

### The Book of Judges

#### Lesson 4 - Chapter 2 Continued

In Judges chapter 2 we find the beginning of the terrible unexpectedly quick slide of Israel from their golden age of unity and harmony with YHWH (under Joshua's leadership) into rebellion and idolatry. We saw last week that the Lord God accused Israel of gross disobedience and that in the light of all He had done for them.

I want you to keep something in mind as we continue our study of Judges chapter 2 today, and keep on reminding yourself of it all during our exploration of this book: Israel was an already redeemed people. The folks that were behaving in such wicked ways that God had no choice but to react were not pagans but fully redeemed Israelites, God's chosen people. These were NOT people who "pretended" to be redeemed but actually weren't; they were not people who WERE redeemed at one time but aren't considered redeemed any longer. However their salvation history was in grave danger of being reversed. What the Lord was about to do with Israel was NOT an act of His disavowing them; rather it was an act of Israel stepping away from Him. The things He would do to Israel reflect a continuing love and concern for His set-apart people in hopes that harsh punishments and severe divine discipline would drive them back to safety and rest in Him.

Other than for purely historical reasons, why must we take what is happening here so personally? It is because this has a direct connection to the church age. This God-principle of the Lord attempting to keep His people firmly in the Kingdom even when our behavior warrants expulsion is ongoing. Within this principle is also HOW the Lord reacts to our continued sinning and tries to draw us back from the brink usually by means of punishments and disciplinary actions. However if our determination is such that even God's severity is not sufficient enough pain to convince us of our foolishness, and we essentially or emphatically renounce Him, then He will open His hand and release us back to our former unredeemed state.

We also see that the evil inclination that all men are born with remains active even after redemption. It is our delusions that entrap us; it was Israel's delusions born of their evil inclinations that caused them to honestly believe that they could worship Ba'al and Asherah and at the same time insists they were devoted to Yehoveh. We look at this at distant observers and think, 'what a bunch of dummies; how could anyone participate in a festival to a pagan god one moment and then turn right around and claim piety and holiness in the name of the God of Israel? How could those ungrateful stiff-necked Hebrews take elements of Ba'al worship and then incorporate them into the pure ways set down at Mt. Sinai and think God would find them acceptable?' Church, we do it all the time. How many Christian institutions host Halloween parties in the name of providing a safe and godly place for their children to do what they ought not do in the first place? How intertwined are the two most important gentile Christian created holy days of Easter and Christmas with pagan symbols,

drunken parties, excessive self-gratification, and secularism? But we have ready and well-rehearsed excuses and rationalizations that we honestly believe exempt us from responsibility or consequences.

We are reliving the era of the Judges only this time with a Christian theme. I pray for the day that all of us will finally hear the Lord saying to us the words He said to Israel in verse 2: *“.....you have paid no attention to what I said. What is this you have done?”*

Let's re-read part of chapter 2.

RE-READ JUDGES CHAPTER 2: 10 – end

Here we are introduced to what will become an endless cycle of delusional apostasy by Israel, oppression from an enemy as punishment, realization of their sin and subsequent repentance, and then eventual deliverance. I say “delusional” apostasy because I think the meaning of apostasy (from a Biblical perspective) is different than the common dictionary meaning. Webster's says that apostasy means to abandon one's faith; I don't agree with that. And the reason I don't is because in the modern sense for us the word, “abandon”, means to denounce or completely and knowingly give something up in its entirety. If we abandon a sinking ship, we're giving up the ship as entirely a lost cause in exchange for something else. If an unwed mother drops off her infant at the door of a church or orphanage, she is abandoning it and will (generally) have no further relationship or contact with that child. That is not what we see Israel doing in Judges, and that is not usually what we see happening in the NT when a Believer is accused of apostizing.

I think it is better that we see it from Yehoveh's perspective because it's the only perspective that matters. For Him “abandon” more means to break faith. It usually means that we have chosen NOT to entirely fall away or renounce Him, but rather to mix our devotion to Him with devotion to something else. Or it has a sense of intellectually hanging on to Him while behaviorally following the path of evil.

The Lord created marriage to give us a visible, tangible, physical way of practicing and acting out the kind of relationship (with all of its benefits, obligations, and challenges) that He has with His followers. He sees Israel (and all of His Believers) in the context of a wife to Him, and He wants us to see Him in the context of a husband to us. Thus when a spouse is unfaithful in a marriage it is said even in our secular courts of civil law that the marriage has been legally abandoned. Even if the couple has not separated; even if the unfaithful spouse did not have in his or her mind to legally terminate the marriage or marry another, the level of unfaithfulness crossed over some point that the spiritual bond was broken even if it only involved the human spirit.

One of the most graphic depictions of this concept of a marriage relationship between Yehoveh and His followers is contained in Hosea. We'll not read it all, but I do want for us to read the short 1st chapter as it helps us to understand the Lord's attitude towards those who break faith with (abandon) Him.

### READ HOSEA CHAPTER 1 all

Whoring is a word used often in the Bible for a spouse breaking faith in a marriage relationship; it is virtually a synonym for idolatry (when it pertains to man's broken relationship with God). When this faith-breaking reaches some tipping point that only the Lord determines, then He springs into action with the result expressed in the names of Hosea's 3 children: Yizre'el, God sows catastrophe; Lo-Ruchamah, God will no longer have pity; and Lo-Ammi, His followers will become not-my-people (and He will become not-their-god).

While those words are frightening beyond imagination, there is some good news that is contained in the first verse of Hosea chapter 2.

***Hosea 2:1 "Nevertheless, the people of Isra'el will number as many as the grains of sand by the sea, which cannot be measured or counted; so that the time will come when, instead of being told, 'You are not my people,' it will be said to them, 'You are the children of the living God.'***

That is, after the Lord has disowned Israel for a time, He will open the door to let those back in WHO WANT TO COME BACK IN. They originally came to the Lord in their own free will; they then took the path of evil and thus fell away by their own free will; and then the Lord will open up a path to recovering their redemption, which they must enter by their own free will. It is like that for Believers in Yeshua.

So with the concept of a marriage relationship in mind, and with a better understanding of what the Bible means by abandonment, Judges verse 12 can say, "They (Israel) abandoned YHWH, the God of their fathers...", but it does NOT mean that it was their intention to no longer worship Yehoveh. If you asked an Israelite at that time, "have you left the relationship with YHWH and replaced it with devotion to another god?", the answer would have been an emphatic "NO"! Rather it is as is written in the previous verse, ".....the people of Israel did what was evil in Yehoveh's eyes (or perspective)..." The specific evil was idolatry.

It will always be for mankind that our viewpoint (whether Christian or not) is irrelevant when contrasted with God's. It doesn't matter if we consider ourselves "moral" people, or a "good" person, or "saved" and secured for eternity. God's definition of all things is what we must go by or we are simply deluding ourselves. It's much easier and more comfortable for us to ignore the commandments of Torah where Yehoveh defines sin, holiness, righteousness, and purity and instead believe that with our salvation we'll somehow simply "know". Without Scriptural investigation into the Torah we'll then rely on the so-called goodness of our own hearts or more often we'll rely on religious doctrines and traditions to determine our beliefs and explain what is proper behavior. But when we walk down that dangerous but wide road we'll also find ourselves in the exact same position as this new generation of Israelites who (as it says in verse 10), "knew neither YHWH or the work He had done for Israel." As I explained in our last lesson this statement doesn't mean that they didn't know who YHWH was, or that they weren't aware of their own national history; rather they chose to be willfully ignorant. Therefore they blindly went about their lives confident that they were in good stead with the Almighty;

when in His eyes they were rebellious and unfaithful and that equated to abandonment. The wife in the marriage (Israel) had committed adultery against her husband (who in this case is Yehoveh).

Verses 12 and 13 say that Israel chose to add other gods (Canaanite gods) to the mix due to their syncretism with their pagan neighbors; it was in their eyes a peaceful, loving, appropriate thing to do.

But God was unimpressed with their peaceful ambitions and their sincere intents, so it says that the Lord's anger BLAZED up against Israel with the result that He allowed Israel to have their own way and mix with the wicked Canaanites and He made it so the Canaanites no longer feared them but the Israelites lost all desire to resist their enemies.

I want to show you something fascinating about verse 14 that demonstrates the amazing interconnectedness of the Word of God and why we must skip over nothing. Literally the first words of verse 14 say, "the **'aph** of the Lord burned against Israel" or "the NOSTRILS of the Lord burned against Israel". Now follow me here: what the Lord is incensed about is Israel's idolatry. They were bowing down to the Ba'als; and what that means is (by definition) they were presenting burnt offerings to the Ba'als. Yet they were also presenting these same offerings to Yehoveh. Naturally these tainted offerings were unacceptable to God; they were defiled and anything but holy.

Recall that on several occasions in our study of the first 5 books of the Bible that it would be said that the smoke of Israel's offerings from the altar of Burnt Offerings would waft up to God and He would fine them a pleasing odor to His nostrils. They were pleasing because they were offered in obedience; they were offered properly, from the proper Altar, at the proper sanctuary, by the proper mediaries (the Levite Priests).

In Judges 2:14 we find the opposite: when the Lord smelled the smoke of the burnt offerings it caused His nostrils to BURN. The odor of Israel's offerings were not pleasing to Him because they were offered according to pagan standards, from pagan altars, at pagan sanctuaries, and many times by whatever official they wished to use (or no official, no priest, at all).

God's people cannot substitute unclean offerings for clean offerings and give them to the Lord. God's people cannot declare good what God declares is evil. God's people must never think that we can without consequence wander after things we are told to reject; because the result (at some point) can be that God will no longer block our path (for our own good). At some point He'll let us go the way we have determined we will go. He will open His hand and we will be allowed to be as the world, and also to share their eternal fate. Think that's only an Old Testament curse?

***CJB Romans 1:26 This is why God has given them up to degrading passions; so that their women exchange natural sexual relations for unnatural; 27 and likewise the men, giving up natural relations with the opposite sex, burn with passion for one another, men committing shameful acts with other men and receiving in their own persons the penalty appropriate to their perversion.***

Why is homosexuality on the rise in our society? Why is so-called gay marriage now legal in some states? Because it is being sought after as an appropriate way of life by many, validated as good and healthy, and a large portion of the Church now celebrates it right along with unbelievers. And because God has obviously decided to turn those over to that perversion who insist they must have it.

Just as Israel convinced themselves that God preferred peace with their Canaanite neighbors to war, so have many modern Christians have convinced themselves that God prefers tolerance and inclusiveness to obedience and standing up for what is right. The commandments of God are crystal clear on the matter, but men have decided that any kind of love is godly love. Is there a consequence for doing this terrible thing? According to Paul there is.

From the spiritual and heavenly point of view there were 5 reasons recorded in Judges for Israel's fall from grace.

1. The tribes no longer fought for a common cause and were in a state of disunity; they even began to war amongst themselves. This led to the Wilderness Tabernacle becoming dilapidated and eventually even being moved from Shiloh for political reasons. Even the Ark became dissociated from the Tabernacle in such a way that it would soon be seen as no longer necessary that the Ark be kept in the Holy of Holies. This led to a breakdown in the entire priestly system and thus the indispensable sacrificial system. God could no longer be properly appeased, and the people's sins could no longer be properly atoned for.
2. The 12 tribes decided that rather than following God's instructions to deport all Canaanites from the Promised Land and annihilate those who refused to go, they would establish good relations with them. Such a thing nearly overnight exposed Israel to customs and cultures that held too much temptation for them to resist.
3. The gods of the Canaanites were nature gods. As Israel had won the hills but not the amazingly productive valleys and plains, Israel had a harder time growing crops on their rocky ground while the Canaanites' had an almost ideal location to sow and plant. Israel watched the Canaanites worship the sun god, rain god, and goddess of fertility and concluded that unless they did the same it was near hopeless that they could grow substantial crops in less suitable soil. So they played follow-the-leader.
4. Although it isn't typically talked about enough in our religious institutions, sex played an enormous role in primitive societies. It was key for growing the large families needed to flourish, and it was just as key for the animals to procreate freely in order for flocks and herds to grow large. Therefore sex was seen as equally integral to worship practices. Temple prostitution (which is the scholarly name for sex acts as part of religious services) was normal and customary. In fact it must have at first seemed strange for Israel NOT to employ sacred sex. Can you imagine what your worship experience would be like if suddenly it was deemed that no more music or singing would be included? Most folks would find congregational meetings less fulfilling and exciting; it would seem as though an important ingredient was missing. That is how ingrained and expected and taken for granted that sacred sex was among the Babylon Mystery Religions. This illicit mixing of Israel with the Canaanites and thus becoming

intimately near their worship customs proved too attractive to Israel and so they also adopted sacred sex as part of their integrated worship of YHWH and Ba'al.

5. Syncretism was the result of blending the politics and economics of the Canaanites with the Israelites. The two different societies started looking almost identical, because their condition before God was becoming identical. While they certainly didn't plan for this to happen, they also didn't resist it.

The consequences of this apostasy (and remember, Biblical apostasy is NOT the decision to entirely terminate ones' relationship with God, but rather to compromise it) was that God responded by turning Israel over to their enemies, and thus they could not stand against them as they did under the Godly ideal of leadership displayed by Joshua.

I've taken some good potshots at my own brothers and sisters of the Church today, but I've also saved a few for my dear friends the Jewish people of Israel. Just as the Body of Believers is today following a parallel path to the time of Judges, so are the modern Israelis.

Every effort is being made to deal away portions of Jerusalem in order to make peace.

Many Jews are now accepting that the Temple Mount, the site of Yehoveh's Sanctuary, complete with the towering Muslim Golden Dome, will have to become a permanent possession of the Palestinians IF peace is to happen.

Allah is more and more being seen among Jews as but another legitimate name for God and thus in the desire to display tolerance and love there is no reason that Islam cannot be accepted as a good and appropriate religion for descendants of Ishmael, just as Christianity is seen as a good and appropriate religion for gentiles in general.

In the name of humanity Israel constantly sends food and fuel and medical supplies and money to the terrorist regime on their borders, with the hope that their enemies will come to like them. The rest of the world sees such a thing as a sign that Israel is willing to give up their so-called racist and elitist attitude of being "the chosen of God", in return for becoming a welcome member of the world community of gentiles.

Now in Judges 2:16 comes the first explanation of the protocol of the Judges; and here is also explained this correlation between the spiritual role and the human role in the purpose of the **Shophetim**. It was that the Lord Himself would raise up a judge, and the judge would be a savior who rescued some tribe or another from whoever was oppressing them. But even then Israel would quickly return to those false gods of their neighbors after the savior/judge had completed his mission. The thing to understand is that for as long a Judge whom the Lord established ruled, Israel was kept secure.

And the reason that the Lord did this for Israel is one that we can all take great hope in and it is expressed very simply in verse 18. There we're told that the Lord was moved to pity because of those who were oppressing His people. The Hebrew word that is usually translated as oppressed or afflicted is **lachats**. **Lachats** means to apply pressure, to squeeze. **Lachats** has a direct counterpart in the New Testament and so we would do well to see the context of the

word here in Judges and apply it to the New Testament usage. That New Testament word is in Greek **thlipsis**; we translate it as Tribulation. That's right, the Greek work **thlipsis** is a translation of the Hebrew **lachats** and it means to be placed under pressure. It indeed is used as a euphemism in both the Hebrew and Greek to mean oppressed or afflicted. However the evangelical branch of the church has taught us to think of tribulation as equivalent to extreme subjugation and forced servitude along with mortal danger for those who resist. But in fact it can also represent a great pressure to do what is not right. We're all familiar with the term peer pressure, meaning that those who we have the closest relationship with, and those whose admiration and acceptance we seek, apply a kind of unbearable psychological influence upon us to conform to their ideals and morals. The force is more often a passive one of implicated social rejection for non-compliance, and less usual is it that such influenced is aggressive coercion and physical harm.

And when we read Judges we see that unbearable pressure from both aspects is present upon Israel due their mixing the godly with the ungodly, the clean with the unclean, and the Lord decides to takes pity upon them as a result. The 2 pressure points on Israel are 1) the immense social and accompanying psychological pressure to conform for what is seen as the common good, and 2) some degree of physical coercion of the government to comply with the society's laws and customs. Often though this can simply mean that living life is easier and more convenient and one can attain a higher socio-economic strata when done in harmony within the society's morays and expectations, than if one chooses to buck the system. There is a 3rd kind of pressure and that is attacks from other nations who want to take land, or crops, or people from Israel.

Now that you know this, the next time you read about tribulation (**thlipsis, lachats**) in the Apocryphal books of the New Testament don't automatically picture the situation as some kind of grossly evil fascist repressive government running around enslaving people or killing the opposition at a whim (although it certainly appears that it will reach that level at some point near the end). More often (from a Biblical standpoint) tribulation is simply addressing a national situation whereby the pressures of a society that is far from God makes life for those living within that society, but who also seek to live in harmony with God, terribly difficult. In the case of Israel dealing with their Canaanite neighbors it points to a situation whereby the temptations placed in front of Israel to succumb to a pagan lifestyle are huge; the draw to personal pleasure and comfort and sexual deviance are nearly irresistible. The principle that economic advancement overrules everything else becomes the focus. Sound familiar?

Verse 20 continues to make the point that the Lord God is VERY angry with Israel, thus there is NO chance that Israel will escape severe punishment. But hidden in the words of the second half of this verse is a kind of slap in the face to Israel by the Lord. Look where it says that, "Because this nation violates my covenant, which I ordered their fathers to obey...." In Hebrew is says, "Because **hagoy hazeh** violates my covenant..." Goy means GENTILE nation. Way back in Genesis, before the time of Abraham, **goy** or **goyim** meant nations as in any old nation on earth. But when Abraham was declared by God as the first Hebrew, and thus the earth became divided into gentiles and Hebrews, the term goy became applied ONLY to gentile people and nations but NOT Hebrew. So here we have the Lord essentially saying, "because this gentile-like nation violates my covenant...." The bottom line here is that if to some serious

level a follower of God behaves as a non-follower, then the God of Israel will see you just as though you were a non-follower and not as one of His. I can't define this exact point, and I defy anyone else to either; such a matter is in the Lord's province alone. But there is every reason to stay as far from any possibility of the Father lumping us in with the pagans of the world (due to our unacceptable behavior and attitudes), isn't there?

So in verse 22 God says that He is leaving those Canaanite nations there for the tribes of Israel to contend with as a test, or better a trial. This does not mean trial in the sense of "trials and tribulations". It doesn't indicate being put into a bad situation whereby the bad situation is of itself the punishment. Rather in Hebrew the word is *nassa*, and it refers to a judicial kind of trial. In other words the accurate sense of this statement is that God is going to put the tribes of Israel on trial in His courtroom; they are the accused and He is the judge. Whether they are convicted and merit further punishment, or whether they are found to be innocent and merit mercy, will depend on if Israel proves itself to have learned its lesson and becomes Torah observant as their immediate ancestors were. The alternative is that Israel will reject God's discipline (in the form of the Canaanite nations being divinely allowed to create problems for Israelite society) and God reacts with further and (predictably) more severe punishments on His people.

We'll start chapter 3 next time.