

**JUDGES 2:1-15 (selected)**  
**PLAYING THE LONG GAME**

*Then the Angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said: "I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers. And I said, I will never break My covenant with you. And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars. But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this? Therefore I also said, I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you."*

*So it was, when the Angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voices and wept. Then they called the name of that place Bochim; and they sacrificed there to the Lord. And when Joshua had dismissed the people, the children of Israel went each to his own inheritance to possess the land. So the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord which He had done for Israel.*

*. . . Another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel. Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals; and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the Lord to anger.*

It's easy—maybe not wise, but easy—to take a shortcut on an important task, so as to get done quickly and move on to something more enjoyable. Whether it's building a house or a shed, whether raising children or crops or herds, whether it's mastering welding, or math class, whether leading in government or the congregation, "Close enough," playing the short game, has an appeal. Yet, "close enough" yields poor results, that will not last.

The struggle between "close enough" and "building for the long term" is in our text for today. The Children of Israel had now been living in the "promised land" of Canaan for approximately 40 years. God had brought them out of slavery and oppression in Egypt under Moses. God brought them into the land of Canaan to conquer it and possess it under Joshua. Israel crossed the Jordan River and camped at Gilgal. There the Lord renewed His covenant with them, to be their God and they His people. Circumcision was re-instated

(not practiced during the 40 years in the wilderness). Passover was again celebrated (not celebrated since Mt. Sinai 40 years earlier). Food now came from the land of Canaan (manna ceased after 40 years). God told Israel to drive out thoroughly the idol-worshipping Canaanites, to tear down their altars, and not in any way to be partakers of their idol worship. God was building for the long term and the future. God had promised Abraham 500 years earlier that this land would belong to his descendants, and a great nation would develop. From them the Seed (Jesus) would be born who would give New Life to sinners. God was involved in the long game.

That approach didn't sit well with the Israelites. Short-cuts seemed better. They did not eradicate all the Canaanites from the land, only some of them. Why? Perhaps it was too much work. Just driving out some of them would be close enough, a short game. Or perhaps it didn't seem cordial—a little too harsh—not to live with them in peace. After all the Canaanites tolerated Israel's worship of Jehovah, so Israel should tolerate their worship of idols. Israel turned to idol worship as well. What could be the harm with taking a little short-cut away from what God had said? They still knew God and His promise. Little did they realize that the “short-cut game” they were playing, and wanted to play because it was easy and fun, would end up in long term disaster, ultimately drawing them away from their only hope of God's forgiveness and eternal life in heaven through Christ.

Does it sound familiar? The long-game of living under the loving Lord and His will, serving the crucified and risen Savior 100% with heart, soul, strength, and mind, is not very appealing. “Let's take a short cut and play the self-satisfying short game. It won't hurt. Let's abbreviate God's will for gender, and sex, and morality. Let's promote and indulge in ‘liberated’ morals of movies, books, and deeds. It will be more cordial toward people around us, and it will be more fun. So what if we dishonor marriage and its intimacy by indulging ourselves outside of marriage? So what if we approve men with men and women with women as a legitimate intimate pair? So what if we approve of pretending to change one's gender—as if God made a mistake in who we are.” (Maybe, then, shorten the legs of the tall person because God made him too tall?!) The same shortcut appeal works for any sin. Let's waste what God has entrusted to us, losing it at the gambling halls, risking it for illegitimate goods that God has entrusted to someone else. Let's take the name of God in vain because it's the way the people around here talk. ----- What pleases me now, regardless of what it does down the road, is the goal—even despising God and my Savior.

The same shortcut appeal applies with Bible teaching. Instead of being such sticklers for “Thus says the Lord,” let's be one in worship and cause with those who say things which God does not say—such as “God has chosen some for hell,” such as “after death the Christian has to be purged from final sins before entering heaven,” such as “baptism is

purely symbolical and does nothing”—even though Scripture says “Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins,” such as “the Lord’s Supper is symbolical—“is my body” mean represents—“is the blood of the new covenant” means represents, such as “before the End Christ will set up a kingdom on earth for 1000 years”—though Jesus Himself said “My kingdom is not of this world,” such as “One has to make a decision for Christ. One has to ask Christ to enter his heart”—although faith is Spirit-worked. ----- To pretend-away differences in Bible teaching is to play the short game. It’s easy and cordial, but will lead to further drifting from the Lord.

The Lord plays the long game. He does not want us, or those who come after us in this life, to slide away from Him by making the short game our number one interest. The devil wants you to think the short game is where life really is—“Do what suits you now.” But the devil’s goal is a different long game—to draw you and those after you further and further away from the Lord and His Son in whom you have the humanly impossible release from sins and guilt. Separating you from God in the pangs of hell is the devil’s game. God, however, will step in.

And so in our text we read that The Angel of the Lord came to speak with Israel. The term “The Angel of the Lord” is a term that comes up often in the Old Testament. It is not speaking of an ordinary angel, but of the Lord Himself! In our text, The Angel says “**I** led you up from Egypt . . . **I** swore to your fathers. The Angel is God. The Lord, who had appeared to Joshua at Gilgal earlier, to assure Joshua that the Lord would be with them in their very first battle vs. Jericho, now appeared again at Bochim to call the people to repentance for their bonding with the ungodly Canaanites and joining in the idol worship.

“*Why have you done this?*” The Angel says. ( Do these words sound like God’s words in the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve sinned?) God knew Israel’s answer. Israel wanted to play the self-serving, fun-loving, short game. He knew that the appealing short game of Satan only leads to long game defeat, The Angel had harsh news for God’s people.. “*I said, I will never break My covenant with you; and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land. You shall tear down their altars. But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this?*” “*Therefore I also said, I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you.*” No longer would living in Canaan be living on Easy Street. Instead of the Canaanites appearing as friends, the Canaanites would become a thorn for them, oppressing them, trying to take over the Israelites, The idol gods of Canaan would become a dangerous threat to Israel—like a monstrous addiction that must continually be fought. Sin is like that. When one continues to lie, lying becomes an ingrained way of life and must consciously be

fought. Or pornography. Or gossip. Sin always breeds more sin and brings more unhappiness and troubles in life. Name one that doesn't. God wants you to see that.

*The people began to weep.* [The name Bochim means “weepings.”] *They sacrificed to the Lord,* They sought the Lord's forgiveness. His forgiving mercy was showered upon them. This is the key to playing the long game in life. Realize each day that you are a sinner. Implore God's mercy in Jesus. In Christ you are forgiven time after time. One would think God would get tired of that, but He doesn't. Then willfully serve Him who has made peace for you. Joshua sent the Israelites home to serve the Lord in the long game. You also go home in peace.

But beware! Satan is no pushover. He casts out his lure, making the short game look better and the long game a waste. He will never give up. *Another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel. Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals; and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the Lord to anger.* Each generation needs to prepare the next; however, not just with mechanical ritual, but with heartfelt love for the Lord and with love for that generation to follow.

This message is applicable to Father's Day! “Fathers, bring up your children in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4)! Do not deviate from Him and His Word. However, the short game has a great appeal—“Let your children do as they want. It's easier that way.” Not so. Fathers, train your children in the long-game, eternal life in Christ. Lead them to stand in His Word. ----- Likewise, children, do not shrug off your father's training in the Lord. Shortcuts that serve you seem more appealing, but ultimately lead to defeat. Be in the long game. The Savior has won the victory. Do not foolishly cast it away—for yourself or the generation to come.

So be it! Amen!

Pastor Kanzenbach---