

Generations and Judges

S.R. Judges 2:6 – 8, 10

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Introduction

- A. I'm in real trouble. I need immediate help. You see, my great grandparents and grandparents and parents trusted in Jesus, and now I do too. My condition may not seem tragic to you, but history tells me I'm in danger.
- B. This generational degeneration happens so repetitively in **Biblical history** you can set your clock by it. It is called "the third and fourth generation problem." It is written in the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:5). It lived out in the dark days of the Judges (Judges 2:10). It led to the violent and immoral history of the Kings (1 Kings 11-12; Neh. 8-9). It triggered the failure of the Hebrew church (Heb. 2:1-4).
- C. Our **personal history** reveals the presence of generational degeneration today. The sacrificial and passionate faith of the first generation is accepted as an important set of doctrines by the second. The third generation continues the traditions of the faith, but they have little inner conviction or practical expression of it. The fourth generation brings the charade of faith to an end. In four generations faith goes from *passionate*, to *important*, to *cold*, to *dead*.
- D. Now, do you see my dilemma? Are you in the same boat? What will happen to our generation? Or the next!? Many local churches are made up of third and fourth generation believers. Some are spiritually cold and growing restless. The bold repentance and sacrificial faith of their predecessors, is carefully replaced by spiritual convenience to accommodate a worldly lifestyle. If history holds true, the result won't be pretty.
- E. Yes, "the third and fourth generation problem" is a pattern, but it need not be a prophecy! The fire doesn't have to die, it can be rekindled. Every new generation can make a fresh and authentic commitment to worship the Lord their God and serve *only* Him (Luke 4:8). But how?
- F. Surprising lessons are learned from a generation who failed. Their spiritual failure led to the horrific period of the Judges. Their generation was blessed with more land, power and wealth than any previous generation, and they used them to destroy the culture. Oh, they didn't plan to destroy their society and ruin their children's future. They just failed to see the desperate need of their generation (and ours!).

I. Know the Lord Personally

- A. First, they had an urgent need to know the Lord personally. The opening words of Judges diagnose the reason for Israel's collapse.

- B. “⁷The 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. ... After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel.” (Judges 2:7,10)
- C. Israel had a generational problem. It took three generations to go from courageously faithful to practically forgetful. How could this happen?
- D. Certainly, the parents shoulder some of the responsibility. After all, Moses warned parents that their children didn’t see the miracles they saw, or hear the thundering voice of God they heard (Deut 11:1-9). So, it was crucial that they model a wholehearted love and service to God (Deut. 11:13), and it was necessary that they personally share the story of God with their children (Deut. 11:18-21). The spiritual silence of one generation becomes the spiritual indifference of the next.
- E. However, the children bear some of the blame as well! When Judges 2:10 says, “*they did not know the Lord*” it does not mean they didn’t know who God was. Eli, the priest, had two sons who illustrate the children of the Judges era. They served in the Tabernacle daily. They “went to church” all the time. But, “the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the Lord” (1 Sam. 2:12; a bookend with Judges 2:10; one starting an era, the next ending it.). They knew who God was, but they were driven by their pleasures not the Law. They did not know the Lord personally or practically.
- F. Every generation needs to rediscover a passion to know the Lord, personally and practically in every area of our lives. But, wherever the social eclipses the spiritual and the superficial is preferred to the transformational, you will find a generation of spiritual failures.

II. Be Different From Your World

- A. This generation has a pressing need to live differently from the world. “Third and fourth generation” Christians know the world is a spiritual graveyard, and yet they want to dress and act like a corpse! In the same way, Israel knew the Canaanites were under the judgement of God, yet they joined in their lifestyle and admired their idols. God said,
- B. “I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land I swore to give to your ancestors. I said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall not make a covenant with the people of this land, but you shall break down their altars.’ Yet you have disobeyed me. Why have you done this?” (Judges 2:1-2)
- C. God asks our generation the same question! We are rescued from the terrifying destiny of this world. How then can we derive our pleasures from its values? How can we align ourselves with its activities? Are the delights of the Lord and the work of His kingdom not enough?

- D. Israel chose “accommodation” and “participation” with their world’s values, rather than separation from its ways! Like the striking of a cymbal this message rings repeatedly in Judges 1. Each family was charged to cleanse their home from influences that would compromise their morals and faith, “but they failed to completely drive out the inhabitants of the land” (Judges 1:21, 28, 32, ...).
- E. A troubling progression happens in Judges 1. The family of Ephraim compromises and allows the Canaanites to live “*among them*” (1:29). But then the family of Asher gives in and just “*lives among the Canaanites*” (1:32). And then finally, the “Canaanites” (Amorites) forced the family of Dan from their land all-together. Israel’s compromise with the Canaanites led to the dispossession of the blessing of God!
- F. The way to spiritual life for this generation is not by accommodating our faith to our lifestyles, but by conforming our lifestyles to the faith (Rom. 12:1-2)! A generation that whines about how their religion is an intrusion to their happiness, is a generation headed for spiritual failure. But, a generation that revels in the beauty of distinction will know the joy of spiritual life.

III. Serve the Lord’s Purposes

- A. David served the Lord in his generation (Acts 13:36). The generations of the 300 years before him often did not.
- B. This generation doesn’t just need to *know* something, or *refrain* from something, it urgently needs to *do* something! It needs to serve the Lord’s purposes, not its own. The divine journalist of Judges identifies this as a defining characteristic of a faithful generation.
- C. “⁷The 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. ⁸Joshua son of Nun, the **servant of the Lord**, died at the age of a hundred and ten” (Judges 2:7-8)
 - 1. “They served the Lord” is sung at the beginning of Judges, and it is answered by an opposite refrain at the end of Judges, “everyone did what was right in their own eyes” (Judges. 17:6; 21:25).
- D. We have a choice. Serve the Lord, or serve ourselves. The pressing need of our generation is to make that choice. At the end of the day are we more concerned with our glory or God’s; our kingdom or His, our work or His mission? One path leads to the tragic return to the days of the Judges The other path leads to the useful life and hopeful death of Joshua.
- E. With one breath God could sweep the Canaanites out of the land. Why did God allow them to remain? God tells us,
 - 1. “I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the Lord and walk in it as their forefathers did.” (Judges 2:22; 3:4)

IV. Conclusion: Will this generation pass the test?