

June 19, 2016
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Judges
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Judges 2.

1. Are there any similarities between the worship of false gods Baal and Ashtoreth and worship around the world today?
2. Why did the people abandon God and follow after the gods their neighbors served?
3. What can chastening of God's wayward children look like today?
4. What might be true if God does not bring trials into the life of a professing Christian who is living in sin?
5. What, if any, is our responsibility toward a sinning brother?

A GENERATION WHO DID NOT KNOW THE LORD Judges 2:6-23

We read about the beginning of the Church in the book of Acts and rejoice to learn that the apostles went throughout Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria telling the good news just like Jesus told them to do. Paul joined them as the Church spread throughout Asia and to Rome. It was a great start. But then we read the letters to the seven churches that Jesus dictated to John according to the first three chapters of the Revelation and things don't look so good. Jesus warned them to straighten out some relational matters with Him or He would come and remove their lampstand from its place. Today, those

churches are ancient memories. The lamp has been quenched and false religion owns the land.

Then we read about the great Reformation that swept through Europe. Men and women sacrificed significantly in order to bring the truth of God's Word to light in a dark age. Churches were established throughout France, Germany, Switzerland, Scotland, and Wales. But go there today and you will have a difficult time finding Bible preaching churches. What happened? Where are the Bible preachers?

Not very many years ago, England was the great missionary engine of the world. Great preachers like Whitefield, Spurgeon, Campbell Morgan, and more recently D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, trumpeted the Bible message throughout the land. But go to England today and you will discover that many of the old church buildings have been converted into antique stores or bars. What happened? Where did all the Christians go?

Take a trip across America and discover the large number of little church buildings sitting abandoned. Or notice the dozen or so cars in the parking lot of a church building that once was home to hundreds of faithful followers of Christ. While the cults and entertainment centers are running over with excitement, it is difficult to find faithful ministries that regularly reshape people's lives to be different from their world by the preaching of the Bible. And what is becoming of Bible colleges that once turned out scores of preachers and missionaries each year at graduation? Is it possible that clear preaching and teaching of God's Word is falling on hard times in America the Beautiful? Could it be that in our lifetime there will be very few people in America who display the character of Christ in opposition to the character of the world?

How do these things happen? That is the story of our text. The story of Judges is God accomplishing His will in spite of the failure and rebellion of His chosen people. It is a picture of spiritually defeated Christians, with whom we are all familiar. Or worse, it is the story of religious people who really do not know God at all. We have much to learn from this book and this text in particular. Learn that fellowship with God can never be taken for granted. Learn that God will accomplish His will even when that will is painful for His people.

The Leader Died and Things Changed (vv.6-13).

The second chapter of Judges starts out with information that looks like a replay on Joshua (vv.6-9). We who watch sports on television are experienced with replays. We read, *When Joshua dismissed the people, the people of Israel went each to his inheritance to take possession of the land (v.6)*. This part of the story is simply a review of what happened previously. This is not the assembly of 1:1 where the people met to inquire of the Lord about who should lead. Nor is this the assembly of 2:1-5 where the Angel of the Lord met at Shechem (Boichim) to express displeasure with the people. The meeting from which Joshua dismissed the people was recorded in Joshua 24 where Joshua's last words challenged the people to follow closely after the Lord.

That meeting is in the past. Now we learn that the leader and his peers passed away. Joshua had lived to the age of 110 having led the people for about 15 years after Moses died. After that Joshua died. All the elders who had witnessed God's amazing works of bringing the people across the Jordan, the sack of Jericho, and the discomfiting of the inhabitants of the Promised Land also exerted influence on the people after Joshua's death. And for the most part, while the leaders who had witnessed God's work continued to live, the nation as a whole followed God. *And 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 work that the LORD had done for Israel (v.7)*.

But still there is something significant in the fact that Joshua died. *And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of 110 years. And they buried him within the boundaries of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash (vv.8-9)*. All God-ordained human leaders are destined for the same end. What becomes of their influence after they are gone? Dave Breese wrote a book in 1990 titled "Seven Men Who Rule the World From the Grave." It is sobering account of how mere men like Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and others have had such an influence on world culture that even though they have been dead for decades, their false teaching is perpetuated generation after generation. How is it that the truth our father's teach us about God dissipates into thin air unless we intentionally,

discipline ourselves to teach it and learn it in successive generations? Maybe it has something to do with humanity's natural sinfulness and inclination to reject God in favor of error.

For Israel, the nation of God's people, Joshua's death and the subsequent death of his peers spelled a terrible change (vv.10-13). Another generation arose. That is bound to happen. *And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel (v.10)*. The new generation did not know the Lord or what He had done for Israel.

Two important matters come to bear in this matter about the new generation being ignorant of God. First is the fact that God was not working miraculously like He did when He delivered Israel from Egypt, sustained them in the wilderness, and strengthened them to subdue the land. Second is the obvious fact that the people were not living in fellowship with God or they would have at least known Him.

These truths apply well to our circumstances. While it is true that God does not do a lot of miracles in our days, still we have no excuse for not knowing God. God continues to reveal Himself in the things He has created (Romans 1:18-20). Also, God has revealed His character through His law, the basic principles of which He has written on every conscience (Romans 2:14-15). God sent us the perfect and complete expression of Himself in God the Son, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-3). For us the most important truth is that God has given us a thorough description of Himself in the complete revelation we call the Bible (Romans 3, 2 Timothy 3:16-17). God has shown Himself to us. We have no excuse for not knowing Him.

Therefore, parents must know God, walk in fellowship with God, and teach their children about God or create a generation who does not know God and cannot believe His self-revelation. At the same time, there is the very important matter of God drawing people to Himself in salvation. It does appear that throughout history God works in particular cultures in special ways. It is likely that this is what happened in Asia in the first century, in Europe during the reformation, in Great Britain during the 19th century, in America during the 20th century, and now in China. The norm is for God to

continue to draw individuals out of dark, pagan, godless cultures into the light of His truth by His grace.

Biblical tension requires that each generation train the following generation to know God and to expect they will. When we do not, there is change. I call it a terrible change because the people did not know God. However, it is likely that the people in that day probably considered themselves quite progressive, quite wise, quite acceptable to the people of the land. No doubt they would acknowledge that they were changing, but they would claim that the change was good.

The change that has taken place in American culture over the past two generations is deemed quite good by those who do not know God or care to know God. We who love God now live in a typically godless, pagan culture that is so influenced by Satan and sin that the acceptable norm is evil but called good. God issued a warning about this very thing through the prophet Isaiah. *Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! (Isaiah 5:20).*

The important people, the progressive thinkers, the movers and the shakers are in full agreement that God, the Bible, church, and Christians are a thing of the American past and that is good. That is quite similar to what people in the generation after Joshua were thinking. God's assessment stands in stark contrast to that twisted self-assessment.

God's assessment of the people is not pretty. *And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals. And they abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the LORD to anger. They abandoned the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth.*

They became like their neighbors. The people went after other gods, the gods of the people (v.12). They served the Baals (vv.11,13). Baal was the male god who all the Canaanites and inhabitants of the land served. Throughout the Old Testament the name can be singular or plural and is attached to variations of Baal-type gods. Baal worship often involved sensuality since this god controlled the harvest. Along with the Baals, the people also served the Ashtaroth (v.13). Ashtaroth

was the female counterpart to Baal. Being the goddess of fertility, worship involved sexual abandon and all manner of licentiousness.

How could God's people ever end up in such sexual debauchery? Maybe we find the answer to that question by asking, "How do professing Christians end up in adultery, consorting with prostitutes, addicted to pornography, trapped in homosexual lifestyles?" It is a gradual, almost imperceptible move away from faith in God's Word to that which is appealing to the flesh. It is giving up a quiet, confident walk in faith in God, for that which is exciting and appealing to fleshly instincts and emotions.

The people began to chase after the popular gods, and then we learn that they bowed down to other gods (v.12). This is worse. It is digression. First the people walked away from the true God to satisfy their curiosity about false gods. Having taken their first drink of fleshly gods, their first puff of tantalizing worship, they were hooked. They now bowed down their hearts, their mind, will, and emotions to these false gods. They were owned, and it is likely that they didn't realize it and probably would have denied it if someone accused them.

God's assessment was that the people did what was evil in the sight of the LORD (v.11). Their world called it acceptable, normal, and even good. God reiterated what He had taught all along. He had always taught these people and their forefathers that bowing down to false God's was *evil*. The word means bad, morally wrong, wretched. The word also speaks of that which results in adversity, sorrow, loss, and exceeding grief. What God calls evil never results in pleasant peace.

God revealed that by chasing after the false gods, they had abandoned Him, the one true God. You can't bow down to popular gods and the true God at the same time. In reality, the people had abandoned the God of their fathers (v.12). This was the chief sin because it opens the door for all other sins. When we dismiss God from a family, a church, a school, a culture, there are no boundaries to help us know when we are in trouble. To abandon God is to turn off the GPS and virtually to drive blindfolded. People like that are not going to reach the desirable destination. Why do people walk away from the God of their parents?

They were guilty because they abandoned the God who brought them out of Egypt (v.12). It is true that these particular individuals had not been slaves in Egypt. But in principle, if God had not delivered their forefathers, they would have been slaves. This is the picture of people who God has delivered from the penalty of their sins who choose to walk away from Him to pander their flesh with gods of this world. That is not going to have a good ending.

Why is abandoning God going to end up in a bad place? Because in so doing they provoked the LORD (v.13). By their intentional rebellion against God, the people stirred up His inner being. To provoke is to vex, agitate, stir the pot. The word is used to picture God, as humans would understand, with nostrils flared in anger. They made God angry with them. This is God who created all things as well as them. He created a nation of these people according to His promise to Abraham. He delivered them from slavery in Egypt. He constituted them as a nation with laws and leaders. He strove patiently with their ancestors and finally let them all die in the wilderness because of their rebellion. He put their fathers in the land He promised to Abraham, and strengthened them to victory over many enemies.

What were these people thinking? God had been so gracious to them. Why would they now turn against Him in stubborn rebellion? We could ask the same question dozens of times in our own settings, circumstances, families, and churches.

The Story of the Judges' Period in Israel (vv.14-23).

Verses fourteen through twenty-three in this second chapter is like an outline or synopsis of the entire book. This is what the book is about. The people sinned and God responded to His people's rebellion. Because they sinned, God was no longer required to keep His covenant. He was simply keeping His part of the covenant. *And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God (Deuteronomy 28:1-2).* But the people did not obey God. Therefore, God was not required to bless them.

Therefore also, God poured out judgment on the people just as He also promised. Before God sent the parents of these people into the Promised Land, He warned, *But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you (Deuteronomy 28:15).* Is it so difficult to figure this out? Faithfully obey God and be blessed, or fail to obey God and be judged. That was God's rule.

God just kept His word and promises in response to the people's rebellion. *So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them. And he sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. Whenever they marched out, the hand of the LORD was against them for harm, as the LORD had warned, and as the LORD had sworn to them. And they were in terrible distress (vv.14-15).*

Now the astonishing truth that no one should expect! In judgment God remembers mercy. The people rebelled. God sent trouble through their warring neighbors. But . . . *Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them (v.16).* Again we read in verse eighteen, *Whenever the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge, and he saved them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge. For the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them (v.18).*

What an amazing God who is moved with pity toward us even when we stubbornly refuse to obey Him. Every time God chastens His children, He grieves for us. Surely when you were growing up, if you grew up a generation ago, you heard your mom or dad say, "This is going to hurt me more than it hurts you," as they prepared to discipline you. I heard it as a kid and I said it as a parent. I did not understand that truth as a child because all I felt was physical pain. As an adult, I felt the pain of pity and love in my heart as I watched my children suffer. That is the heart of God. Nevertheless, pain notwithstanding, God, knowing what is best, continued to use the instrument of chastening in His people's lives.

God used the enemy as a continual test. *So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he said, "Because this people*

have transgressed my covenant that I commanded their fathers and have not obeyed my voice, I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died, in order to test Israel by them, whether they will take care to walk in the way of the LORD as their fathers did, or not" (vv.20-22).

It is not wise for us to make God angry with us. But even in His anger God has a plan. He puts us to the test to see if we will be careful to walk in fellowship with Him. He already knows the answer to the test. The test is for our benefit so that we will know if we are going to walk in fellowship with Him.

The people rebelled. God kept His promises and sent trouble. But consider the people's condition because of their rebellion. They were in deep trouble. For one thing, they could no longer withstand their enemies. *And he sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies (v.14).* More than that, they were in terrible distress because *the hand of the LORD was against them for harm, as the LORD had warned, and as the LORD had sworn to them. And they were in terrible distress (v.15).* The word **distress** means that God pressed the people into those narrow, stressful spots of life we call between a rock and a hard place. They were not experiencing just tough circumstances but terrible (an intensive superlative) circumstances.

Worse is that the people could not do right. In spite of their problems and God's chastening to bring them back to Himself, *Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they whored after other gods and bowed down to them. They soon turned aside from the way in which their fathers had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the LORD, and they did not do so (v.17).*

They were stubbornly foolish. *But whenever the judge died, they turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them. They did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways (v.19).* The people had chafed against God's rules. The people chose to break free from God to worship the cool gods, do the exciting religion, join the popular way. They thought they were in control. They were wrong.

The people had actually stepped into slavery as bad as their forefathers had known . . . but they didn't know it. They were at the Lord's mercy and didn't know it. *So the LORD left those nations, not*

driving them out quickly, and he did not give them into the hand of Joshua (v.23). Did the people of this generation ever wonder why they were trying to live in a land where evil people tested them? Did they ever ask where they came from? Does anyone in modern Israel wonder who actually owns the land and why the neighboring enemies won't leave them alone?

Because of the similarities in circumstances, it is also fair for us to wonder, "Do defeated Christians ever wonder why they do not have victory over sin?" Do they finally concede to try to live in peaceful coexistence with sin? Do they get confused and attempt to reinterpret what victory actually is or what peace with God really is? Do they ever stop to consider in how many different ways they are disobedient to God? Do they not long to walk in joyous, peaceful fellowship with God?

When we choose to walk away from God, we choose to bring unnecessary trouble and testing upon ourselves. Even while God lets loose the hounds of heaven on us, He does so in mercy. The wise response is to return to God who loves. The wise response is to ask God to teach us how to be in fellowship with Him.