

JUDGES SESSION #3

In the last 2 sessions we were looking at the **Historical Introduction** to the Book of Judges. Israel's problems during its "Dark Ages" clearly began with **compromises** regarding God's clear commands. These led to **complacency** which sucked them increasingly into outright **disobedience**...and that in turn soon led to complete **defeat**.

In the Christian life, spiritual defeat usually begins with small steps of compromise, doing little things that are wrong, tolerating wrong attitudes & motives, allowing them to find a home in our minds & hearts...but each of these little things lead us further & further away from God & spiritual victory.

Someone rightly said, "If you do not have what is ABOVE you, WITHIN you, you will give in to what is AROUND you."

A Youth for Christ staff worker in Sri Lanka, while serving in the war-torn city of Jaffna during the worst times of the civil war in this country, wrote to those who were concerned about his safety. He said, "The safest place to be is in God's will. The only thing we need to fear is disobedience."

God's command is still to obey Him and follow Him with all our hearts. What will God say about us at the end of this week? That will depend on our response to Him during the days of this week. Will we follow Him faithfully? Or will we tolerate the little compromises...the angry word, the lustful thought, the proud motivation, the things that cannot fit a holy life or please a holy God? Remember...the only thing we need to fear is disobedience.

Let's get back to Israel's story now as we look at the...

THEMATIC Introduction (2:6 – 3:6)

Once again the pattern is the same as it was in the Historical Introduction, beginning with...

1. The Command of the Lord

- 2:10 contains a most important statement:

When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel.

- this verse indicates the basic failure here: they did not pass on to their children a sense of loyalty to the Lord

- let's go back to the book of Deuteronomy to pick up **God's command** in this regard:

- **Deut. 6:4-9...**

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord *is* one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

"And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall **teach** them diligently to your children, and shall **talk** of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall **bind** them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall **write** them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

- the people were required to teach their children about God and His instructions

- **personal morality** is involved here, as the Word of God was meant to govern whatever was done with the **hands** (“bind them as a sign on your hand”), and whatever was thought with the **mind** (“they shall be as frontlets between your eyes”)
- God’s instructions were also meant to affect **family morality** (“write them on the doorposts of your house”) and **political life** (“write them on your gates”)
- one of the main reasons for building a memorial mound of stones beside the Jordan River at Gilgal after the miraculous crossing on dry ground (early in the book of Joshua) was to provide an ‘excuse’ to tell their children about God’s mighty power; but it looks like they never got around to those ‘family devotions’
- the next generation always needs to have its own personal encounters with the Lord, but Christian parents have a responsibility to pass the faith on to their children. Don’t let it be said that after YOU another generation rose up who didn’t know the Lord.

2. what was The **Response** of Israel? [2:7-13...]

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. ⁸ Now Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died when he was one hundred and ten years old. ⁹ And they buried him within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Heres, in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash. ¹⁰ When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel.

¹¹ Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals; ¹² 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. ¹³ They forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.

- we see here another familiar reason for their spiritual failure: **Complacency**
 - ...maybe we could call it the ‘*Second-Generation Syndrome*’
 - what a contrast *their* apathy is compared with the fervency of the first generation who conquered Canaan under Joshua!
- this second generation was...
 - 1) **satisfied with the status quo**
 - they did not conquer any more territory or drive out any more enemies; they appeared to be content with life as it was
 - 2) they took **God’s blessings for granted** & did not acknowledge Him

G.K. Chesterton, a remarkable genius and Christian writer, wrote in his autobiography that the most important thing he had learned from life was that the **critical factor in life** is whether you take things for **granted** or take them with **gratitude**.
 - 3) ...and most especially, they **neglected God’s Word**
 - they specifically failed to pass on God’s truth to their children

- for example: the **Feast of Tabernacles**, a week-long ‘picnic,’ was designed to be an annual event to teach the children about Israel’s deliverance from slavery in Egypt; but they *never kept this Feast* after Joshua died until hundreds of years later in the time of Ezra & Nehemiah! [Neh. 7:18]...they neglected a wonderful way to teach their children, which should have been built right into their annual holiday schedule

What is *God’s strategy* against **complacency**?

- look at 2:20-23...

"Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and has not heeded My voice, ²¹ I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, ²² so that through them I may test Israel, whether they will keep the ways of the Lord, to walk in them as their fathers kept *them*, or not." ²³ Therefore the Lord left those nations, without driving them out immediately...

- in other words, God **uses difficulties** to test us & to teach us to trust Him

...He *pushes* us out of our complacency

- a story is told of a large cruise ship which ran into a huge storm, causing a woman to fall overboard; a crowd gathered at the edge of railing, not knowing what to do, when suddenly a man plunged into waves and held her up until a rescue boat came
 - when they were safely back on board, everyone was astonished to see that the hero was the oldest man on board, a fellow in his 80’s
 - a party was held that evening to honor him; when he was called to make a speech, the old man said, “I would like to know just one thing: who pushed me?”
- in **our** complacency, enjoying social peace, political stability, economic abundance, spiritual blessings...and growing apathetic in our relaxation...God may have to **push us** to wake us up, or stir us out of our dangerous attitude
- not all difficulties come to us for this reason –but some do and we would be wise to examine our own situation if we are experiencing difficulties to see if perhaps these are “God’s push” to shake us out of complacency and reawaken a fresh trust in Him again

There was another reason for Israel’s failure: **Complete Disobedience**

- they broke the covenant with God
 - vs. 12 tells us “...they *forsook* the LORD God...and *followed* other gods”
- these other gods were primarily **Baal** and **Ashteroth**, whose worship practices involved the sin of **idolatry** and the sin of **adultery**
- **Baal worship** was perhaps most degraded form of worship ever practiced
 - it involved the concept of sympathetic worship; that is, you worship your god by behaving as he does
 - ...the result was temple prostitution, fertility rites, drunken sexual orgies, idolatry, snake-worship, homosexuality, & child sacrifice
 - **Baalism** ascribed power to Nature, with 2 main gods or principles
 - the male principle was Baal
 - the female principle was Ashteroth (or Astartes)
- a basic idea was that Baal (the sun god) copulated with the original mud of world...and the result was the appearance of animals & man

- sounds rather similar to the modern idea that sunlight interacting with the primordial sea produced the first instance of life on earth, doesn't it!
- Baalism was a **Nature Religion** – as such, it was very popular because **fertility** was a main concern in an agricultural society
 - the methodology to ensure this fertility was to **stimulate** Nature so that it would produce the results needed (rain & harvests, etc)
 - and the way to stimulate Nature was to engage in sexual orgies at Canaanite temples
 - in contrast, the **Christian** faith is a religion primarily of **submission**, not of stimulation
 - “the heart of ancient Baalism was **secular humanism**”
 - the universe is self-creating
 - Nature is ultimate
 - man as lord of Nature can produce a better world by ‘stimulating’ Nature
 - James Jordan comments that “To the extent to which the processes of Nature replace the acts of God in any system, to that extent the system has become Baalistic.”
- ...in **our** cultures, gripped by secular humanism, we are sadly not very far removed from ancient Baalism!

In our next session we will see what **God's response** was to Israel's disobedience.