

Judges 2:6-15; Dt. 6:4-15; The Rise of Rebellion I. The Great Start II. The Tragic Failure III. The Frightening Consequence

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, this morning as we begin a series through Judges, we find the context or reason why this book is so full of rebellion and sin. How could it be that in the span of a few short years, we could fall from the heights of Joshua and Caleb- to a generation that knew nothing about the Lord? Oh how the mighty nation of faith has fallen! The Book of Judges serves as a link between the book of Joshua and Samuel. Judges covers the period after the exodus out of Egypt and initial conquest up until the coming of the kings of Israel. Ruth was also written during this same period of time.

Throughout this book, there is a clear cycle of rebellion followed by slavery. In the context of this groaning and misery, the Israelites cry out for mercy and God sends them a judge. This judge saves- or delivers them; and the Israelites enjoy a period of peace- only to be followed by another rebellion. Each judge is raised up to God to deliver them from the hand of their oppressors- the judge is supposed to remind Israel who they are! The theme of Judges is this- Remember who you are as my people! Remember what I did for you in bringing you out of slavery! Your new identity must lead to obedience- and in this obedience you will find blessings and peace! As Ex. 19 puts it, you are to be a holy nation and a kingdom of priests. That is what both they and we are called to be- but that is not what we find in our passage today! So this morning we look at the event that started Israel's downfall. With this theme: Jesus rebukes the rising rebellious nation for their forgetfulness!

I. The Great Start

Our passage opens up with a great start. Judges ch. 1- 2 serve as an introduction- but in ch. 2:6 we find the promising context in which Judges had been written. Abraham had been promised back in Genesis 12- your posterity will fill this land. You will have an abundance of children- as many as the sand on the sea shore. And your seed will occupy this land- the land of Canaan will belong to them. They will be brought out of Egypt- and given rest and peace! I- the LORD- will drive out the occupants of this land- and your

offspring will inherit houses and fields that they did not build and plant. So in v. 6 we find that God had indeed been faithful. Although there was a portion of Canaanite people left in the land- to teach Israel the necessity for war- the nation of Israel had been given a firm foothold and down-payment. Each tribe was able to go to their promised inheritance- to take possession of the land. This was a sovereign land gift- an undeserved blessing! Since the earth belongs to the LORD, He has the right to give the land to whomever He is pleased with. Israel did nothing to deserve it- she simply received it! And she continues on the right foot- in v. 7 the people served and obeyed the LORD. The first generation- under the leadership of men like Joshua and Caleb- and the men who had been raised at the feet of these godly leaders- continue to serve the LORD with all their heart. This is the generation of elders who had seen the waters of the Jordan dried up- they had seen the walls of Jericho fall down. They knew that the LORD was God- and they trusted in His name. What is striking here is how things look so promising! We see this throughout history. It is evident in many nations- think of how the Reformation purified Europe- with nations dedicated- even covenanting with the LORD. Even here in the US- how many forefathers saw the need to build this nation on biblical truths. In many institutions- like Harvard, Princeton and Yale- started on a godly principle to teach higher education from a biblical worldview. And even many families- start well. Parents begin to raise children with lots of prayer and dedication- but what starts well soon fades through time. Good intentions do not endure the slow wear of age! Remember, Joshua's words in Joshua 24, choose you this day whom you will serve. The people of Israel all answered together, far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD and serve other gods, for it is the LORD who brought us out of Egypt. We will serve the LORD! And that generation did- but Joshua died and so did that first generation. Joshua was a good leader, but he could not live forever! Joshua was no king, nor was He the true prophet who lives forever! So Joshua died, and his place knew him no more! His plans and warnings are soon forgotten.

II. The Tragic Failure

Although Joshua lived a long time- 110 years- both he and the first generation of elders died. Tragically, no one steps into this vacuum of leadership! What happened in Israel is all too common- good gifts and an easy life lead to laziness and complacency! Those who followed after this first generation became lax in faith- willing to marry and worship with the nations! This is a warning for us all- we can never settle down too much- we are never too old or so holy that we can afford to take a day off in our spiritual battle!

What is tragic in our passage is not the death of the leaders, per say, but the attitude of those who followed these leaders. We see this contrast by comparing v. 7 and v. 10! The next generation did not know the LORD! They had no relationship- no intimate connection. They viewed the LORD like some long lost relative- perhaps having heard the name but not really knowing or caring about them. They had also forgotten the LORD'S works! Although the nations remembered, Israel herself did not consider or recall all that God had done for them! They presumed they had always been in Canaan- that they had the won the right to this land themselves. The whole sovereign gift aspect was lost upon them! Now how could this be? How can we go from such height to such lows in one generation? Well, what we find here is a failure to instruct! They neglected the need for Catechising! As we read from Dt. 6 earlier, parents were supposed to teach their children. Consistently drawing to mind the LORD and His works- impressing His Law upon their hearts! But what these Israelite children had received was little better than a secular education. What we find here is a warning to all parents and church leaders! The church is always one generation away from extinction! Humanly speaking, it takes 50 years of inactivity for a church become completely empty! This is a clear call- a reminder of the need for godly education in the home and in the church! Children, remember not only who you are- remember who God is and what He has done for you! Remember how in Love the Father sent His Son to die on the cross to purchase your pardon! How He rose again for your justification- how He ever lives to pray for you! Know the LORD your God- and serve Him with all your heart! Not only know about Him- know Him! Have a relationship with Him! Parents and elders have a high calling- to teach the children of the church the way in which they should go- as Prov. 22

says. The fact is, folly is bound up in the heart of every man- it takes wisdom to drive the folly out. So this next generation of Israelites forget the LORD and His works- they learned from the nations and rejected the way of blessing and life. If you do not have good and faithful rulers in the home and church, what can we hope for in the next generation? If we don't teach our kids, the world will gladly take our place!

III. The Frightening Consequence

This brings us to the frightening consequences. This deliberate forgetting- this rebellious denial of the LORD and suppression of truth is made immediately evident in their actions. V. 11 continues- after forgetting the LORD and His works they plunge headlong into all forms of wickedness. They did evil- which is a refrain found again and again in this book. The people did bad- wrong- evil actions. They repay the good God had done to them- by rebelling and doing evil. Not only that, they continued into all forms of idolatry. Instead of worshipping the one, true God they served Baal and Ashtoreth. They abandoned the only God who is- totally forsaking Him- not even giving Him second thought- as they jumped headlong into pagan idolatry. As you may know, Baal was the god of the sun who rode on a bull as a sign of strength- and Ashtoreth was his female, moon companion. Together Baal and Ashtoreth were supposed to bring life to the soil and fertility to the womb. This is the complete opposite of conversion- where conversion is to hate sin, to turn and flee from it- the Israelites turn from the LORD and run towards the idols of man. If the parents are hypocritical and shallow in their faith- the next generation will not even bother going through the motions! They followed after the world- worshipping what the world worships. There is no love or fear of the LORD. Truly there is nothing new under the sun- in the void of the heart either God sits supreme or the idols of the world are found! At this rebellion, the LORD is moved to anger! He is jealous for His people- and He has righteous anger over them when they turn their backs on Him. So in v. 14 He rebukes them with the rod of men. The LORD sells them into slavery in their own land. They are as v. 15 says- in great distress because the hand of the LORD was against them. He was no longer for them- but rather He opposed them- just as He had promised. Back in Dt. 28 and Joshua 23 we find this warning- if

you turn from me and cling to the nations- know for certain that I will no longer drive out the nations before you. They will become a whip and thorn to you. If you break my covenant with you, then my anger will be kindled against you. God was keeping His promise! But we also need to remember here, that there is a purpose to this chastisement. The LORD is disciplining the ones He loves. He does not totally forsake and reject them, rather He is using the rods of men to rebuke! He is going to turn their hearts- He is lovingly calling them back to Himself by showing them what the gods of the nations can do! Remember, that in Egypt you were a slave! That serving false gods will make you a slave! He is reminding them- you need to be delivered! So that as we come to the next verse- 2:16- we find that God sends judges to save and deliver them once again!

To conclude, remember that in our text it is Jesus who speaks- the words of the angels of the Lord heard back in 2:1- it is Jesus who is rebuking His people! He rebukes them for their stubborn rebellion- they deliberately forgot and chose the way of the nations! Jesus is jealous for His bride- and He will bring His people back to himself! Jesus is making them remember- you need me to save you! If I let you go- this bondage is all that you will know! He will not let them go their own way- He will chasten them and even deliver them again and again- until they remember and believe! Our own need and tendencies are seen in this text- by nature we too would forget- and our children would go their own way! We need a Savior stronger than Joshua- one who will ever live to completely save His people- who will give us new hearts by His Spirit! We need Jesus to turn our hearts and the hearts of our children- to cause us to remember and believe in the God who is the God who delivers and saves!