

Judges begins with a period of expansion into the land of Canaan (which occurs during the final years of Joshua's leadership). This expansion does not reveal the same dynamic of power that characterized the early gains in the Promised Land. After early victories over Adoni-Bezek and Debir, the children of Israel begin to leave enemy strongholds in the land. Compromise becomes the order of the day as the people reject the Lord's leadership, commands, and authority in their lives (11-13). As a result, God raises up opposition and oppression from among the Canaanites remaining in the land and from the kings and their armies from outside of Israel (14-15). Israel reveals the depth of their depravity as they live under oppression from seven to forty years at a time. When they cry out to God He raises up a judge who delivers them (17). They experience times of prolonged peace as long as the judge remains alive (18). After the judge's death, Israel's depravity surfaces again, as they revert to idol worship and sexual sin, even worse than that which characterized them earlier (19). The cycle begins again.



2. The Sin Cycle Outlined

Drawing the sin cycle on the white board will help students identify the process of Israel's decline into sin. This visual may also help students evaluate contemporary Christianity, both corporate and personal.

The sin cycle characterizes the entire times of the Judges Era. God leaves the enemies in the land to test Israel, to train those who have not known war, and to see whether they will obey the LORD's commands (Judges 3:1-3). The sin cycle is as follows:

- **Israel's Rebellion:** Israel turns from following the LORD to follow the gods of the people of Canaan (2:11-13).
- **God's Retribution:** The LORD responds to Israel's spiritual decline in "hot" anger, judges Israel, delivers them into the hand of "plunderers who despoiled them" and sells "them into the hand of their enemies" who oppress them (2:14-15).
- **Israel's Repentance:** Israel responds to the distress that this oppression brings by calling upon the LORD (2:15b, 18).
- **God's Rescue:** The LORD raises up judges who deliver Israel from their enemies (2:16-17).

- **Israel's Rest:** The LORD in compassion responds to their groaning and grants deliverance from their oppressors as long as the judge lives (2:18; 3:9-11).

Once the presiding judge dies, the people revert to idol worship, and the cycle begins anew. This pattern repeats six times during the period of the Judges.

3. The Sin Cycle Illustrated

Sadly, this Sin Cycle becomes the reality of Israel's existence during these distressing days. The cycle is readily identifiable at least seven times in the book of Judges and precipitates the leadership of Othniel (3:7-11), Ehud (3:12-30), Shamgar (3:31), Deborah (4:1-5:31), Gideon (6:1-8:35), Jephthah (10:6-12:7), and Samson (13:1-16:31). God raises up each of these champions—flawed though they are—in response to Israel's rebellion.

- **Othniel**, a relative of Caleb (Josh. 14), delivers Israel from the Aramean king Cushan-Rishathaim (3:7-11). This story describes the LORD's "hot" reaction for Israel's forgetting Him and serving the Baals and Asherahs. When Israel cries out to God, He intervenes, ending Israel's eight-year service under this oppressor. The people experience 40 years of rest under Othniel's leadership. This story also introduces the divine formula for the success of the judges. The Bible says, "The Spirit of the LORD came upon him" (3:10a). Today as well as in the times of the Judges, believers need leaders who are filled with the Spirit of the LORD and lead others on by His power.
- **Ehud**, a left-hander, is raised up by God to rescue Israel from eighteen years of oppression under the hand of Eglon, king of Moab (3:12-31). God gives Ehud wisdom to kill King Eglon and courage to rally the people to defeat the Moabites. Through him, God gives the land rest for eighty years.
- Though the cycle is not outlined in detail, God raises up **Shamgar** (4:31), who strikes down "600 Philistines with an oxgoad." Since the text says that he "saved Israel," he must have delivered them from the Philistines after they cried out to God.
- After twenty years of harsh service under Jabin, God raises up a prophetess, **Deborah**, to command the army under Barak's leadership, to rescue Israel from Jabin, king of Canaan. In this sin cycle, God's intervention includes two women, a heavenly army, and a torrential storm to subdue Jabin and his army (Judges 5:4-5, 21). This sin cycle concludes with a forty year rest.
- After the death of Deborah, Israel again does evil in the sight of the Lord and He sends the Midianites to oppress them for seven years. This sin cycle introduces a message by an unnamed prophet (Judges 6:8-10) and the involvement of the Angel of the LORD (one of the two times the Angel of the LORD is mentioned in the book of Judges). The Angel of the LORD chooses **Gideon** and performs miracles to ensure Gideon of His presence, power, and peace. God gives the fleece as a public confirmation of His hand on Gideon when the army is gathered. God trims Gideon's army down to 300 men and demonstrates through them who He is and what He can do for those who trust Him. He also gives Gideon a peek into the thoughts of the

opposing army (Judges 9:9-15) and encourages him for the battle ahead. The defeat of the Midianites establishes Gideon as an esteemed leader among Israel, so much so that they ask him to rule over them as king (8:22-23).

Unfortunately, in Gideon's later days he foolishly makes an ephod (garment worn by the priests that contained twelve stones representing the twelve tribes of Israel) which the Israelites begin to worship (8:24-28). Israel experiences forty years of rest under Gideon's leadership.

- **Abimelech** seeks to lead Israel in the absence of a God-appointed judge. His foolishness leads to his demise and Israel's oppression by one of their own. God raises up **Tola** and **Jair** to judge Israel, and few details are given to describe Israel during their forty-five years of leadership. After their deaths Israel experiences eighteen years of oppression under the Philistines and the Ammonites. God raises up **Jephthah**, an unusual man, a son of a harlot, to lead Israel for six years. Amazingly, this son of a harlot knows Israel's history well enough to recite it when he confronts the hostile Ammonites (Judges 11:12-28).
- Before **Samson's** birth the Angel of the LORD informs his mother of Samson's call to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines. As a young man, Samson is mightily used by God because he obeys the divine prohibition given to his parents regarding his hair. The widespread failure to teach God's law produces its bitter fruit when Samson marries a Philistine woman and engages in sexual immorality with harlots. The Spirit of the LORD comes upon him, however, in spite of his moral failures, and grants great victory over the Philistines. Samson slays more Philistines in his death than he kills in his twenty years of judging Israel. Samson mirrors the spiritual declension which has occurred throughout Israel.

4. The Failure of the Levites - Judges 17-21

Forty-two cities scattered throughout the territories of the west of the Jordan River were set aside as cities of Levites. In these cities, the Levites served as spiritual teachers to the people of Israel. Sadly, sexual sin and idolatry characterize the Levites during the Judges Era. The last four chapters contain two stories that illustrate the corruption of the Levites:

- Moses' grandson - (17:7, 30; 18:17, 20, 27, 31)

Jonathan began his priestly service during the early days of the Judges era in the house of Micah, an idolator. Micah's idol is stolen by a delegation from the tribe of Dan, who are roaming through the area looking for a place to call home. Jonathan is conscripted to serve as priest to the tribe of Dan and to minister before the idol taken from Micah.

- A Levite, his concubine, and the near distraction of the tribe of Benjamin - 19:1

Judges concludes with a story about a Levite and his concubine, who is raped and left for dead in Gibeah, one of the cities in the Benjamin's territory. Gibeah has been considered as much safer to spend the night for the two travelers than the Canaanite city of the Jebusites. The "shock and awe" chopping of her body into twelve parts and

sending them throughout the twelve tribes stirred up Israel and nearly caused the destruction of the tribe of Benjamin.

5. The Sin Cycle Interpreted (19:1; 21:25)

Judges 21:25 captures the heart of Israel's problem, "In those days there was not a king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

That man cannot trust his own heart and needs an overseer is evident throughout the Bible. The Lord Jesus sums up the plight of man as He looks out over the multitudes, "He was moved with compassion for them, because they were like weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). Man left to himself wanders away from God to his own hurt.

Application - What does this lesson teach us about God? Man? Sin? Redemption?

- Without godly leadership people tend to go their own way quickly.
- Regardless of how oppressed a person finds himself, there is always hope as he cries out to God.
- God uses people who are considered unlikely candidates in the eyes of man to lead others during times of oppression.
- Man is worse than he thinks, and God is better to man than he deserves.

Summary

God speaks to individuals during times of oppression to raise up leaders who will call the people to action; He speaks specifically to Gideon and Manoah's wife.

God acts by giving extraordinary victories to those who trust Him and intervening through acts of nature to assist their victory. He answers Samson's prayer by power.

God reveals His involvement in the lives of His people even during times of judgment.

Discussion Questions

As we consider the sin cycle, where are we, the people of God in the 21st century, in that cycle?

What attributes could possibly characterize leaders whom God might be raising up today?

What sets the judges apart from those around them and makes them useful to God?