

“The Causes and Cure for Spiritual Inconsistency” // Judges 1–2 // *Broken Saviors (Judges) #1*

Introduction

Open your Bibles... Judges!

My wife and I always say that we have been married for 12 wonderful years... **even though we’ve actually** been married for a total of 14 years. **We’ve just had enough rough seasons** that we can’t honestly include them in the “12 wonderful years,” so we say “12 wonderful years and 2 other ones for a total of 14.”

For a few of our first years, those rough seasons involved our vacations. We could not be more opposite when it comes to philosophy of vacations. **My wife likes to have no real plan** going into a vacation, which is what, in her mind, makes it a vacation (she points out that’s what the word means: vacation, you vacate). Her activities for the day are, “Get up and get a bagel. That’s it. That’s Monday.”

Me, I’m planning out the day in 5 minute increments: “If we get out at sunrise, we can see the **turtles do their morning** wake-up routine; if we leave there at **8:47 we can catch the 9:10 IMAX** showing at the planetarium... then we can come back to the **hotel for 18 minutes** of downtime... and then there’s this cool hot dog place I’ve heard about...”

So we’re very **different** with vacations. **One redeeming thing, however**, is that we both love museums... **foundation of our relationship**... it kinda annoys our kids. But we **both love going in and seeing a snapshot** of an entire epoch of history... understanding a people, or a period, or movement, in a glance.

The book of Judges is kind of like a museum of Israel’s spiritual history—particularly the **1st 2 chapters** that we are going to look at today—In them you get a **snapshot of Israel’s rocky history** with God; you see them go up and down in their faith; sometimes hot, sometimes cold, usually just lukewarm... there are certain temptations they can’t seem to shake.

I feel like it is something most of us can relate to? *Do you ever ask:*

- **“Why do I up and down so much spiritually?”** A lot of us feel like we are spiritually bipolar: is that a real condition? One week I’m super-Christian; the next I’m not even sure I believe.
- Or do you ever ask,
 - “Why are there **some sins** that no matter how hard I try I can’t seem to get rid of?”
 - **“Why do I have so little joy, spiritually?”** Everybody else seems to really have it together... I just feel like I am dragging myself along. Am I doing something wrong?”
- **(Those people are liars and fakes, btw.** One of my biggest discoveries as a pastor is: *Everyone is screwed up once you really get to know them*—including, maybe especially, me.)

These **1st two chapters** are Israel’s spiritual struggles recounted and explained. You’ll see **yours in theirs**. And **out of them we’ll draw 3** core principles the writer uses to shape the rest of the book.

(Judges 1–2)

The book opens like this: **[1:1] After the death of Joshua**, (Joshua, you may remember, had been the mighty warrior general who led the children of Israel into Canaan. He’d seem a lot of great victories, like Jericho, but after he died, there were still parts of Canaan yet to be conquered, so...) **the people of Israel inquired of the LORD, “Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?”** **[2] The LORD said, “Judah shall go up; behold, I have given the land into his hand.”**

And things start out great... [4] “Then Judah went up and the LORD gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand, and they defeated 10,000 of them at Bezek.”

[6] Adoni-bezek (which literally, in Hebrew, means “King of Bezek”) fled, but they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and his big toes. [7] And Adoni-bezek said, “Seventy kings with their thumbs and their big toes cut off used to pick up scraps under my table. As I have done, so God has repaid me.”

- If you’ll let me digress for just a minute... **One of the problems** people sometimes have with the book of Judges is they ask, “How could God send in Israel to conquer a people? This looks like a religious crusade and is unjust.”
- **It’s a good question**, but did you hear King Adoni-Bezek’s perspective on this whole ordeal? He did not say, “God, this is unfair!” He said, “*God has repaid me for my wickedness.*”
- **Listen:** In Deut 18 and Lev 18 God made clear to Israel that he was driving the Canaanites out because of their excessive wickedness.¹ Israel was his instrument of judgment.
 - *These were not innocent people Israel was stealing land from; they were cruel and wicked people that God was bringing judgment upon,* and Israel was his instrument in doing so.

Now, you say: “**Well, but that mentality sounds dangerous. People taking on themselves the mantle of God to be his instruments of justice?**”

- **And that is true.** People who adopt that mentality today commit horrific acts of injustice. *The difference Israel had a clear mandate, clear instructions from God.*
- **God simply does not do that anymore.** *With the coming of Jesus, God began a new way of working in the world. Jesus came on a saving mission,* and those who follow him participate in that saving mission. He didn’t take life; he laid his down. Following

him, *we give mercy, not justice; we lay down our lives, not take them.*

- **One day, King Jesus will bring justice to the world;** but our role now is dispensing mercy, not justice.
- **Anyone who today claims they are on a mandate from God to bring judgment** is either lying, or pathologically deceived.

Maybe you say, “***But surely in these conquests there were innocent people affected.*** Like, kids.”

- **It is true, innocent people sometimes get caught up in judgment...** *That’s not just something that happens in Judges; it happens today.* If a man cheats on his wife and cheats in his business and so he loses his marriage and his job, you might look at him and say, “Well, he brought it on himself,” but what about his kids? They suffer too, and the suffering they endure because of the sins of their father they had no part in.
- *There are multiple ways the Bible answers the question of why God allows the innocent to be caught up in someone else’s justice...* but one thing it assures you is that before the throne of God everyone receives full, complete and perfect justice... and that what we inherit in eternity will make anything we experience on earth seem rather trivial.
 - Think of it like this: **Say that the US Post Office overcharged you .48 on a stamp,** and you went to complain and they said, “OK, but here’s what we are going to do: we are going to release you from any future obligation to pay income tax.” **You would probably say,** on the whole, that you did pretty well in your engagement with the Post Office. While you may have complained at the time that they overcharged you for a stamp, when it is all said and done you’re not going to spend a lot of time complaining that you were treated unfairly by the US government.
- When someone suffers or dies unfairly in judgment, we can rest assured that before the throne of God they receive perfect

¹ Lev 18:6–30; Deut 18:9–14.

justice, and what they inherit in eternity makes up for anything they suffer on earth. (.48 vs. income tax)

- All people eventually die... for these kids, God just collected them early, and what they receive.
- I know that doesn't answer it fully, but hopefully it gives you a place to start.

But let's get back to the story: [19] And the LORD was with Judah, and he took possession of the hill country, but he could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain because they had chariots of iron.

- Well, that makes sense, right? I mean, *chariots of iron*.
- **These were like the tanks** of the ancient world. Just a couple dozen of them could mow down hundreds of foot soldiers, which were all Israel had. Do you know who, historically, were the 1st ones to work with iron? The Philistine.
- So, **Israel says, "That's why** we couldn't drive them out."

[27] And Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean and its villages, or Taanach and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor or the Cling-Ons and Ewoks and its villages, or the inhabitants of Ibleam and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages, for the Canaanites there were determined to dwell in that land.

- "Well, these people were just really difficult. Israel **asked them politely to leave**. Then they talked tough, and then mounted a few attacks". But these **people were stubborn**. So eventually they said, "Ok, we won't **bother you if you won't bother us**."

Ahh... but [28] When Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor... (Well, that's a win-win. Instead of driving them out, like God said, they got some free labor out of them.)

Tim Keller, who wrote an excellent commentary on Judges I will be using a lot in this series, says, "Taken on its own terms, chapter 1 reads like a collection of Israel's press releases about their campaign. It is their 'spin' on why they weren't as successful as we (and God) might have expected. As we read, we are lulled into sympathy with

the Israelites. When we are told that they 'could not drive out' the Canaanites, we are inclined to agree. They did their best."² And, they found a more economical solution to boot: they got free labor out of the Canaanites. All in all, pretty savvy. "But then comes God's assessment." [2] "You have not obeyed my voice." Period.

Look at this: [2] "I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. Yet you have not obeyed my voice. "What is this you have done? [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." Lesson #...

1. Small Areas of Disbelief Produce Large Areas of Disaster (1:8–2:3)

These Canaanites became a **thorn in Israelites side**... a source of constant warfare... Eventually, some of these peoples, like the Philistines, would rise up and subjugate them.

Israel said, "But God, we can't drive them out. We tried." God says "Actually, it's not that you can't; it's that you **won't**." It has nothing to do with you not being strong enough; it has to do with you not being confident enough in God's grace.

Here's a question you should ask yourself: "Where are you saying, 'I can't' but God says, 'Actually, you won't' drive them out"?

You need to look at your life like the unconquered land of Canaan... *Lurking in every crevice of your heart are your own little Canaanites of unbelief and sin.* Where are you saying, "I can't... when God would say, "You won't"?

Here are a few I thought of:

² Tim Keller, *Judges for You* (22).

- **Integrity:** “Well, God, if I were totally honest in my job, I’d lose it. You can’t be expected to play fairly in this field and survive.”
- **Extending forgiveness:** “I know I should forgive him or her, but I can’t.”
- **Avoiding sexual temptation:** “I know it’s wrong, but I can’t say no.” A lot of times people start rationalizing their behavior, twisting the Bible to fit their preferences. “Surely the Bible can’t say this is wrong, because God wants me to be happy, right?” Or “This just who I am.” Or, “but I really love them.”
- Maybe that compromise is **being in relationship you know you shouldn’t be in**. I know all kinds of single people who get in or stay in relationships they know they shouldn’t be in because, “God, I’m afraid of being lonely.”
- One of most common compromise areas I see is in financial faithfulness. **Generosity:**
 - “God, I can barely afford things the way they are, much less be generous. Give God the 1st fruits?”
 - I know wealthy people who say, “I’m just not sure the church is the best investment for the future.”

These are the very areas that become areas of defeat... where the enemy brings cursing into your life... **You say, “But God, I can’t.” God says, “No, you won’t.** It had nothing to do with your inability to obey; it was because you aren’t confident enough in my strength!”

Israel had not ceased to be zealously religious; they had ceased to walk by faith and there is a huge difference in those two. THE MARK THAT YOU ARE WALKING BY FAITH is **full and absolute obedience**.

- There are **TWO WAYS TO APPROACH** a relationship with God: One in which you **do you own thing but try to do enough to** keep God happy so you can use him as a safety net; the OTHER in which you **yield total control** to him and trust him completely.
 - Over the years I’ve used this illustration, and it has a story to go with it. The illustration is RAPELLING.

- When using the rope as a safety tool, there come places where you just *can’t*—you won’t—obey: **Finances; relationships; your future**
- But when he is your trust... all you are focused on is obedience, because he is responsible to hold you up, provide for your needs, take care of you.
- Israel’s compromise started with a failure of belief. All sins start with a failure of belief.
 - **“Every sin springs from a wicked heart of unbelief.” Martin Luther**

Small areas of unbelief become large areas of disaster. Again: You’ve got to start seeing your life like the unconquered Promised Land of Canaan. *Lurking in every crevice of your heart are your own little Canaanites of unbelief and sin.* You have to **send out gospel warriors** to subjugate them. You need to preach the gospel to every part of your life: Your worries; your goals; your temptations; your security. Drive out the enemy from your heart.

Well, it gets worst: [2:12] (After) the people of Israel abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, they went after other gods... [14] The anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them.”

- Israel started to go after the gods of the people around them, and then those people enslaved them.

2. We Choose Between the God Who Saves and Gods that Enslave (2:12–18)

If there were ever a place in the Bible that demonstrates that sin leads to slavery, this is it.

You give yourself to an idol because it promises you power and freedom... (If you want a **definition of an idol** that’s it: Anything that

promises power and freedom and happiness without God.) but what it does is put you in chains

- **Money says**, “I can give you power and freedom.” So you go after it. But you **never seem to have enough**, and it destroys your family, your integrity, your health... It’s always demanding more. It promised power and freedom, but you’re never satisfied; you’re always jealous and constantly worried. This is not the life of a free man; it’s the life of **slave**.
- **You gave your life to build your reputation** because you thought then you’d have power and freedom then. But it had the **opposite effect**. You become **really sensitive** to criticism, **obsessive** of what people thought about you, **always bitter** that people don’t recognize your full worth. This is not the life of a free man; it’s the life of **slave**.
- **“The sin that promised joy and life only led me to the grave.”**

In contrast to these false gods that enslaved them, Judges gives you a glimpse into the heart of Israel’s God: [14] So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers... And they were in terrible distress. [16] Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. 3 things you see there that reveal God’s heart toward his people:

Anger: Make no mistake: God is righteously angry at sin. God is a jealous God, and he is jealously angry over our betrayal.

- **Sometimes people don’t understand God’s jealousy** because they think of jealousy as always a bad thing... like you are miffed when somebody has what you want, or you are insecure and obsessive of someone’s attention.
- But there is a **good jealousy**—a jealousy that is a natural \part to love.
- **I am righteously jealous about my kids...** that they learn to love the right things. Every parent I know thinks a lot about the influences on their kid—they want their kids to grow up knowing what is right. That’s a good jealousy.

- **I am right to be jealous of the affection of my wife:** I want her affections to center on me and not another man. That’s as much for her good, as it is mine. (Obviously, it’s possible to be way obsessive with that, but that’s not what God does...) **God is jealous to be our only God; the be our only real object of worship.**³
- **The opposite of love is not anger, but apathy.** He does that because he is passionately in love with us.

So God is angry... but then, he feels PITY: He sees them in distress. Vs. 18 says the Lord was “moved to pity because of their groaning” (2:18)

- That word for “groaning” in Hebrew doesn’t imply repentance. It was just a **cry of misery**.
- It moved God emotionally to see his people hurting, even when they had brought that suffering on themselves and they weren’t sorry for it.
 - Like me seeing the pain my child suffers for something even when it is their fault. It doesn’t make me cease to love them (if anything, it makes me love them more!)

Then vs. 16, he acts in salvation. He raises up judges to deliver them. And that’s the rest of what we’ll discover.

Ahh... but here is the dilemma, you see. These judges will turn out to be broken people themselves. They fall prey to the same problems Israel had. They are inconsistent, unbelieving, cowardly, greedy, rash, immoral...

So **the question that emerges** from the book of Judges is this: *“How can these men and women be Israel’s Saviors when they themselves needed to be saved?”*

- **Illus.** I’ve told you this story before: grandmother who died in the pool.

³ Dale Ralph Davis, *Judges*, Chapter 2. “Degeneration Generation.”

- **Problem with all Saviors...** political and religious. They suffer from my 2 problems.
- **God's answer is going to be to send a Judge whose story is not recorded in Judges...**

Furthermore, there's another dilemma presented in Judges. God appears to have made two contradictory promises:

- **Vs. 1: "I swore to give this land to your fathers. I will never break my covenant with you."**
- **Vs. 15, "I have sworn to punish injustice and sin because I am a just and righteous God."** (reworded by the gist is the same)

How can God keep both promises? The answer is that God is going to send a judge that is going to both deliver us from our enemies AND pay the price for our disobedience.

Throughout this passage God keeps referring to the covenant he made with Israel. Let me **quickly take you back to** one of the first places where God 1st made this covenant with Israel, and show you something **fascinating**.

- **Gen 15:** God promises Abraham that he will bless him, give him many descendants, and they will be his people forever.
- They were going to officialize the covenant through an ancient ceremony called **the cleaving of the animals**.
 - Gross by our standards... cut animals in half, let them bleed all over the ground... Walk through together. As you did, the blood splashed up on the garment, a stain that indicated what you were willing to happen to you if you broke your part of the covenant.
- But when it came time for Abraham and God to walk through the blood, Abraham fell into a deep sleep. But that didn't stop God from doing it. He walked through alone. He was saying, "I will keep both sides of this covenant. Not only will I spill my blood if I fail to keep my part; I'll spill my blood if you fail to keep yours."

This was a covenant God would ensure all by himself.

- Commentators say the **deep sleep Abraham fell into prefigures the darkness** of sin and its slavery, a darkness we brought upon ourselves.
- God says, "**But I have set my love on you**. So I'll **pay the price** for your disobedience. I'll **pursue you** when you are not pursuing me, and I'll draw you to myself. I'll **sustain you** by my grace. When you are **faithless**, I'll be faithful. I'll **persevere with you** until the end, and the good work I have begun in you, I will not fail to complete it. Salvation will belong to me from start to finish."
 - **BTW, my friend: I know you feel weak; I know you feel like you can't overcome this temptation; like you'll never make it.** God says, "**But I have determined it.** You **weren't even there** when I made the promise. You didn't hang the cross, helping me pay the price. You didn't help bring Jesus back from the dead. I did this all by myself. And I will see it through to the end.
- So, the message of Judges, in large part, is to rest, my friend, that he that has begun a good work in you will complete it. He will never let you go, any more than I would ever let one of my children go.
- **"Those he foreknew, those he predestined; those he called; those he called, those he justified; those he justified, he will glorify."**

You choose between these **two types of gods**. The gods that enslave; or the only God that saves. **Gods that put you in chains** and a God that loves you like a father; a husband.

- Some say, "Well, **I won't choose any**. I'm just not religious." **Ah, but you will!** As I've often explained here, the **human heart is an instinctive worshipper**. You can **no more turn off your drive to worship** by not being religious than you can turn off your sex drive by remaining single.
 - Your **soul will always find** something to cherish ultimately; something upon which to **build your identity**; something you have **determined will give you happiness** and power and peace and security.

- The question is not if you'll worship, only *what* you will worship.
- **If you give yourself to money or fame or romance or family or respect, you will become a slave to it. But give yourself to God, and you'll find the most satisfying, freeing, forgiving love ever known.**
- Keller: "Jesus is the only God who, if you find him, will satisfy you, and if you fail him, will forgive you!" Run from him will pursue you.

Here is the 3rd and final thing these chapters teach us:

3. Amnesia leads to apostasy (2:1, 10)

Did you notice that when God confronted them, he said: [2:1] Now the angel of the LORD... said, "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...'"

- Why does he start there? Does he think they don't know? No, they just no longer are thinking about them.

Again in chapter 2: [10] "And there arose another generation after them *who did not know the LORD or remember the mighty things he had done for Israel.*"

- Had this generation never heard of the Passover, the Red Sea, or the walls of Jericho? Of course not. They knew those stories.
 - The word "know" in Hebrew (*yada*) means intimate knowledge. (Actually is a word that can have sexual connotations.)
 - They weren't intimately familiar with these things. These things weren't precious to them.

That's why God starts by reasoning with them?

- **"I brought you up from Egypt.... Why would you not trust me for these small things?"**

- **Let me ask you a question...** really think about it: *Why would you trust God with your eternal salvation, but **not** trust him in your day-to-day life?* You believe he paid for your sin; he has eternity taken care of for you, and you are going to him... but he can't be trusted in your day-to-day life now? Does that make any sense?
- **A God you can trust with you eternity is a God you can trust with your budget.**
 - **A God** that paid for your sin, you can trust with your emotional needs
 - A God that overcame death, you can trust with your future.
 - If he did the lesser, surely he will do the former.

You need to think about this... and you need to teach them to your children. Parents, consider: **In one generation we go from a people who have saw God knock down the walls of Jericho to a generation that doesn't know God at all!**

- That's how quick it is!
- **Parent:** if your child was suddenly able to get a perspective on his life, and could speak to you: *"Mom and Dad, you are the only ones who can teach me to know the Lord and cherish the things he has done for his people..."*
- **Parents, are your children learning the preciousness of the gospel**—the acts of God and the promises of God—from you?
 - Do they **see it in your priorities?**
 - How you **spend your money?**
 - How you **structure their lives?** If you evaluate just the things you have them involved them—what would they deduce is more important—where they go to college and what kind of job they get, or whether they walk with God and where they spend eternity?

The Bible is clear: **Amnesia produces apostasy.** "And there arose a generation that did not know the Lord or the works he had done for Israel." Will that be true in your family?

Conclusion

Chapter 2:4 says that when Israel saw the damage they had caused to themselves and their children, they wept... but evidently they didn't repent. Repentance means making changes.

- **What does that look like for you?** Changing your habits. Getting your family involved in the life of the church, so that the church is less a religious **event you attend** on the weekend and more a community you belong to!
- **Resolving to obey** God fully in all things.