

## **LESSONS LEARNED FROM A WAYWARD GENERATION (Judges 2:6-3:6)**

Have you heard about the dyslexic, agnostic, insomniac? You will understand his plight better if you know all three of those terms. He suffered from dyslexia, a reading impairment, in which the letters become jumbled and reversed as one attempts to read. That would be frustrating. This individual was an agnostic. That is different from being an atheist. An atheist says, "There is no God," but an agnostic says, "I don't know. I just don't know if God exists or not." He also suffered from insomnia. He couldn't sleep at night. To sum it up, this dyslexic, agnostic, insomniac lay awake at night wondering whether or not there really was a dog.

That's a terrible joke. Today, we are going to look at two terrible conditions that are no laughing matter. The first is spiritual amnesia, and the second is apostasy.

You are familiar with what amnesia is. It has to do with a loss of memories. One of the more dramatic, but rather rare form of amnesia is a person forgetting or losing touch with his or her identity. A very common example of amnesia is the inability to remember anything in your first several years of life. I'm pretty sure no one here remembers being born, learning to talk, or learning to walk. That is called childhood amnesia, and it is almost universal.

We are going to look this morning at a group of people, an entire generation, actually, who suffered from spiritual amnesia. They forgot what God had done on their behalf.

This same group qualified for another condition called apostasy. An apostate is one who abandons, forsakes, or walks away from his or her religion, faith, or commitment to God.

We are going to learn that spiritual amnesia leads to spiritual apostasy. This type of amnesia precedes and produces apostasy. When we forget what God has done on our behalf, when we forget who He is and who we are in Him, we place ourselves in danger of turning away from Him.

This is what an entire generation of Jews did after entering the land God had promised to them. Look with me at Judges 2:6-12a. We are going to learn three lessons from this wayward generation.

### **Lesson #1: There Are Limits to a Spiritual Heritage.**

If one generation presumably follows the Lord and the next generation completely abandons the Lord, it would be natural to assume that the first generation was derelict in passing on their faith. We might be tempted to charge the first generation of Promised Land dwellers with not telling their children about all the wonderful things God had done on their behalf, but I don't think that is the case.

Think for a moment about what family life was like for the people of that day. It was far different from life as we know it. In that day, there were no soccer moms who were ferrying their children to and from ball practice, school events, extracurricular activities. At night time and during free time, neither children nor adults spent their time playing

video games, watching TV, streaming videos, or texting friends.

Time was spent at home, with family, and usually there were several generations of family living together. Story-telling was regularly and often done. People didn't have books in their homes. Parents didn't read to their children. Parents told them stories. That is how they passed on their history, and that's how they sought to pass on their faith in God.

Also, religious holidays such as Passover, were prescribed and designed to keep alive a collective memory of what God had done for His people.

When we are told in v. 10 that this second generation did not know the LORD or what He had done for Israel, I don't think the writer is saying that they weren't aware of who God was or had not heard the stories of what He had done. Rather, I think the text is saying this new generation didn't love God, and they had no gratitude for what He had done. They had not appropriated their parents' faith for themselves.

Parents, you can and should pass on your knowledge. It is incumbent upon to pass on the stories of God's word and the content of the gospel, but you can't, actually, pass on your faith. Your children or grandchildren must believe for themselves. As much as you would like to, you can't believe for them.

A spiritual heritage is an incredible blessing, but there are limits to it. It does not guarantee that your children will trust and follow God for themselves.

As my children were growing up, I always made sure that I had health insurance, and it was a family plan. That meant, regardless of who got sick, they were all covered. I got the insurance. I paid for it, but everyone in the family was covered.

In the kingdom of God, there is no family plan for salvation. There are only individual policies. You can't get to heaven on the faith of your parents, or grandparents, or because your uncle was a Baptist preacher. It doesn't work that way.

The only way to get to heaven is when **you** confess your sin, and when **you** believe on Jesus as **your** Lord and **your** Savior. Momma can't get you to heaven. Daddy can't get you to heaven. Your family church can't get you to heaven. But Jesus can; so, you and I must each, individually trust Him as Savior and Lord.

By the same token, you can't get your child to heaven nor your grandchildren, but you can pray for them. You can teach them about Jesus. You can challenge them, and I pray that you are doing all of those things.

## **Lesson #2: Withholding Our Hearts from God Insures Disaster.**

In the Bible, the four-letter word *know*, k-n-o-w, is often used as a synonym for *love*. To say that God knows us is to say that God loves us. To say that we know God is to say that we love God. By telling us in v. 10 that this new generation did not know God is to tell us that they did not love God. They had not allowed God to capture their hearts and their affection. Since their hearts and allegiance had not been captured by God, they were captured by the godless culture around them. Look at vv. 11-13.

Let me take you back to the last chapter of Joshua, the book that precedes this one. Notice Joshua 24:14-15. Joshua, Moses' successor, was telling the people, "You have a

choice to make. You can choose to serve the old gods, the new gods, or the LORD God.” The old gods were the gods of Egypt. The new gods were the gods of their neighbors in the Promised Land, the gods of the Canaanites, principally, Baal. Joshua said, “My family and I, we are going to serve the LORD God.”

The people answered, “We will, too!” Look at vv. 16-18.

Joshua had some counsel for the people. Look at v. 23. He told them to “incline” their heart, i.e., they were to lean in to God.

If you lean toward God, you don’t have to worry about falling because He will catch you. If you lean away from God and toward the world, you have no one to catch you. If you lean too far toward the world, you will fall into idolatry and immorality, and will begin to imitate or mimic the ungodliness and evil of the prevailing culture.

That is what the second generation did. As a result, God acted. Look at vv. 14-15.

Centuries later, God’s people were practicing idol worship, and they were far from God. Azariah, the prophet, went to speak to King Asa in Jerusalem. He recalls to the King the way things used to be back in the days of the Judges, back in the time period we are looking at today and will be looking at for the next couple of months. Let me read to you 2 Chronicles 15:3-6.

<sup>3</sup>For a long time Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest and without law, <sup>4</sup>but when in their distress they turned to the LORD, the God of Israel, and sought him, he was found by them. <sup>5</sup>In those times there was no peace to him who went out or to him who came in, for great disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants of the lands. <sup>6</sup>They were broken in pieces. Nation was crushed by nation and city by city, for God troubled them with every sort of distress.

Could it be that we have so sinned against God that God is troubling our land with every sort of distress—economic distress, health distress, racial distress, social distress, international distress, and so many other kinds of distresses that presently plague our nation?

Years ago, I read something Pastor Tony Evans wrote about this very thing. These words were published 24 years ago, but they seem to be truer today than they were back then. Listen to what he wrote:

Now when God is your problem, then only God is your solution. If God is ticked off, it doesn’t matter whom you elect or what programs you initiate. Until His anger is assuaged, you won’t be able to fix what’s wrong or spend enough money to buy your way out of your dilemma.

This is the heart of our problems today. Too many individuals, families, churches, and communities want to keep God on the fringes of our lives. There He can be accessible if we have a need, but we can keep Him far enough away from the center of our lives that He doesn’t start messing with our agendas.

As long as we keep God at a distance, He will not take over the control center of our world, and thus unrighteous-ness will rule. He will be close enough for invocations and benedictions but not part of the debate in between.

The net result of all this is that we are seeing the “devolution” of mankind. The more we marginalize God, the worse things get. This is what Paul said in Romans 1:18 when he wrote, “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” Then in verses 19-32, Paul traced the downward spiral of a culture that excludes God.

Have we not excluded God—from our schools, from our public institutions, and from our national conversation.

You and I need to incline our hearts toward God. What is there in your life that is competing with God for your attention and affection? In John 15, Jesus likened His Father to a Gardener who comes along with his pruning shears and starts cutting away those things that inhibit our fruitfulness.

Do you remember that prayer I challenged you last Sunday to pray? That prayer is, “Lord do whatever You must do to me so that You can do whatever You want to do in me and through me.” Part of what God must do to us is to prune us, to cut away those things that are keeping us from bearing much fruit.

Let the Lord take His shears to your life. If you are serious about growing, if you are serious about His Lordship, invite Him to start pruning your life.

### **Lesson #3: Since God Loves His People, He Has Sent a Savior.**

Look at this amazing statement in v. 16. This verse stands in contrast to v. 14. In that earlier verse, we are informed that God gave the disobedient Israelites over to the hand of plunderers. Then, in v. 16 we are told that God saved them out of the hand of the plunderers.

In his commentary on Judges, Dale Davis observed, “Here is the fundamental miracle of the Bible: that the God who rightly casts us down to the ground should—without reasons—stoop to lift us up.”

Actually, there are reasons, but those reasons have nothing to do with our being deserving. They have everything to do with Him being incredibly gracious and merciful.

By the way, in preparation to preach through Judges, I read several articles devoted to listing the best commentaries on Judges. Each list put Davis’ commentary as **the** best commentary on Judges. I will give you one more quote from Davis: “If you but tumble into this abyss of divine mercy, you will be convinced of one irrefutable fact: the God of the Bible is absolutely uninventible.”

If it were up to you or me to invent God, none of us would come close to describing a God like the One shown to us in the pages of the Bible. God is a God of perfect justice, and yet He is a God of amazing grace, and He acts in accord with both of those attributes without acting contrary to either of them. He judges without being ungracious, and He extends grace without being unjust.

In this book, there were eleven men and one woman who were called *judges*.

The title of *judge* is a bit unfortunate and doesn't aptly describe the purpose they each served. The Voice Bible calls them *leaders and liberators*. They didn't sit on a bench and oversee cases in a court of law. They were military leaders in most instances and were used by God to deliver His people from whatever peoples were enslaving them. Look at v. 18.

The various judges that God raised up were imperfect people, but they foreshadowed One perfect Judge who would come after them to deliver God's people from their greatest enemy—sin and death.

David Limbaugh, the brother of the late Rush Limbaugh, wrote a book a few years ago entitled, *The Emmaus Code: Finding Jesus in the Old Testament*. Understandably, he devotes less than two pages of his book to Judges, but he does point out that the judges in this book anticipate Jesus as the Savior and King of His people. He wrote, "In Jesus, we see the perfect judge, for He brings not merely temporary deliverance from present struggles, but eternal salvation from spiritual enemies and obstacles." Jesus has not only the power to save us eternally, He can also save us daily in our struggle with sin as we turn to Him.

I have chosen to preach through Judges because I find our situation in North America uncomfortably close to how it was in that day. I see a continual slide into godlessness, and as time goes on, that slide is picking up the pace.

Let me contrast a couple of generations in America. Those born between 1928 and 1945 are called the Silent Generation. A full 84% who are of that generation claim to be Christians, and of that number, 61% attend church at least once a month.

Those born between 1981 and 1996 are referred to as Millennials. Less than half, 49% of them, say they are Christians, and only 35% will attend church one or more times a month. More disconcerting is that one survey reported 40% of them are not affiliated with any faith or religion.

The most recent generation in America, which is known as Generation Z is the most irreligious generation in American history.

In 1999, 70% of all Americans were members of either a church, a synagogue, or a mosque. In 2020, for the first time ever, that figure dropped below 50%. Just last year, only 47% of us belonged to a religious body.

Our nation needs a spiritual awakening. Our Deliverer, our Savior is available, but we need to cry out to Him. We are instructed in 2 Timothy 2:8, "Remember Jesus Christ." Don't forget Him. We gather today to remember Him.