

# 07

## SESSION SEVEN

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# The Judges Cycle

### SESSION SUMMARY

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In this session we will take a look at the second chapter of Judges, which is in essence a summary statement for the whole book. We will see how the Israelites did what was right in their own eyes, leading to an ongoing cycle of sin, judgment, and deliverance. We will also see how God raised up deliverers who brought temporary peace but ultimately demonstrated their own need for salvation. The Book of Judges reveals to us the idolatry that results from rejecting God's authority. Today, as those who follow King Jesus, we are freed from this pattern of sin and empowered to do what is right in God's eyes.

### SCRIPTURE

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Judges 2:11-19

# THE POINT

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**Judgment of sin occurs when people turn from God and do what they think is right in their own eyes.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

Share the following information about the Comet airliner: Designed and built in Britain, the Comet was the world's first passenger jet airliner. It revolutionized air travel and was the pride of the British aviation industry until the first of three crashes happened in March 1953. "One fragment collected from the scene of the crash showed that a crack had developed due to metal fatigue near the radio direction finding aerial window, situated in the front of the cabin roof. The investigators found that a small weakness such as this would quickly deteriorate under pressure, and would rapidly lead to a sudden and general break-up of the fuselage."<sup>1</sup>

What were the signs that the airliner had become weak in some places? According to reports based on data collected after the crashes, investigators found signs of metal fatigue. Over time, these areas of weakness had given way and caused the planes to crash.

What are some ways fatigue can affect people? (mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually) In what areas are you weakest once fatigue begins to set in? How does this affect your focus?

As we will see in today's study, time and again God's children would show signs of weakness in their faithfulness to Him. Like the Israelites, our faithfulness to God can fail when we lose focus.

- **What are the warning signs that you are beginning to lose focus on God?**
- **When have you been unfaithful to God? What caused you to lose focus on Him?**

### Option 2

In 1954, William Golding wrote a novel where a group of well-educated, well-behaved English schoolboys crash into the paradise of a deserted island with no adult survivors. The book, *Lord of the Flies*, posed the question as to what would happen to these young adults. Would they use their privileged upbringing and knowledge to create a new society of peace, or would something else occur?

As the story progresses, we see that instead of creating harmony and peace, these little boys fight for power, hunt and kill each other, and even cut off the head of a pig and sacrifice it to an imaginary and yet utterly real "beast" on the island. Golding uses this beast as a symbol for the evil in the heart of every person, even children, and ultimately shows the consequences of what the world would look like if all rule and authority were removed and rejected.

Golding's book, selling more than 15 million copies, is popular not because it's so unbelievable but because it's so terrifyingly possible. The underlying moral logic of the story is an imaginary outworking of the truth about the nature and condition of our own hearts. We are a people who constantly reject God's rule and authority over our lives, while going through life and making decisions based on what we, as individuals, believe to be right and wrong.

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**Judgment of sin occurs when people turn from God and do what they think is right in their own eyes.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

## PLOT

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The Book of Judges presents a cycle of sin and salvation that becomes a pattern for God's people. In the previous sessions, we saw the incredible influence Joshua had on the Israelites. As Moses' successor, Joshua led Israel to great victories. The walls of Jericho came down. Joshua and the other elders were a positive spiritual influence on the people, counseling them to walk in the ways of the Lord.

But when Joshua died and his generation was no longer on the scene, "there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel" (Judg. 2:10). This is where our story picks up, with the Book of Judges and a section of Scripture that introduces us to the leaders God gave Israel to govern them and rescue them from their enemies.

## TIMELINE

### THE JUDGES CYCLE

*Because Israel follows after false idols, God delivers them over to their enemies.*

### DEBORAH

*God gives personal gifts to be used for His glory and the good of others.*

### GIDEON

*God gives strength to accomplish His will.*

## THE PEOPLE TURN FROM GOD TO IDOLS

The spiritual state of Israel, after the death of Joshua, is sad to see. While we heard the Israelites testify in the previous session that they would worship God alone and reject the false gods and idols from the surrounding nations, we witness this dedication slip away in the generations following Joshua's death. Instead of worshipping God alone, we now see that abandoning God leads the Israelites to embrace idols:

**And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals. And they abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the LORD to anger. They abandoned the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth. (Judg. 2:11-13)**

What led to such a quick descent from the faithfulness of God to the faithlessness of the next generation? The young people did not “know the LORD” or what God had done for them (v. 10). They failed to remember God and His glorious rescue of their ancestors. The previous generations saw God deliver His people from Egypt, sustain His people in the wilderness, go before His people in battle, and scatter His people's enemies. Yet within a generation, the young people didn't know God or His works.

Perhaps this serves as a warning to us: Faithfulness to God does not pass from generation to generation through the genes. We don't inherit our parents' salvation, and we can't expect our children to inherit ours. For this reason, we must be diligent to pass on the knowledge of God to the next generation.

Not only that, but it's also important to recognize that we are called not to merely pass on information to the next generation, but to pass on the faith. The problem with this generation of Israelites was not that they did not “know” cognitively what the Lord had done. The problem was that they did not know God personally. “Know” here refers to intimate knowledge. Their relationship to God was not precious to them.

Forgetting the promises of the Lord leads to making decisions apart from the Lord. They did what was “evil in the sight of the LORD.” God, not us, determines what is right and good, and what is sin and evil. This is the calling card of sin: We think we know better than God. The Book of Judges may be best known for the last verse of the book that sums up what sin is: “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 21:25).

- **Have you ever been unfaithful to God because you were more concerned about yourself than obeying Him? Explain.** (p. 48, PSG)

## GOD JUDGES THE PEOPLE

We've seen how God's people turned away from God and decided to worship the idols of the pagan nations around them. So what will God do in response? Well, we know that God keeps His promises, and one of the promises He made was to discipline them if they persisted in disobedience. (See Lev. 26:17; Deut. 28:15.) That discipline takes place when God hands over the people to their enemies.

**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. 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. (Judg. 2:14-15)**

God's anger over idolatry should not surprise us. It is the natural outworking of His exclusive love for His people. As we've studied the story line of Scripture, we've seen how God describes Himself as "jealous"—not in the possessive and selfish way that humans often experience jealousy, but jealous for us and for our good. God is angered by our sin because of the harm sin brings to us and because of the offense our sin is to Him.

How did God respond to His people's rebellion? He gave them what they wanted. They wanted to be like the surrounding nations, so He delivered them into their oppressive hands. One of the ways God punishes sin is by giving us what we ask for.

### GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

Some people may read this passage and be struck by the reference to the "anger of the LORD" that "was kindled against Israel." Isn't this the God who is "slow to anger" and "compassionate," the One who shows mercy to generations? Yes, it is. The God of love is the God who is angered here. But this anger is faithful because it is rooted in His unflinching love for His people.

To resist the portrait of God's anger in this passage is to miss the point. It's like saying, "I want God to love me and be happy when I leave Him for other gods." You can't have it both ways. If you want God to love you, then you can't expect God to be happy when you choose idols over Him. For God to be passive and nonchalant over your sin, for Him to simply shrug His shoulders at your rebellion, would not be love at all.

Imagine a husband who says, "I love my wife so much I'm happy for her to go out with other men." Ludicrous, we'd say. If he truly loved her, he would flare with jealousy. Love and exclusivity go together. Anger at betrayal is faithful, not unjust. In a similar way, God's anger at Israel is rooted in His deep and lasting commitment to His people's good.

God's anger toward sin is expressed in two ways: the first is passive, and the second is active.

**God's Passive Anger:** This is when God allows us to experience the consequences of our sin in order to show us how foolish we were to walk away from Him. In this passage we see how God, in His anger, "handed them over" to the marauders.

Why does God allow people to experience the consequences of their sin? So that we'll turn back to Him as Savior. Often, we think of God's wrath as lightning bolts crashing down on us from the skies. But sometimes, God's wrath is expressed in giving us what we want, in handing us over to our own desires.

Examples of this kind of punishment abound in Scripture. We'll see it later in the Old Testament when Israel rejects God as king and demands a king like those of other nations. God lets them have a king . . . and all the problems that come from frail and fallen human authorities. We will also see it in the story of the prodigal son, when the father allows his son to go his way, face the consequences, and then return.

**God's Active Anger:** Sometimes the consequences of sin are passive; they are inherent in the sin themselves. But other times God's punishment is more active. This is when God disciplines us and calls us back to Himself. A good example of this kind of discipline is in the story of Jonah. Jonah was rebelling against God and running away from Him, and God appointed a storm, a big fish, sun and scorching wind, a plant, and then a worm to drive him back to God.

In this passage, we see elements of both the passive and active sides of God's anger toward sin. We see the passive: "He gave them over" (v. 14). We also see the active: He "was against them for harm" (v. 15).

## THE PEOPLE CRY OUT AND GOD DELIVERS THEM

As we've come to expect from previous stories about an incredibly gracious God, judgment isn't God's last word to His people. As the author of Judges continues to summarize this difficult time in the history of Israel, he shows that after God's discipline came God's salvation.

**Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they whored after other gods and bowed down to them. They soon turned aside from the way in which their fathers had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the LORD, and they did not do so. 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. 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. (Judg. 2:16-19)**

## TIMELINE

### **SAMSON**

*God uses broken leaders to accomplish His good purposes.*

### **RUTH AND BOAZ**

*A glimpse of God's love in the midst of dark times.*

### **SAMUEL HEARS**

*Samuel hears from God.*

When you put verses 14 and 16 side by side, you may find yourself scratching your head. God handed His people over to the enemy, and then He saved them from the enemy? How does that work?

God was delivering His people from their enemies not because His people had fully turned their hearts away from idols and back to Him, and not because they were truly repentant. He was delivering them because of His great love. He was compassionate toward them in their misery, and so He showed them undeserved kindness through the judges He raised up to save them.

The cycle of the judges continues after each moment of deliverance. As you see at the end of this passage, whenever the judges died, Israel returned to sin and their downward spiral of corruption.

## CHRIST CONNECTION

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It's often said that the way you can discover a person's true nature is to take away external constraints: no rules, no filter, no teacher, or no chance of being caught. In the case of the Israelites, once the judges disappeared from the scene, the people slipped headlong into sin again. Even God's kindness in delivering them didn't always lead them to faithfulness. "The people served the LORD" according to Judges 2:7. But by Judges 3:6, the people "served their gods."

What Israel needed is the same as what you and I need today—not a temporary deliverer but a Savior who would change their hearts. The good news for us is that in the person of Jesus Christ, God is both our great Judge and our great Savior. In Christ, we are set free from these continuing patterns of sin and destruction so that we are also free to carry out God's mission in the world. As believers, we know that Christ has redeemed us from this endless cycle of sin and despair. So when we struggle with remaining sin, we are to confess quickly (Jas. 5:16) in light of God's patience (2 Pet. 3:9). His kindness toward us is what shows us His loving heart—even in the times He disciplines us and calls us back to Himself.

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### God Is Just

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*God established standards for His moral creatures that are in accordance with His righteousness, and all people will be judged according to those righteous standards (Lev. 11:44-45; Rom. 2:5-11; 2 Cor. 5:10). It would be an injustice if God did not uphold His righteousness, for such a failure would require God to violate His own righteous character. Since humanity has sinned by failing to live up to God's righteous standards, God has taken it upon Himself to make provision by being both just and the justifier of those who place their faith in Christ (Rom. 3:25-26).*

# YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What can we do to make sure we don't forget God's past work in our lives and in the lives of others?** *Answers may include things like Bible reading and memorization, keeping a journal, prayer, etc.*
- **What are some ways we are tempted to do what is right in our own eyes? What are some examples of our culture living this way?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What are the dangers of deciding for ourselves what is right for me or right for you?** *There are many dangers that could result from this belief in moral relativism. In essence, this would lead to the belief that all things are permissible.*
- **When have you sensed the Lord's kindness to you despite your relationship being strained because of your sin? How did the Lord's kindness affect you?** *God's kindness and love toward us, even while we sin, should move our hearts toward repentance.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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The time of Judges is really no different than our own when it comes to moral relativism—the belief that objective right or wrong doesn't exist, but rather people get to decide for themselves what is true, right, and wrong. Of course, this notion of relativism is absurd both logically (it is self-contradictory) and morally (it is really difficult to live out the belief that nothing is objectively wrong in the face of racism, human trafficking, the Holocaust, etc.) Relativism fails not only on account of these arguments and many more, but primarily on account that God exists, and He alone determines what is true, right, and wrong.

- **How would you answer someone who was arguing for relativism?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **How does belief in God change the way we think about moral decisions in our lives?** *Since God is the moral lawgiver, determining what is right and wrong and holding us accountable for our moral decisions, we should see our moral decisions as having more weight than we sometimes do.*



## HEART

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One of the interesting things about sin is the fact that it doesn't stop people from worshipping. In the case of the Israelites, we don't see them stop worshipping altogether—they only stop worshipping God. The people worshiped idols instead. Thus, sin is not the ceasing of worship but the sinful redirection of worship away from God and toward idols. Sin, at its root, is a worship problem, which makes it a heart problem.

- **What are some modern day idols that we see redirect people's worship away from God?** *Answers may include technology, pop culture, personal ambition/achievements, hobbies, etc.*
- **What are some ways to prevent our hearts from being redirected to these false idols?** *Most of the things we make into heart idols are not bad in themselves; they only become bad because we allow them to direct us away from God. For those heart idols, one way to prevent their redirection is to recognize that these things were never intended to take the place of Christ on the throne of our hearts.*



## HANDS

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By embracing relativism, the Israelites abandoned God in order to serve idols, and this abandonment led to conformity. Think about it. The temptation to worship false gods came from the temptation to conform to the world around them. They forgot that they were called out of the world to be a people holy (or set apart, consecrated) to the Lord (Deuteronomy 7:6), and not a mirror image of their surrounding culture.

- **How does this story challenge you to live differently?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **What are some ways you can reflect the holiness of Christ in our culture today?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

## ▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

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### LEADER PACK

For this session, point out item #8, which contains an informational chart regarding the Book of Judges, providing a list of characters that were used by God during this ongoing cycle of sin and deliverance.

### SOURCES

1. "1954: 'Metal fatigue' caused Comet crashes," BBC News [online], [cited 1 Sept 2015]. Available from the Internet: [news.bbc.co.uk](http://news.bbc.co.uk).

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPJoshSPR16](http://lifeway.com/TGPJoshSPR16))**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

**[GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)**

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

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