

## Winning the Second Generation

Cycles of Sin . . . Stories of Grace – Part I

Judges 1-2

### Introduction

The Old Testament book of Judges is a story of a nation gone mad with sin and rebellion. It will sound at times, like a history book on Western Civilization. It will sound much like our nation today.

No one would deny that we are facing an enormous moral and spiritual crisis in our country. We are being deluged by a flood of immorality and amorality, in which everyone seems to be saying, “What’s right for you must be right.”

This is not a new philosophy for living, by they way. It goes all the way back to the children of Israel. The book of Judges begins after the death of Joshua, in a time of great immorality in the land.

I am reminded of a cartoon that showed a sophisticated college student speaking to a missionary. The missionary was unmistakably identified by his pith helmet, shorts, hiking boots, and walking stick. The student said to him, “I don’t see how you do it! What do you do when you can’t take the superstition and the violence and the immorality any longer?”

“Simple,” came the reply, “I just get on a plane and go back to the mission field.”

Now we cannot get on a plane and leave today. God has called us to this generation, in this country. The question is, “How do we live?! How do we live in this kind of society that has gone mad, without becoming like it? How do we impact it?”

I invite your attention to a book in the Old Testament that gives us some answers as to how to

live – the book of Judges. I want to begin by taking you to the last chapter and the last verse of this book. This is where God gives the diagnosis of the problem.

Usually God gives the diagnosis and then, deals with the symptoms. In this book, He gives the symptoms and ultimately, concludes with His spiritual diagnosis.

In Judges 21:25, the last phrase, we are given God’s diagnosis,

*. . . everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*

There is one other key verse that I want to note with you. It not only serves as an explanation for this entire book, but it will be the focus of our discussion today. Turn to Judges 2:10.

*All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel.*

This could be paraphrased, “They knew about the Lord, but did not know the Lord.”

Now there are a lot of things that we could discuss in the first two chapters of Judges. However, as I read and re-read, trying to discern what the Spirit of God would have us to study, the point that troubled me more than anything else, was this phrase. How can one generation be so faithful to God and the next generation not know Him?!

I am going to visually represent this with a couple of chairs. The first chair will represent the first generation. This is the generation that came with Joshua and conquered the land. This chair will represent the generation that had passion and fire. They would take on the Perizzites and the Jebusites; they would ask for Hebron. The second chair will represent the next generation, mentioned in Judges 2:10, that did not acknowledge the God of the first generation and, as the verse says, really did not know the works of the first generation.

The question that I ask today is, “Why does the second generation so often fail to follow in the footsteps of faith of the first generation?”

This problem exists in our society. Why is it that the Spurgeon’s, the Tozer’s, the Moody’s, and the Sunday’s children walked away from their father’s great faith? What happened to schools like Princeton, Harvard, and Yale that began as Bible colleges, in which the major study was the Scriptures and every student was required to take Greek and account for an hour a day of personal devotions?

The problem also exists with the church. Why is it that the average church does not remain effective for more than two or three generations? I recently read a survey that concluded the average church reaches its peak of effectiveness, outreach, and enthusiasm at twelve years of age. At this point, if this church is an average church, we are halfway to the grave.

How can we remain in the spirit and passion of first generation faith?! How do we stay in the first chair of faith?

Judges chapters 1 and 2 will give some answers. It will not give all of them and it will even raise some fresh questions, but God gives enough of the story to warn and challenge us!

## **Problems Related To Being “Second Generations”**

It seems that there are fundamental problems related to being in the second generation. We will start by looking at the negative points from the first two chapters of Judges; the negative reasons that the generation in the second chair did not follow the God of the generation of the first chair. Let me suggest several problems with being part of a second generation that we can learn from today.

1. The second generation can be influenced by the partial obedience of the first generation.

Let us clear the air at the start that the generation that followed Joshua to the promised land was not perfect. First generations will make mistakes. If you are trying to start a godly heritage in your home; if you want to be a first generation believer, you need to realize that you will make mistakes. The problem is that second generations seem to be so sensitive to that partial obedience – or disobedience.

Let me point to some rather disturbing notes that are found early in Judges. Look at Judges 1:4-6.

***Judah went up, and the Lord gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hands, and they defeated ten thousand men at Bezek. They found Adoni-bezek in Bezek and fought against him, and they defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites. But Adoni-bezek fled; and they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and big toes.***

This was the ancient method of ending a military career. There was no way this king could stand steadily to fight or handle a bow or sword. They would dismember a conquered king as a sign that these men could no longer fight.

The problem, however, was that mutilation was a pagan practice. God had commanded to put these men to death, not to torture or mutilate them. The Israelites were partially obeying, and already flirting with and drawing from the standards of the pagan people around them.

The next verse that hints of spiritual trouble is Judges 2:19.

***Now the Lord was with Judah, and they took possession of the hill country; but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley because they had iron chariots.***

Now this seems logical – Judah is outgunned; Judah did not have the weaponry that the Canaanites had. However, they compared themselves to the Canaanites and they had the short stick; they did not compare the Canaanites to God. It is interesting that in Judges 4, a lady judge, by the name of Deborah, will lead the Israelites against an army with nine hundred iron chariots, and they will defeat them. The problem is not a lack of power on Judah’s part; the problem is a lack of faith in a powerful God.

There are actually seven references to partial obedience, which is, in effect, disobedience. These include:

- Judges 1:27,  
*But Manasseh did not take possession of Beth-shean and its villages . . . so the Canaanites persisted in living in that land.*
- Judges 1:28,  
*It came about when Israel became strong, that they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but they did not drive them out completely.*
- Judges 1:29,  
*Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites who were living in Gezer, so the Canaanites lived in Gezer among them.*
- Judges 1:30,  
*Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, or the inhabitants of Nahalol; so the Canaanites lived among them and became subject to forced labor.*
- Judges 1:31-32,  
*Asher did not drive out the inhabitants . . . So the Asherites lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; for they did not drive them out.*

These references continue, but we will stop there. You get the picture!

The picture Judges chapter 1 gives us is that there is control, but not total conquest. There is victory and there is a visible sign of obedience to God, but there is still a nagging disobedience. The next generation of Israelites picked up on this.

A contemporary illustration would be a couple driving to church and arguing all the way. The husband complains about having to spend “good time” in church. Little Susie, sitting in the backseat, is picking up on this. They arrive at church, get out of the car, and say, “Praise God, isn’t it a beautiful day! Brother, it is so good to see you!”

After church, the husband shakes the pastor’s hand and says, “Oh, that was a wonderful sermon, Pastor Sominex! Have you met my dear wife?”

Little Susie is watching and thinking, “Liar! Hypocrite!”

One of the greatest stumbling blocks that young Christians have is not the opposition of the world, but the disobedience of so-called established Christians.

2. A second fundamental problem is that the second generation can often become isolated from past experiences of faith.

Look at Judges 2:8-10.

*Then Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of one hundred and ten. And they buried him in the territory of his inheritance . . . All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel.*

This is the “Old Time Religion”. The next generation is looking at Mom and Dad as if to say, “Well, that is great for you.”

The problem is that this has not been incorporated in their own life. There is no sense of involvement; no appreciation of the past. They have been told to go to church; they have been given their belief system, but they have not had the matter of conviction shared with them. They have not heard, “Look what God did through us . . .”

Do you remember, in Joshua 22, the two and a half tribes were so concerned that their children would understand the work of God that they built a memorial. It was going to be a teaching tool that they could use to share with their children everything that God had done in their lives. In that way, it would not just be something God had done in their generation, but would impact the second generation as well.

How well will we communicate our vision of faith and mission; our rich heritage of observing God’s grace and power? Our future depends upon it.

3. A third fundamental problem is that the second generation can become ignorant of the practical preeminence of God.

Look at Judges 2:11-13.

*Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals, and they forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers . . . So they forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtaroth.*

Ashtaroth, by the way, is a goddess.

It was bad enough that they turned away from the living God, but even worse, they chose to put in His place, foreign deities. This reveals that they knew nothing of God's sovereign power.

Let me insert, in order to give a better understanding of this, some information about Baal. Baal was a god in charge of storms and fertility. He was responsible for the fertility of the crops, the livestock, and the family. Baal naturally had his female consort; that is, Ashtoreth or Ashtart (she was quite a tart). In the Canaanite theology, fertility depended upon the sexual relationship between Baal and Ashtoreth; the revival of nature was supposedly due to intimacy between Baal and his mistress.

However, the Canaanite faithful did not just sit back and hope their two gods got along. A Canaanite man, for instance, would go to a Baal shrine and have relations with one of the sacred prostitutes serving there. The man would fulfill Baal's role and the woman would fulfill Ashtoreth's. The idea was that the copulating of the worshiper and the spiritual prostitute would encourage Mr. and Mrs. Baal to do their thing and thus, the rain, grain, wine, and oil would flow.

So guess what this second generation of Israelites get involved in? This was much more than buying a little Buddha, saying a few prayers, and throwing some rice at him. They got involved in the most degraded form of worship. They were engaging in temple prostitution, fertility rites, drunken orgies, idolatry, snake worship, homosexuality, and even human child sacrifices.

The second generation had gone that far because, I think, they had been isolated from the God of their fathers.

What do you think God's response is going to be when He sees the second generation doing this? Will He say, "Well, you win some, you lose some. That's the way the cookie crumbles."?

No. Look at Judges 2:14.

***The anger of the Lord burned against Israel***

...

This is not the petty anger of hurt feelings, but the holy anger of a righteous God against sin, betrayal, and idolatry. He recognizes that His people are prostituting themselves with foreign gods.

They would, in fact, become enslaved six different times in a total of one hundred fourteen years. Sin produces slavery.

The amazing thing that I found as I read these two chapters several times, is that Judges 2:16 reveals the incredible grace of God. Look at that verse.

***Then the Lord raised up judges who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them.***

Thus the book of Judges is the story of the cycle of Israel falling into sin and slavery and despair and repentance, sin and slavery and despair and repentance, over and over again. Then God, in His mercy and grace, would use men and women, called judges, to deliver His people and bring them back to Himself.

## **Practical Suggestions For Winning "Second Generations"**

Now we have uncovered the negatives that lose second generations. What are the positives, from Judges 1 and 2, to keep them? What can we learn to help the second generation follow the first generation – to experience the faith of their fathers as their own personal faith? How can we keep the second generation from falling into the second generation syndrome? Let me suggest two key ways to keep the second generation in the arena of first generation faith.

1. The first generation needs to develop cooperation with the second generation.

Let me give two ways to do this.

- The first way to develop cooperation with the second generation is physically.

Look at Caleb's daughter. You may remember that Caleb took on the giants of Anak. Note Judges 1:12.

***And Caleb said, "The one who attacks Kiriath-sepher and captures it, I will even give him my daughter Achsah for a wife."***

This is my kind of dad. His daughter is about to get married and he wants to make sure that the guy who gets her is worthy. He is probably wondering if there is anyone worthy of his daughter. I know the feeling – even though my daughter is only four. Caleb wants to make sure this guy is a first generation man. So, he says, "Here's the test – if you trust God and

allow God to do the fighting for you; if you have that kind of relationship with God and you conquer this city, you're good enough for my little Achsah."

Now the lines had not been drawn at this point in time evidently, as to who could marry who. The one who steps up to this challenge, interestingly, is Caleb's younger brother. Look at Judges 1:13-15.

*Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, captured it; so he gave him his daughter Achsah for a wife. Then it came about when she came to him, that she persuaded him to ask her father for a field. Then she alighted from her donkey, and Caleb said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Give me a blessing, since you have given me the land of the Negev, give me also springs of water." . . .*

She sounds just like her dad! Years ago, Caleb had said to Joshua, "Give me Hebron."

Now Achsah is asking for more territory with spring water. She is not asking for land that she will just inherit; she is asking for more land which must be conquered and maintained!

She had, years before, apparently seen her father's faith in action. Caleb had communicated his faith to her in some way, and she is now physically involved in the action of faith. This makes Achsah a first generation kid.

Have you ever wondered why missionary kids grow up and go back to the field where their parents served? It is because they had a high level of involvement in their parents ministry – and it became their ministry.

Do you teach a Sunday School class; put out hymnals; teach a children's club; set up chairs? Involve your children, if you can; involve a second generation believer – a young believer that you may be discipling. In whatever way you serve Jesus Christ, think of physically involving the second generation along with you.

- The second way to develop cooperation with the second generation is prayerfully.

If you have a problem, involve the whole family in praying about it! Especially involve the younger children. They will amaze you with their passion for transparent prayer; they will frighten you with their expectation of an answer from God.

My wife was shopping with our four year old daughter Candace, and could not find a parking space. She drove around and finally, a car pulled out. Little Candace said, "Thanks, Lord, we needed that space."

I was cleaning in the garage last week, while Candace was outside playing. She did not see me in the garage. All of the sudden, she knelt down in the driveway and said, rather loudly, "Oh, dear Jesus, . . ."

My first impulse was to look to see if any neighbors were watching – they are already uncertain about who Baptists are! I tried to hear her prayer, but I could not. Children are so transparent in their prayers.

Involve the second generation through prayer. Do you have a problem? Have you ever taken someone from the second generation aside – that college student; a younger believer you are discipling; a teenager – and said, "I need you to pray for me.?" Take them through the struggle.

I had an example of this in my home recently. I was quite upset a few weeks ago about a city counsel decision. I came home from the counsel meeting at midnight and woke my wife. I explained the whole story to her as I paced around the bedroom. She sympathized and listened. Then, she reminded me of the sovereignty of God, which I did not want to hear at that moment! I wanted some matching hysteria; anger.

My wife also did something else the next morning. She took the children to school and told them to pray for their daddy. Now wait a second! I do not mind praying with them, but it is rather odd to have them praying for me – especially praying for me because I am having a hard time and I am a little upset! I came home that afternoon, not knowing this is going on, and the kids gave me big hugs, which is fortunately, standard. But I noticed that they were looking at me differently; staring at me, and wondered what was going on. My wife told me later that she had told them to pray.

My children were seeing me in an entirely different light; that is, "Daddy needs help!" Perhaps my kids were picking up on the fact that Daddy is human.

We have the misconception that the first generation is to be a perfect model. As a result, we do not share our struggles.

We should not only involve them prayerfully to ask, but to thank. We do not thank God because it makes Him feel good; we thank God because it is good for us. It teaches our children; the second generation; our disciples that the source of power and grace, strength and blessing is God.

Praise, worship, thanksgiving, prayer are the greatest protection against the second generation syndrome.

2. The second major suggestion that will keep the second generation in the first chair of faith is for the first generation to develop communication with the second generation.

In a recent conversation with our youth pastor, he mentioned that teenagers so often say, "I just wish my parents would talk to me."

I read a survey recently that the average father spends less than five minutes per week talking to his children. Communication in the households of America is at an all time low!

I am not suggesting talk for talk's sake. We want the second generation to pick up on our passion; our mission; our vision. We want them to understand that God is real; He is personal. We want them to realize that God can be approached; He cares. Let me give two very important things to talk about.

- First, we should communicate spiritual events in our lives.

Remember again the passion of the two and a half tribes, in Joshua 22, as they built an altar to serve as a tool for teaching their children. They wanted to tell them the stories and kindle in their young hearts, a fire for God. It was a symbol that God is alive; that God is powerful; that God can be trusted.

What do we share with our second generation? If you share Jesus Christ with a neighbor or a co-worker, tell the second generation about it. Tell them what you said. Tell them how the person responded. Tell them what you wish you had said. Let them know what God is doing in your life and through your life. Share spiritual events. You may be surprised how little they understand about what you do.

Nearly a year ago, I realized I was making a mistake with our children along these lines. I recognized the problem when our kids were hanging onto my legs saying, "Don't go to another meeting." I realized I was not communicating the mission to the second generation.

My most consistent night out is Wednesday night for Evangelism Explosion. I began telling our children, not that I was going to another meeting, but, "I'm going to tell people about Jesus Christ tonight."

"Oh, you are?!"

"Yea, that's really important isn't it? There are people who don't know the Lord, so I want to share with them."

It made all the difference in the world. And there is a possible connection with the activities of one of our sons. A couple of weeks ago, this son came home and told us that he had told his kindergarten friend about Jesus. He said his friend prayed and asked Jesus into his heart. My wife and I thought that was great. I had to ask, however, "What did you tell him?"

"Well, I told him if he wanted to go to heaven, he had to ask Jesus into his heart. If he didn't, he was going to hell and burn in the fire."

Two nights ago, the same son put under my pillow as a present to me, "The Wordless Book". That is the evangelistic tool for Child Evangelism Fellowship. The next morning, I asked him what it was for. He said, "It's for you to use at Evangelism Explosion."

He is catching the vision. He is part of it!

So often, the second generation does not hear what is happening in our lives because we simply do not share it. Then, over a period of time, they become more and more isolated from what is happening in our lives. We need to communicate spiritual events.

I want to suggest that this is wonderful way of sharing not only our beliefs, but our convictions with our children. For example, you have been invited to a company party that your clients are putting on. You go out of politeness, but politely refuse the offers to drink what the boys are drinking, to laugh at the stories the boys are telling, and to dance with the pretty office secretaries. Do you remember how you felt? You felt like a "stick in the mud"; a "holy Joe"; a "fuddy duddy". Have you ever considered how powerful that story would be to communicate to your son or daughter? They are facing incredible peer pressure at school, at college, in a career. They think you do not understand and that your world is in some way, protected from that kind of thing. How powerful it would be to share how you feel and what God is doing to help you to remain distinctive in the arena in which He has placed you.

Tell the second generation what God is doing in your life.

Let me expand that a little further.

- Secondly, we should communicate our spiritual dreams for their lives.

It is a tragic misconception of parents and older Christians that somehow, the second generation is going to pick up by osmosis that we think God has a special plan for their lives. They cannot read our minds.

Smalley and Trent wrote a rather interesting book entitled, *The Blessing*. It talks about the need for parents and children to bless family members with meaningful words and touch. Tell them that God has something unique for them.

Now, by the way, godly parents have ungodly children who will refuse to follow. We cannot guarantee that they will obey; that they will adopt the values and the faith. Whether they do or not, however, the responsibility is still ours to share it.

One of the ways we can share is to pull little Johnny aside, or that new believer, or that one you are discipling and say, "I want you to know I appreciate

you and these things I see in your life, God can use in a wonderful way."

"You mean, God can use me?"

"Oh, yea. The way God has put you together – I've noticed this and this and this – God can do tremendous things with that!"

"Really? Me!"

"Yea, you!"

We cannot predict how God will use them, but we can verbalize things related to their makeup that God can use for His glory. Constantly encourage the second generation in the Lord. Do not ever fall into the trap that they can read your mind. Communicate to them how special they are to God.

Let me close with a question. Which chair are you sitting in? Are you first generation or are you second generation? I trust that we are all in the first chair, even though we may be the second, or third, or fourth, or fifth generation. I trust that we are sharing in the passion and the vision and that this will challenge us because a generation will follow who need to know that God is alive; that God is powerful; that God can be trusted.

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