

Saturday, June 9, 2018

Living Among Idols

Judges 2:6 – 3:6

Shared by Henry van Oudenaren

Disobedience and Defeat

⁶ After Joshua had dismissed the Israelites, they went to take possession of the land, each to their own inheritance. ⁷ The people served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel.

⁸ Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of a hundred and ten. ⁹ And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Heres^[b] in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.

¹⁰ After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. ¹¹ Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. ¹² They forsook the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They aroused the LORD's anger ¹³ because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.¹⁴ In his anger against Israel the LORD gave them into the hands of raiders who plundered them. He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist.¹⁵ Whenever Israel went out to fight, the hand of the LORD was against them to defeat them, just as he had sworn to them. They were in great distress.

¹⁶ Then the LORD raised up judges,^[c] who saved them out of the hands of these raiders. ¹⁷ Yet they would not listen to their judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them. They quickly turned from the ways of their ancestors, who had been obedient to the LORD's commands. ¹⁸ Whenever the LORD raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the LORD relented because of their groaning under those who oppressed and afflicted them. ¹⁹ But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their ancestors, following other gods and serving and worshiping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways.

²⁰ Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and said, “Because this nation has violated the covenant I ordained for their ancestors and has not listened to me, ²¹ I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died. ²² I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the LORD and walk in it as their ancestors did.” ²³ The LORD had allowed those nations to remain; he did not drive them out at once by giving them into the hands of Joshua.

³ These are the nations the LORD left to test all those Israelites who had not experienced any of the wars in Canaan ² (he did this only to teach warfare to the descendants of the Israelites who had not had previous battle experience): ³ the five rulers of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites living in the Lebanon mountains from Mount Baal Hermon to Lebo Hamath. ⁴ They were left to test the Israelites to see whether they would obey the LORD’s commands, which he had given their ancestors through Moses.

⁵ The Israelites lived among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. ⁶ They took their daughters in marriage and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods.

Key Verse

After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. Judges 2:10

Table Questions

1. What reasons do you think there were for the “generation that grew up that knew neither the Lord nor what He had done for Israel” (Judges 2:10), especially since it was the one that followed the generation “who had seen all the great things the Lord had done” (Judges 2:7)?
2. What has the Lord done for you that you have not shared with your next generation?
3. What can you do today to prevent this cycle from happening (again)?

Well good morning brothers!

What a blessing to be with you again this week. I praise the Lord for each of you and your faithfulness in joining together each week to edify and encourage one another.

My thanks to Chuck for getting our Skype connection going this morning.

Thanks to Greg, who I know is away this week, for his excellent introduction to the book of Judges last week that I was able to listen to as Chuck was able to record and post it on the FW website.

The section that I will be discussing with you this morning, Judges 2:6-3:6, is relayed to us by “an angel of the Lord” (2:1) but many scholars believe this not to be a created angel, but God Himself, since He uses phrases like “I brought you up out of Egypt” and “I will never break my covenant with you” (2:1).

Let’s begin with a summary of what this portion of Scripture is about..

Summary

1. During the time of Joshua, the Israelites take possession of the land the Lord has given them
2. Joshua and his generation served the Lord faithfully
3. After they had all died, the next generation did not serve the Lord, they forsook the Lord and served other gods, and did evil in the eyes of the Lord
4. As a result, they aroused the Lord’s anger, the Lord was against them and He gave them into their enemies’ hands who plundered them and they were in great distress
5. The nations that had not been driven out during Joshua’s time were allowed to remain by the Lord for two reasons:
 - a. to test the Israelites to see if they would walk in His ways as their forefathers had (2:22)
 - b. to teach warfare to the generation who had not experienced war during their lives (3:2)

...and the Key Verse that I have taken from this passage that I’ll focus on will be from Judges 2:10....

After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel.

In preparing my talk, 3 questions came to mind that I wanted to answer since I always want to relate Scripture to my lifein other words, see what is God trying to teach me...

Remembering that “the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the

thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” Hebrews 4:12, so let’s see what we can learn from our Lord this morning!

Here are the 3 questions:

1. Why do we live among idols in our generation?

In Judges 2:3 we read that the nations the Israelites did not drive out “will become traps for you, and their gods will become snares to you.”

How many evils have we not driven out of our countries, communities and homes that we are now suffering from...to avoid controversy, I’ll stick to evils like lust, pride, adultery, ungodly programs on TV or movies or books, hatred, injustices....and the list goes on.

We who know the Lord have allowed these and many more to increasingly permeate our society over the past 50, 60, 70 years and the next generations are now faced with so many more temptations than we were.

So, we largely have ourselves to blame for the current state of affairs....would you not agree?

2. What have we done to let the next generation know the great things the Lord has done in our lives?

What similarities do you see between yourself and the Israelites in Judges 2:6-7....i.e. God has blessed you so richly with your “inheritance” (which could be your good health, your loving relationships, the good job you have or had, the home you own, the car you drive, the savings you have in the bank, etc), yet has your next generation forgotten all the Lord has done?

And the result of this ignorance is given in verse 2:11, "The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals; and they forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt." And then verse 14 describes the divine response to this idolatry. "So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He gave them over to plunderers."

Wouldn't you agree that the generations that are following us are increasingly being given over to “plunderers” as a result of their worship of false gods?

3. What can we do to prevent the same thing happening to our next generation that happened over and over again to the Israelites...that is, they forgot about the Lord and suffered severely?

My wife and I have been married now for 34 years and our “next generation” consists of our 3 grown children, 2 boys and a girl, each of whom are married or soon will be.

Our children went to church from the day they were born, attended Sunday School, which my wife and I helped teach, and the Awana midweek program which my wife and I helped lead. At home, meals began with prayer, supper ended with Bible reading, and days ended with Bible stories and prayer beside their beds.

What else could we have done? For sure in hindsight, sharing and showing and discussing what God was doing in our lives personally would have been key to making Him more real than just an historical figure.

We are also now grandparents, as my eldest son and his wife who live in Houston have 2 wonderful girls aged 3 and 1. Fortunately, the girls parents are faithfully raising them to know the Lord....they take them to a Bible believing and teaching church each Sunday, they help to teach Sunday School, and are augmenting that with faithful prayer and Bible reading and teaching at home.

But is that enough? What will their “success ratio” be with their next generation?

I have been buying children’s Bible story books to read to my granddaughters when we visit them and when they visit us, but began wondering the other day if the children’s Bible picture books might be part of the problem for the last generation and the next....

What message or impression do the cartoon characters in those books leave in children’s minds regarding God...that He is some cartoon character like Thomas the Tank Engine or their current favourites...Paw Patrol?

The real question we need to continually ask ourselves is, how do we make God real to them? One of your table questions deals with that topic and I look forward to hearing what ideas you come up with if someone from each table could note them down and email them to me as I often feel out of the loop since I’m not able to be physically present with you all.

John Piper, the faithful pastor from Minnesota, summarizes the sequence of activities in Judges 2 like this....

“First, the people revered and served the true God because Joshua and his generation kept the memory of God's mighty acts alive among the people.

Second, a new generation arose who for some reason did not know God or his work for Israel.

Third, this new generation forsook the true worship and turned to other gods. And finally, God brought the judgment of His wrath upon them.”

How relevant is this to our current realities in the US and Canada....has God given us over to plunderers? It sure seems like it to me.

To give you a glimpse of our current events here in Canada, and since we're talking about religion, we may as well talk about politics 😊...the province of Ontario where we live, which has 40% of the population of the entire country, has just gone through an election...which happens every 4-5 years.

As background, we have 3 major political parties...a socialist party called the NDP, an historically left of centre party called the Liberals (like your Democrats) and an historically right of centre party called the Progressive Conservatives (like your Republicans).

The left of centre Liberal party has been in power for the past 15 years and were led by an openly lesbian woman for the past 5. During their time in office they became increasing left leaning socially and fiscally, to the point where they and the socialist party were indistinguishable....and to the point fiscally where the province now has the largest debt per capita of any jurisdiction in the world...not to mention the unBiblical policies they have implemented.

So we find ourselves in a state of fiscal and moral bankruptcy....sound familiar?

Fortunately, from my perspective, the Conservatives won a majority during the election this past Thursday....but unfortunately, their leader, Doug Ford, has many questionable characteristics, not the least of which is that he is the older brother of the now infamous Rob Ford, former mayor of the city of Toronto.

Doug won the leadership of the Conservative party only 3 months ago against, in my opinion, 3 stronger character candidates, after a hastily called vote which was necessitated when the former leader of the party was forced to step down due to unsubstantiated sexual harassment claims.

Why are we not able to have better candidates to select from? I firmly believe its because these people represent a growing segment of the population....people who are increasingly worshipping false gods.

So what can we do?

In Deuteronomy 6:4-5 we find the most important commandment in the Bible is: "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might."

Jesus said that was the first and great commandment....and what comes next in this great text in verse 7.... "And these words which I command you shall be upon your heart, **and you shall teach them diligently to your children.**" The first assignment a parent (or uncle or friend...) has after loving God is to store God's Word in his heart and teach it to his or other's children.

Deuteronomy 6 continues in verses 7-9 with the following practical guidances which we you and I need to better apply....

"and you shall talk of them (that is God's words) when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

During my research on this chapter, I came across a good explanation for our current woes from someone that I had not previously heard of....John Kitto, who lived from 1804-1854...

In one of his 23 books, called The Pictorial Bible, he wrote...

"God will allow our oppressions to become sufficiently severe to arouse us from our slumbers and remind us of the sanctions of The Law in order that we might turn again to our Lord and God."

Checking into who he was, I came across this description in Wikipedia of his background and offer it to you as an example of what God uses to bring forth his truths to each generation....and perhaps explains why we have been so ineffective in keeping God alive to our next generations...

"Born in Plymouth, England, John Kitto was a sickly child, son of a Cornish stonemason. The drunkenness of his father and the poverty of his family meant that much of his childhood was spent in the workhouse. He had no more than three years of erratic and interrupted education.

At the age of twelve John Kitto fell on his head from a rooftop, and became totally and permanently deaf. As a young man he suffered further tragedies, disappointments and much loneliness. His height was 4 ft 8 in, and his accident left him with an impaired sense of balance. He found consolation in browsing at bookstalls and reading any books that came his way.

From these hardships he was rescued by friends who became aware of his mental abilities and encouraged him to write topical articles for local newspapers, arranging eventually for him to work as an assistant in a local library. Here he continued to educate himself.

One of his benefactors was a dentist Anthony Norris Groves, who in 1824 offered him employment as a dental assistant. Living with the Groves family, Kitto was profoundly

influenced by the practical Christian faith of his employer. In 1829 he accompanied Groves on his pioneering mission to Baghdad.

A London publisher asked Kitto to write up his travel journals for a series of articles in the Penny Magazine, a publication read at that time by a million people in Britain, reprinted in America and translated into French, German and Dutch. Other writing projects followed as readers enquired about his experiences in the East amidst people living in circumstances closely resembling those of Bible times.

Kitto had been a careful observer of physical detail – the topography, the animals, architecture, agricultural methods, the manner of interaction between people. His retelling of Bible stories in the light of what he had seen brought the narratives to life and confirmed the accuracy of the ancient texts. He showed how the activities described by the prophets and apostles accorded with the realities of Eastern culture. He supplemented his own observations with details from the journals of other travellers, and helped the Bible reader to understand many things previously obscure or contradictory to the Western mind. His careful research into the geography, biology and archaeology of Bible lands served to support and encourage confidence in the accuracy of the Bible.

In his generation Dr Kitto was a most significant contributor to Christian scholarship, and he provided much help for Evangelicals defending the Bible against the attack of liberal critics."

Now listen to this...."He eventually wrote a total of twenty-three books, of which Charles Spurgeon (one of my favourite witnesses) considered the Daily Bible Illustrations to be "more interesting than any novel that was ever written, and as instructive as the heaviest theology."

Inevitably, Kitto's encyclopedic works have been superseded by the researches of later generations of scholars. Yet his Pictorial Bible and Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature held, for almost a century, a unique and valued place on the academic library shelf, and his Daily Bible Illustrations encouraged the faith of readers of all ages and backgrounds, and stimulated the imagination of many a Sunday school teacher."...from Wikipedia

Wow, does God use cracked vessels or what?

Here we have a man who grew up poor, had a drunk for a father, fell on his head, was totally deaf, received very little formal education, and to top it all off, was short 😊
....and yet God used him to encourage and stimulate millions!

Where's Randy (Frank), perhaps you are following in John Kitto's footsteps with your woodland creature series?

Let me close off our talk today by looking at the last point I mentioned in the summary of this chapter I gave at the start....

5. The nations that had not been driven out during Joshua's time were allowed to remain by the Lord for two reasons:
- a. to test the Israelites to see if they would walk in His ways as their forefathers had (2:22)
 - b. to teach warfare to the generation who had not experienced war during their lives (3:2)

I trust you will agree with me that everything that happens to us God either causes or allows....for if we believe He is who He says He is, then there can be no other options.

So it is with the Israelites.....they chose to disobey God and not drive out the enemy nations from the land they inherited, so God chose to allow those nations to remain. He could have intervened, but chose not to.

But God is able to take our disobedience and give us another chance, as He did with the Israelites....He chose...

- a. to test the Israelites to see if they would walk in His ways as their forefathers had (2:22)...but they obviously failed to do so, so He chose to use their disobedience....
- b. to teach warfare to the generation who had not experienced war during their lives (3:2)

....seems odd to us that a God of love would chose to teach warfare but God's ways are higher than ours.

Coming back to our present day dilemma, what are we to do regarding the next generations, and their falling away from the Lord?

Well our task is straight forward, we need to increase and improve how we testify and provide witness to those around us that God is real and that He is working in our lives each day! Your table questions will focus on each of you coming up with ways that you can do this so that you can encourage one another.

Regarding what God is up to....Scripture says that "God is the same yesterday, today and forever" (Heb 13:8), so, and I say this with great concern, perhaps as it says in Judges 3:2, the next generation will be learning about warfare should they not return to the Lord soon.

Let that provide us with the added impetus we need to labour while the harvest fields are ready and before our Saviour returns!

Heavenly Father, we pray with confidence that You will continue to guide and direct you each step of His Way!

Amen, amen and amen.