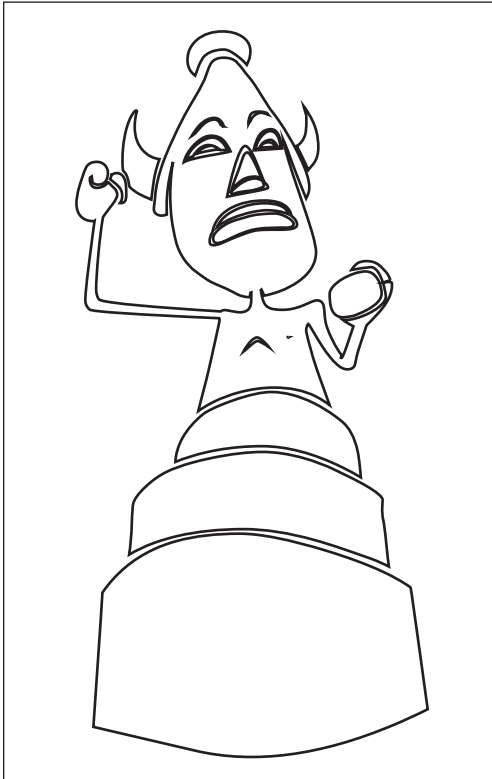


The time of the judges



Colour me!



Judges 2:6-17

Joshua had been faithful to the Lord. And after Joshua sent the Israelites to take the land they had been promised, they remained faithful to the Lord until Joshua died at the age of one hundred and ten. He was buried on his land in Timnath-Heres, in the hill country of Ephraim north of Mount Gaash. Even though Joshua was gone, the Israelites were faithful to the Lord during the lifetime of those men who had been leaders with Joshua and who had seen the wonderful things the Lord had done for Israel.

After a while the people of Joshua's generation died, and the next generation did not know the Lord or any of the things he had done for Israel. The Lord had brought their ancestors out of Egypt, and they had worshipped him. But now the Israelites stopped worshipping the Lord and worshipped the idols of Baal and Astarte, as well as the idols of other gods from nearby nations.

The Lord was so angry with the Israelites that he let other nations raid Israel and steal their crops and other possessions. Enemies were everywhere, and the Lord always let them defeat Israel in battle. The Lord had warned Israel he would do this, and now the Israelites were miserable.

From time to time, the Lord would choose special leaders known as judges. These judges would lead the Israelites into battle and defeat the enemies that made raids on them. In years gone by, the Israelites had been faithful to the Lord, but now they were quick to be unfaithful and to refuse even to listen to these judges. The Israelites would disobey the Lord, and instead of worshipping him, they would worship other gods.

Commentary

After the exciting stories of Moses and Joshua, comes a less attractive period in Israel's history. It was not long before the people forgot all that God had done for them and began to copy those around them, choosing other gods to worship.

Both Moses and Joshua had warned them that this might happen, but it seems that faith in the one true God had not been passed on very well to their children and their children's children. Perhaps they imagined that they didn't have to make an effort to pass on the story to those who came after them and that somehow it would just be picked up; or maybe they underestimated the influences from the tribes around them. What happened to Israel stands as a warning to the people of God in every age. Unless we make the effort to tell and retell the true story of God, it will easily be forgotten or corrupted. No wonder their enemies began to defeat them easily and God seemed to have abandoned them. But God did not give up on them. He sent leaders (judges) from time to time to draw them back to the faith, even though, once these leaders died, many people returned to putting their trust in idols.

Questions

- ▶ Why did people forget all that God had done, after Joshua died?
- ▶ Why were the Israelites so attracted to worshipping other gods from the tribes around them?
- ▶ Why didn't God give up on his people?
- ▶ What keeps you believing, even though many people around you today do not?



Visual aid

Use a compass or a compass app as a focus. No matter which way you turn, the needle will always point north. The people of Israel chose to ignore the compass that God had given them in the Ten Commandments and in the amazing story of their rescue from Egypt and God's guidance during the days in the desert. No wonder they lost their way, just as we would if we ignored a compass.



Activity idea

There are lots of things today that grab our attention and influence us in our thinking and our actions. Look through a popular magazine together and cut out pictures of some of the so-called 'gods' of today: extreme focus on fashion, greed, desire for popularity at any cost, obsession with good looks, possessions and power. Although these things aren't necessarily bad in themselves, they can be bad for us if they lead us to forget to trust in God.



Prayer idea

If the Israelites had remembered the Ten Commandments, they would have recalled that the one true God cannot be represented by statues of animals or by sacred trees. Remind each other of the commandments and, as you say each one, turn it into a prayer for help—for example, "Help us remember that you are the one true God; help us not to worship false gods; help us to respect your name," and so on.

Key verse

In years gone by, the Israelites had been faithful to the Lord, but now they were quick to be unfaithful and to refuse even to listen to these judges (Judges 2:17).

New Testament story link

Matthew 6:24: Jesus tells us that we can't worship more than one God.



Colour me!

