

Evil **Old Testament**

Evil

Before we get started, I want to emphasize that the Old Testament is different than the New Testament. That is obvious and seemingly redundant. But, this is something that must be constantly brought to mind.

The Hebrew language and writing is very different than English. It may seem that skilled translators, translate Hebrew words into English words with ease. But, that is not really the case. Some concepts in Hebrew may be difficult to find a match in English. Many Hebrew words are not exact equivalents of English. These words grew out of a culture that is very different from our own.

This reminds me of a Japanese word Kuchisabishii which has sometimes been translated as “When you're not hungry but you eat because your mouth is “lonely”.”

Our culture, with electronics, flying machines, remote control are everyday concepts for us. They would be incomprehensible to an ancient Hebrew. So then, are some of the Hebrew concepts to us.

Add to that, the concept of covenant in a theocracy with God as the king. More and more, I am convinced of the importance of “covenant” when reading anything in the Old Testament. However, under it all, there is the same God, the same savior, the same faith. The Scripture we have is from them. God gave it to them. But today, it is for us. Let us try to understand what it means.

One more item before we start our study of “evil.”

In the study, there is reference to the Hebrew imperfect tense. Here is some background information on it from the website

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becomingjewish.com. This information is succinct and easy to understand.

“The imperfect conjugation is used to express incomplete action and is usually translated as present tense (I walk) or future tense (I will walk). The imperfect also denotes habitual or customary action – past, present, or future tense. The imperfect may also be rendered as one of several modal values (would, should, can, etc.) which are suggested by context and syntax.”

“The Hebrew imperfect does not have tense apart from context and syntax – just like the Hebrew perfect. The Hebrew imperfect denotes incomplete action, whether in the past, present, or future.”

The Bible has much to say about “evil.” According to Biblehub.com, the noun for evil, *ra*, is used some 667 times in the Old Testament.

[Strong's Hebrew 7451](#)
[667 Occurrences](#)

Interesting. That is 666 plus 1.

In the study of the book of Judges, it is encountered first in Judges 2:11.

Judges 2:11 The sons of Israel did evil. Here is a good simple introductory explanation of evil from Robbie Dean:

“The word used here for evil is the Hebrew word *ra*. It can mean something that is just destructive, a non-moral sense of something that is just disagreeable, bad or doesn't work; but it also, in most places, has a spiritual sense and it illustrates the violation of the will of God. It is evil because God says it is evil, it is evil in the sight of the Lord. It is focused on idolatry—“and they served the Baals.” The root of all evil is the transfer of allegiance and priority from God to something else in the created order. This is what happens over and over.”

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A more recent quote from Robbie Dean:

“Now how do you define evil? That is a good question. Evil is clearly defined in the Old Testament. Most of the time, the vast majority of the time when it says so and so did evil, what comes next is that they are worshiping false gods. They are ignoring the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and they are following some other god. David did a lot of sinful things. He conspired to have Uriah murdered. He committed adultery with Bathsheba. He did a number of other things. But it is never said he did evil. He was not an idolater. His heart was for the Lord. And, we all have sin and we all sin. But, David was never one who turned his back on the Lord. He knew what was true and what wasn't.

“So the sons of Israel did evil. This is the Hebrew word ra' which can be translated bad or evil but it has to do mostly with idolatry. And that is the context here (chapter 2). It describes those who abandon God, who turn their back on God and they are worshiping some alternative. It may be they are only worshiping their own sin nature and doing whatever they want to do. They are just completely self-absorbed and self-indulgent. It could be that they have attributed to some idol made out of stone or wood or metal and they have attributed that as some powerful representation of some spiritual deity. We know from Deuteronomy that God says they are worshiping and sacrificing to demons, that there are demons behind those idols. And we will see more about that as we go forward this evening. So they did evil in the sight of the Lord and they served the Ba'als.”

Evil is a word that appears often in the book of Judges (Judges 2:11; 2:15; 3:7; 3:12; 4:1; 6:1; 9:23; 9:56; 9:57; 10:6; 11:27; 13:1; 15:3; 20:3; 20:12; 20:13; 20:34; 20:41). But, it hasn't been a topic of great concern in this study. Yet, it is the reason so many bad things happen in the book of Judges. So, what is evil?

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The book of Judges does give an insight into the process of evil starting in Judges chapter 2.

Judges 2:10 All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel.

Judges 2:11 Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals,

Sons of Israel. This is not a single person doing evil. This is “sons,” plural. This is a collective group of people. This was rampant throughout Israel.

Did. This means to do or to make. Either way, the sons of Israel (plural) did this. No only that, but the verb is in the imperfect tense. This is continuous, habitual, action. This became the daily modus operandi.

Evil. Literally, “the evil.”

Judges 2:12 and they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and they followed other gods from the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them; so they provoked the Lord to anger.

Judges 2:13 They abandoned the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtaroth.

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Judges 2:14 Then the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and He handed them over to plunderers, and they plundered them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies around them, so that they could no longer stand against their enemies.

Judges 2:15 Wherever they went, the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, as the Lord had spoken and just as the Lord had sworn to them, so that they were severely distressed.

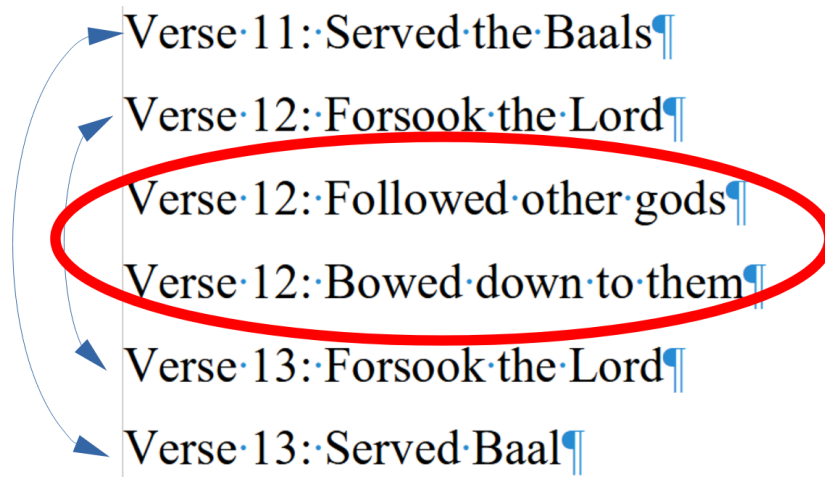
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Here is a table of these chapter 2 verses with the key words identified.

Verse	Phrase	Meaning
11	Did Evil	“It can mean something that is just destructive, a non-moral sense of something that is just disagreeable, bad or doesn't work; but it also, in most places, has a spiritual sense and it illustrates the violation of the will of God.” (Dean) In this context, it seems to function as a title or introduction to the anti-God activities of the sons of Israel.
11	Served the Baals	In this kind of context it is worship. The verb can also mean work or be in the service of. When out of fellowship we are in the service of the flesh, the world and the Devil.
12	Forsook the Lord	The verb means to abandon. This is the abandonment of the faith life, doctrine, the plan of God for our lives and even acknowledgment of the Messiah/Savior. This is not a momentary lapse. This is habitual activity.
12	Followed after other gods	Literally, “walked after.” If you are a Christian, once you go down this path, you change the manner of your life, your behavior. <u>This starts with what you think</u> . So in the Old Testament, they patterned their life after the evil anti-Yahweh ways of the Canaanites.
12	Bowed themselves down to them	Means prostrate. But it is more than that. It is reverence. You value the object of your worship. In the Old Testament, this was often “Baal,” one of the Canaanite gods.
13	Forsook the Lord	Repeat from verse 12
13	Served Baal	Repeat from verse 11

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Note the “chiasm.” That is a repetition in reverse order of a phrase or words. When that technique is employed by the writer, it emphasizes the words or phrases in the middle:



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Here is a table with the sons of Israel (plural) doing (continuous) evil (abandoning God and serving other gods):

Judges	Offense	Enemy
3:7	The sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth.	Served King of Mesopotamia Delivered by Othniel
3:12	Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord.	Served King of Moab Delivered by Ehud
4:1	Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord after Ehud died.	Lord sold them into the hand of King of Canaan. Delivered by Deborah
6:1	Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord;	Gave them into the hands of Midian. Delivered by Gideon
10:6	Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, served the Baals and the Ashraroht, the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the sons of Ammon and the gods of the Philistines; thus they forsook the Lord and did not serve Him	Lord sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the sons of Ammon. Delivered by Jephthah
13:1	Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, so that the Lord gave them into the hands of the Philistines forty years.	The Lord gave them into the hands of the Philistines forty years. Delivered by Samson

Essentially, the evil described in the book of Judges is violation of the 1st and 2nd commandments.

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From the book of Exodus version:

Exodus 20:2 “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

Exodus 20:3 “You shall have no other gods before Me.

Exodus 20:4 “You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth.

Exodus 20:5 You shall not worship them nor serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, inflicting the punishment of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me,

Exodus 20:6 but showing favor to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

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From the book of Deuteronomy:

Deuteronomy 5:7 'You shall have no other gods besides Me.

Deuteronomy 5:8 'You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.

Deuteronomy 5:9 You shall not worship them nor serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, inflicting the punishment of the fathers on the children, even on the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me,

Deuteronomy 5:10 but showing favor to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

Let us look at some select uses of this verb as it applied to the “evil” kings of the Southern Kingdom in the book of Chronicles.

Concerning King Rehoboam (2 Chronicles 12:14)

2 Chronicles 12:14 But he (Rehoboam) did (imperfect) evil because he did not set his heart to seek the Lord.

When a king does evil, it effects everyone below him in the kingdom. Many people are corrupted.

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2 Chronicles 21:6 He (King Jehoram) walked in the way of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab had done, for Ahab's daughter was his wife; and he did (imperfect) evil in the sight of the Lord.

2 Chronicles 22:4 So he (King Ahaziah) did (imperfect) evil in the sight of the Lord like the house of Ahab, for they were his counselors after the death of his father, to his own destruction.

Notice here, once the evil is started, it is almost impossible to eradicate. One generation teaches/infects the next. And often, each succeeding generation will do more evil than the previous. We are seeing that in the book of Judges. We are also seeing that in the world today.

The writer of 1 Chronicles is not the only one who identified evil in the land. Hezekiah attempted to clean out the evil from the land. In a speech to the Levites he said:

2 Chronicles 29:5 Then he said to them, "Listen to me, you Levites. Consecrate yourselves now, and consecrate the house of the Lord, the God of your fathers, and carry the uncleanness out of the holy place (the temple).

2 Chronicles 29:6 For our fathers have been unfaithful and have done (perfect – i.e. a completed action from the perspective of

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Hezekiah) evil in the sight of the Lord our God, and they have abandoned Him and turned their faces away from the dwelling place of the Lord, and have turned their backs.

2 Chronicles 29:7 They have also shut the doors of the porch and extinguished the lamps, and have not burned incense nor offered burnt offerings in the holy place to the God of Israel.

King Manasseh was one of the most evil kings in the Southern Kingdom if not the worst. And yet, God's grace finally got through to him late in his reign. He finally believed and tried to clean up the mess he made. But it was too late for the people of his kingdom. They had been thoroughly corrupted into evil. I have an extensive quote from 2 Chronicles because there is an extensive list of evils described.

2 Chronicles 33:2 He did (imperfect) evil in the sight of the Lord according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord dispossessed before the sons of Israel.

2 Chronicles 33:3 For he rebuilt the high places which his father Hezekiah had torn down; he also set up altars for the Baals and made Asherim, and he worshiped all the heavenly lights and served them.

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2 Chronicles 33:4 He built altars in the house of the Lord of which the Lord had said, “My name shall be in Jerusalem forever.”

2 Chronicles 33:5 He built altars for all the heavenly lights in the two courtyards of the house of the Lord.

2 Chronicles 33:6 He also made his sons pass through the fire in the Valley of Ben-hinnom; and he practiced witchcraft, used divination, practiced sorcery, and dealt with mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking Him to anger.

2 Chronicles 33:7 Then he put the carved image of the idol which he had made in the house of God, of which God had said to David and his son Solomon, “In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever;

2 Chronicles 33:8 and I will not remove the foot of Israel again from the land which I have appointed for your fathers, if only they will take care to do everything that I have commanded them according to all the Law, the statutes, and the ordinances given through Moses.”

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2 Chronicles 33:9 So Manasseh encouraged Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the sons of Israel. (He continually, habitually, promoted to many people anti-God activities. God is the God of the covenant.)

Evil first shows up in the Garden of Eden in the name: the tree of good and evil. Here “good” is in opposition to evil. However, I suspect “good” includes many associated concepts like “right” and “righteousness.”

Genesis 2:17 but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for on the day that you eat from it you will certainly die.”

Let me summarize points on evil from the Bible:

1. Idolatry: Evil is focused on idolatry. Robbie Dean made that point early on.
 - A. Bible passages like Judges 2:11 indicate that evil is forsaking/abandoning God and bowing down/worshipping other gods.
 - B. This is a violation of the first and second commandments.
 - C. In spite of his terrible sins, David is never said to be “evil.” He never turned his back on the Lord.
 - D. The New Testament has additional information on “evil.” However, I am limiting my points to Old Testament only.

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2. People. Evil involves more than a single person, although a single person may be characterized as evil.
3. Habitual. Evil is not limited to a single act, generally. It is a continuous activity that corrupts many people in turning away from God and worshiping false gods. The Hebrew imperfect points to a habitual action.
4. Covenant. This description is from the Old Testament in the context of “covenant.”

Understand, this short study on “evil” is only from the Old Testament in a covenant context.