

A Faithless Generation

Devotional Reading: 1 Corinthians 10:1–14

Background Scripture: Judges 1–2

Today's Scripture: Judges 2:6–15

I. Generation Gathered

Judges 2:6–9

6 And when Joshua had let the people go, the children of Israel went every man unto his inheritance to possess the land.

7 And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that he did for Israel.

8 And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being an hundred and ten years old.

9 And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnathheres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash.

6. The book of Joshua concludes with a parallel passage to this verse and the three that follow. As his final recorded act of leadership, *Joshua* had called the twelve tribes of Israel together in Shechem to renew their covenant with God. The specifics of this covenant renewal are recorded in Joshua 24:1–28.

The departure of every man *unto his inheritance* refers to the land distribution that is described in Joshua 13:8–19:51. Each tribe except Levi received a portion of Canaan in which to settle.

Until this point in Israel's history, the people have moved together as a cohe-

sive whole. There has been evident unity under the leadership of Moses and Joshua. But now, for the first time, the Israelites are dispersed across a larger region as *every man* departs to *possess* a slightly different portion of the *inheritance*.

7. Piecing together various data points, *the days of Joshua* ended around 1400 BC. Allowing twenty years or so for *all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua*, we come to the period of the judges, which began in roughly 1380 BC.

The Hebrew word translated *served* occurs in various contexts to depict subservience, either to other people or as the worship of a deity. The writer intends the latter sense here. The word can also signal the worship of pagan gods. Service unto God was the original indication of God's faithfulness promised to Moses when God spoke to him through the burning bush. The Israelites accepted their identity as God's people when they gathered at Mount Sinai to receive God's commands. Under Joshua's leadership, *the people* worked for God and worshiped Him.

The word *elders* does not signify age alone; the term also applies to local leadership. Elders adjudicate disputes and administer justice as community-recognized authorities. The elders who *outlived* Joshua most likely represent the end of the second generation after Egypt-

tian bondage. The first generation—the generation of the exodus itself—was sentenced to forty years in the wilderness for lack of faith; only two people from that generation entered the promised land: Joshua and Caleb. Therefore, the second generation would be those who followed Joshua’s leadership after Moses.

8. The book of Joshua describes Moses as *the servant of the Lord* more than a dozen times. We see that characterization echoed here, now applied to *Joshua* (compare Joshua 24:29). Scripture designates a handful of other people in a similar way. These include Abraham (Genesis 26:24), David (2 Samuel 7:5, 8), Caleb (Numbers 14:24), and Job (Job 1:8). To be God’s servant should be the goal of every believer.

9. This verse repeats Joshua 24:30 almost word for word. Joshua is *buried* in the place he personally inherited after the allotment of lands to the tribes. He is buried *in the mount of Ephraim* because he is from the tribe of Ephraim. The allotment of land for this tribe is described in Joshua 16:5–9. It was a relatively small area, given that Ephraim was the second smallest of the twelve tribes.

II. Generation Growth

Judges 2:10–15

10 And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.

11 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim:

12 And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger.

13 And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth.

14 And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies.

15 Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed.

10. A generational shift occurs, and the first element in “the Judges cycle” emerges. The reference to *all that generation* applies to the second generation of the exodus; the phrase *another generation* refers to the third since escaping Egypt. The text poetically notes the deaths of those in the second generation as being *gathered unto their fathers*.

The new generation hasn’t experienced God’s miraculous *works* in the same way as either the first or second generations. A breakdown seems to have occurred: the second generation failed to transfer what they *knew* about *the Lord* to their children in a way that compelled them to accept and live by it.

The word *knew* in this context points beyond information in and of itself. It includes the concepts of recognition and acknowledgment. This new generation is not unaware of the Lord, but the people do not pledge their undivided loyalty to Him as their God.

11. A form of the phrase *did evil in the sight of the Lord* occurs dozens of times in the Old Testament. In the book of Judges, such behavior signals the second aspect of “the ‘Judges cycle.’” It refers primarily to idolatry. Prior to the judges, Scripture uses the saying to characterize

the Israelites who died in the wilderness because of doubt, fear, and a lack of faith in God's deliverance (Numbers 32:13).

The phrase *the children of Israel* refers to the third generation of Israelites counted from the people's release from Egypt, the new generation presented in the previous verse. Although God claims them as His *children*, this new generation repeats the rebellion of their ancestors, ignoring warnings the Lord gave about forsaking Him for other gods.

The plural word *Baalim* refers to fictitious gods known individually by the designation *Baal*, which means "lord" or "master." Among the Canaanites, the Baals are gods of storms, weather, and fertility. Since agriculture was a fundamental building block of ancient Near Eastern society, Baal was understandably popular.

12a. The action implied by the word *forsook* in the book of Judges includes the concept of abandonment and the replacement of that which is abandoned with something else. The Israelites of this third generation do what the second generation swore not to do. God is faithful, but the Israelites are not.

The text commemorates God, who rescued the people from bondage in *Egypt*. After setting them free, God identified Israel as His covenant people and Himself as their God. He is the *God of their fathers*—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This designation should tie Israel's generations together as it speaks to God's faithfulness. But God knew in advance what His people would do as they lived among the land's inhabitants.

12b–13. God's displeasure at His people's disobedience results in *anger*. The Hebrew word translated here as *provoked* means to be vexed, sorrowful, and troubled. The people's choice to turn away from God grieves Him.

Ashtaroth is the plural for the Canaan-

ite goddess Astarte, who is associated with war, sexuality, and healing.

14. *Anger* is often described as "burning" (*hot*) in Hebrew. The root image is a blast of hot air from the nostrils. The Lord's anger is caused by Israel's failure to be exclusively loyal to Him. Israel's violation of the covenant is serious. Hundreds of years later, this continuing tendency will be likened to sexual immorality.

Consequence kicks in as God gives His people over to oppression by *their enemies*. God had warned Israel through Moses that they would face such domination by adversarial nations as a curse for their disobedience. Therefore, they face raiders who loot and plunder their wealth. They become subject to local rulers and live in oppression.

When the Israelites entered Canaan, the hearts of the land's pagan kings "melted" in fear (Joshua 5:1). The Canaanites lost their courage because of God's power and might. They yielded to the Israelites both voluntarily and involuntarily. In this place and time, God now gives the Canaanites the upper hand.

15. The declaration regarding *the hand of the Lord* is an anthropomorphism, which means using a human characteristic to describe God. Other texts use this technique regarding God's eyes and ears (Psalm 34:15), His mouth (Isaiah 62:2), and His face (Exodus 33:20). Here the word *hand* signifies God's power and might. His hand brought Israel out of Egypt; Scripture declares this in other places by using the words *hand* and *arm* as near synonyms (examples: Deuteronomy 4:34; 5:15; 26:8). His hand was with Israel when they entered the promised land, but now it is turned *against* them *for evil*. This verse doesn't refer to a moral evil since God doesn't tempt people to sin. Rather, it relates to physical distress.

Involvement Learning

A Faithless Generation

Into the Lesson

Consider the games “Telephone” or “Pictionary.” What are the most challenging parts of those games?

As we study today’s passage, consider why it is important for us to pass along the legacy of our faith in a way that is received accurately, remembered appropriately, and shared faithfully.

Into the Word

Read Judges 2:6–9, then read Deuteronomy 1:26–39 and Joshua 1:1–11, 16–18. The Deuteronomy verses are about the first generation, who came out of Egypt; the verses in Joshua are about the second generation, who grew up in the wilderness. Write a brief summary of each generation.

First Generation _____

Second Generation _____

Third Generation _____

Read Judges 2:10–13. What benefits or blessings did this generation lack?

What benefits or blessings did this generation enjoy?

Key Text

The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim.
—Judges 2:11

Read Judges 2:14–16. Write what God did for the first and second generations because of their response to Him.

What were the consequences the third generation faced (consider Judges 2:14–16)?

Into Life

Read Deuteronomy 30:11–20 and write down words or phrases that stand out as significant to you and explain why.

Using this passage as an inspiration, write a personal statement of faith.

Thought to Remember

Every person must choose God deliberately and personally.