

THE SECOND GENERATION SYNDROME

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Judges 2:1-14 - "Now the angel of the Lord went up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, "I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you, [2] and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.' But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done? [3] So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you." [4] As soon as the angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the people of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept. [5] And they called the name of that place Bochim. And they sacrificed there to the Lord. [6] When Joshua dismissed the people, the people of Israel went each to his inheritance to take possession of the land. [7] 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. [8] And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of 110 years. [9] 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. [10] 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. [11] And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals. [12] 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. [13] They abandoned the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtaroath. [14] 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."

Sad words, these. The book of Judges opens with this brief synopsis of Israel's failure to obey the Lord. The purpose of this reminder is to stamp deeply in our minds that disobedience to the Lord **follows** careless people relentlessly into their futures. Other lives are always effected.

The Lord shows these careless people something they should have seen coming but didn't. The **next** generation would reap the painful results of the easy neglect of the previous generation. I say **easy neglect** because the first generation didn't feel the actual **pain** of their neglect as fully as the next generation would. Nothing that drastic seemed to happen immediately. Their gradual cultural accommodation seemed painless.

These verses in Judges two are full of God's painful grace. He tells the people in advance the **cause** of the hard lives they are about to experience. The people **failed to drive out the enemies as God had instructed.** To follow God meant they would have to be **against** the pull of the cultures in which they were immersed. And nobody enjoys being against what seems natural to everyone else.

You can read the record of their failure all through the first chapter of Judges. They tried to **manage** what God said was to be **eliminated.** Significantly, the place where this pronouncement of their failure was made was called **Bochim (2:5)**, which means "**weepers**" or "**weeping.**"

Of course, we all **fail** the Lord at different times and in different ways. We are constantly in need of fresh repentance. But that's not the issue of Israel in this text. They were disobedient in a deeper sense than mere failure. Their disobedience was more **foundational** than that. They had failed to **drive out their enemies** when they **first** entered the Promised Land, and they **still** weren't driving them out. They had grown accustomed to **living** with what God said couldn't be accommodated.

Their original disobedience had become **ongoing** and **systemic.** And they persisted in their carelessness because initially there were no rapid effects from it. **They couldn't sense their own spiritual drift.**

In other words, they were **embracing** past disobedience by **continuing** in it. They never consciously **processed their own guilt.** They were now **sowing** to their disobedience. And that kind of disobedience isn't something you **leave behind.** The very disobedience they thought was going to bring them ease and freedom turned out to be their greatest source of grief. Hence, "**Bochim**"(2:5) - **weeping.** There's a lesson in that for the thoughtful and the teachable. They were now **servicing** what once seemed an easy cultural adaptation.

Then we read of the **death of Joshua** in **verses 8-9.** This was a gigantic event for Israel. Joshua spent his whole life trying to turn the people away from their natural sinful inclinations, back to the ways of God. Sadly, this whole second chapter spins out the tale of the people's sin and God's judgment. It's a heart-breaking account. The core of today's teaching lies in **verses 10-14** of Judges chapter two:

1) NOTICE THE IMPACT OF THE SECOND GENERATION SYNDROME

Judges 2:10-11 - “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. [11] And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals.”

“**And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers**”(10). Which generation is he talking about? Joshua’s generation - the people who had entered the promised land. These were the people who had heard the words of Joshua - who saw the waters part and the walls of Jericho fall. That generation finally died off.

After Joshua’s generation died off, another generation came along after them, “**...who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel**”(10).

That’s all we’re told. They weren’t morally wicked at first. They didn’t stumble into idolatry right out of the gate. They probably *intended*, at least at first, to continue in the faith of their parents and leaders. But they couldn’t do it. And the reason they couldn’t do it was they “**didn’t know**” something (2:10). And “**not knowing**” certain things will destroy you.

Actually, they were lacking **two** kinds of knowledge, not just **one**. They had no living **experience** of God - “**who did not know the Lord**” - and they had no **knowledge of what God had done in the past** - “**...or the work that He had done for Israel.**” I take that to mean **both** kinds of knowledge are needed. It’s not enough just to be in some place where people really **encounter** God.

That’s vitally important. People need their own personal experience of God’s life and power, for sure. **And**, in addition to that, people need to be in some place where they regularly discipline themselves to **learn about what God has done in history**. They need **content** to understand and squeeze fruit out of their **experience**.

Pause and think about those words. **Two kinds of knowledge** are always necessary - not just one. Each generation needs its own **experience of God’s reviving spiritual life**. **And each generation needs a deep understanding of God’s words and ways**.

Our text says these people had no knowledge of **who their God was or the work He had done**(2:10). This was the **beginning** of their spiritual ruin, but not the **end** of the path. There’s another inevitable downward step.

Next in sequence, **because** they didn’t **know** certain important things, they soon bowed their lives to **idols** - “**And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals**”(11). This describes the sin they eventually committed. But they weren’t **born** idolaters. They **defaulted** to idols because of the vacuum in their heads and hearts. When you don’t know God and His works you can’t help but fall in love with something else.

So it’s important to read **verses 10 and 11** together - “**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.** [11] **And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals.**”

It’s important to remember this pattern. The people became idolaters **gradually**. There may have come a specific time when, for the very first time, that Israelite bowed in religious worship to that idol of Baal. But the **seeds** of that idolatry were prepared as the **memory** and **knowledge** of God slowly evaporated.

And here’s the point to ponder. People who forget this truth rarely understand **why** sin just “pops up” the way it does in churches, families, and individuals. Without remembering this pattern from Judges it’s almost impossible to do an accurate **autopsy** on the death and destruction sin always brings. You frequently have to look farther back, before the actual sin was committed, to find the attitude of heart that made the life **vulnerable** to that sin.

There is always a **timing element** in the growth of either holiness or sin. That’s why Paul always likened the growth of our souls - in either direction - to the time that passes between **sowing** and **reaping**. It takes an understanding of **sequence** to see the invisible connection between the first phase and the second.

2) THE TRUE MOTIVATION FOR GODLINESS FADES WHEN PEOPLE ONLY CONSIDER THEIR OWN SPIRITUALITY

I’m still thinking about those same two verses from chapter two. The context surrounding **verses 10 and 11** is a bit

chilling:

Judges 2:7-13 - “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. [8] And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of 110 years. [9] 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. [10] 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. [11] And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals. [12] 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. [13] They abandoned the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth.”

Notice those opening words of **verse 7** - “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.”

As long as two things happened the people served the Lord. **First**, they served the Lord as long as Joshua was there to keep **prodding** them to serve the Lord. And **second**, they kept serving the Lord as long as the great miracles of the past kept motivating them. After those two factors were removed the next generation forgot all about the Lord. That’s the brief recap of those verses.

Now, here’s what I want to say as I wrap up this message. There is another motive for godliness - a **third** factor. And without this third factor true godliness will never be propelled very far into the future. And the reason I want to **close** with this point is I think it’s the one point most neglected in the direction much of the contemporary church is taking today. I’m hoping this will help us all remember it.

Here it is. **You can’t consistently make the most godly decisions in your present life until you consciously make those decisions for the next generation, not your own.** This is the point Paul makes in **Romans 14:7** - “**For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself.**”

This is Paul’s advice on how Christians should learn to evaluate their attempts to live for God. That’s what Romans fourteen is all about. It’s about people trying to sort out which rules they will apply to their pursuit of God. There are many different situations. People bring different levels of maturity into the mix. Some understand freedom in Christ better than others. Some come out of very strained, sordid pasts.

But here’s the universal principle to apply. My life, Paul would say, isn’t an **end in itself**. It’s a **pattern** for others and a **pattern** for the next generation.

The Psalmist deals with the same issue again - **Psalm 78:5-8** - “He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, [6] that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, [7] so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments; [8] and that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God.”

How shall I live my life. How much time and attention shall I give to God? **You can’t make that decision properly until you do something else first.** The Psalmist would invite you to look around this sanctuary today. See expectant mothers with swollen tummies. God has a plan for that unborn child - “**Psalm 78:6** - “....that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children....” God wants **you** and **me** to live our lives thinking about - **aiming our choices at** - that unborn child.

I have had the blessing of living my life shaped by people - by parents and others - who suffered much for Jesus. I know it was a different era, but my father dug ditches for Canada Dredge and Dock so he could plant a church in Welland, Ontario in a day when there wasn’t a dime of support coming from the District or anyone else. I’ve been taken to church three or four times a week when there was no children’s church or supervised nursery. I was taken even when I hated being taken. As a child I saw adults quit great jobs at the close of a missionary convention and pack up their young families and spend the rest of their days as missionaries.

In other words, much of the convicting power that has shaped my walk with Jesus **wasn’t** of my own doing. I was **shaped** by others just as often as I **shaped** my life by my own fortitude. My parents pretty well forced me to spend an hour each Sunday learning Bible stories in Sunday School. Lots of times it was in some dark old church

basement or furnace room. The teachers weren't always exceptional. But I was there - every Sunday - for an hour. You do the math. One hour per Sunday - fifty-two hours a year - over twenty years, one thousand hours of Bible stories. Then there were three church services a week. Three hours of Bible teaching a week - one hundred and fifty-six hours of Bible teaching a year - over twenty years, three thousand, one hundred and twenty hours of Bible teaching. Add that in with the Sunday School - four thousand, one hundred and twenty hours of Bible study by age twenty. All of that is now in me. It is not due to any special discipline on **my** part. Others were investing in the **next** generation.

Now I take that stored up heritage into everything I do. And here's my point. There are many things I can, quite safely, do with respect to my own personal choices. I can find some nifty, cutting-edge church where they just watch videos and drink cappuccinos. I can do the one hour a week church thing. In fact, I can probably do one hour every **two** weeks and make it to glory just fine.

But that's only because I'm bringing **into** my present church life all that was invested in my **earlier** years. I could probably lighten the pace now and not notice anything different in my walk with Jesus. That's why multiplied millions of North American evangelicals are super-sizing the **material/leisure/pleasure/home** segments of their lives. They can do it with absolutely no observable difference to their quality of life or their faith.

But there's a great difference coming. We just don't see it yet. It won't be the same for the **next** generation. They will probably have more money. They will be better educated. They will know hockey and piano and movies better than any of us. But they won't have the **stored up heritage** we brought into our hunt for a more convenient life-style. **Judges 2:10** will become **prophetic** for that next generation: **"....And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel."**

I take no pleasure in teaching this. I know this kind of teaching makes nothing but enemies. But God help us all to ponder the **next generation**. They need more than good jobs and educations. And they need more than a bare conversion experience. They need models of **radical, sold out commitment to Christ**. And **you**, my friend, are the **pattern**. You will never take the right path for your life today just looking at **your** life. Each one must take the path he or she takes for those yet unborn to keep our religion from having a short shelf-life.