

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
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Cycles of Disobedience

Judges 2:11-19

Key verse: “They did not listen even to their judges; for they lusted after other gods and bowed down to them” (Judges 2:17).

The Book of Judges tells about the life of Israel in the Promised Land, from the time of Joshua’s death until the rise of Israel’s monarchy (King Solomon, King David, etc.). Judges 17:6 gives the theme of this entire book: “In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes.”

In their immediate context, these words refer to the fact that—during this period of its history—Israel had no earthly king or ruler. But this verse implies that the period of the judges was a time of moral and spiritual anarchy because Israel did not obey her heavenly King.

Judges tells the story of Israel’s *cycles of disobedience*. Those cycles followed this pattern: 1. Israel knew and followed God. 2. Israel forgot God. 3. Israel fell into apostasy and sinned against God. 4. Israel reaped the consequences of its sin as God allowed foreign powers to defeat and oppress Israel. 5. Israel called out to God for help. 6. God raised up a “judge” (deliverer) to rescue Israel. We can look at Judges 2 as an example of Israel’s cycles of disobedience, and we can *apply Israel’s experience to our own lives today....*

1. They knew and followed God. “The people worshiped 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” (2:7). It is significant that Israel followed God as long as its leaders were people who had an *experiential knowledge* of God. They had “seen all the great work that the Lord had done for Israel.”

Knowing about God is important; but knowing God in an experiential way is imperative. Theologian J.I. Packer said, “A little knowledge of God is worth more than a great deal of knowledge *about* God.”

The Apostle Paul expressed his longing for an up-to-date, experiential relationship with God through Christ when Paul wrote: “For my determined purpose is that I may know Him—that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding the wonders of His person more strongly and more clearly” (Philippians 3:10, *Amplified Bible*).

2. They forgot God. Israel knew and followed God as long as its leaders were people who had an experiential knowledge of God. But look what happened within one generation. “Moreover, that whole generation was gathered to their ancestors, and another generation grew up after them, who did not know the Lord or the work that He had done for Israel” (2:10).

How easy it is for a people to forget God! *Indifference* leads to *apathy* which leads to *apostasy*. How important it is for parents and grandparents to model for the next generation what it means to have an up-to-date, firsthand relationship with the living God. If we lose our spiritual passion, apathy and indifference will set in. The results will affect us, but they will also affect the next generation.

Maybe Harold Korver had this generational dynamic in mind when he said: “If you don’t make a habit out of going to church each Sunday, you shoot yourself in the foot, your children in the leg, and your grandchildren in the heart.”

3. They sinned against God. “Then the Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and worshipped the Baals; and they abandoned the Lord of their ancestors, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt....” (2:11).

Human beings are made to worship. If they forsake the one true God, the God of the Bible, then people will turn to the false gods of their culture. For Israel in the time of the judges, those false gods were the idols of Baal and Astartes (2:11, 13). For many in our culture, the false gods are *power, pleasure, materialism, or the cult of self*.

4. They reaped the consequences of sin. “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 power of their enemies all around them, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies” (2:14).

Sin has consequences. In the New Testament we read, “Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow” (Galatians 6:7). Often, the consequences of sin come—not as a direct action of God—but in the form of God allowing us to experience the results of our choices and actions. This is what is meant in verse 14 by saying that God “gave them over” to their enemies.

Romans 1:18-32 describes God’s response to a people who refuse to turn away from sin and back to God: “Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen” (v. 24).

As someone has said, “The most terrible judgment is to be left to oneself.”

5. God rescued them. “Then the Lord raised up judges, who delivered them out of the power of those who plundered them” (Joshua 2:16).

In Joshua 2, we see both the justice and the mercy of God. God will not make us follow Him and obey Him. When we forget God and follow other gods, we reap the

negative consequences of our sin. But God is merciful and gracious and willing to forgive and restore us.

As one writer observed: “The kingdom of God has been compared to a great city hospital, whose doors are never closed. However late the sick or the injured may come, they will find preparations have been made to receive them and to minister to their needs.”

Thanks be to God!

(Contact Michael at msigler@fumcfwb.com.)