

The Judges' Cycle

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The book of Judges describes the worst period in Israel's history. After successfully defeating Canaan and dividing the land up among the tribes, Joshua and his generation died.

Judges 2:10 says, "*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.*"

The generation after Joshua had a problem of ignorance. **They did not know the Lord.** We wonder how this could be. The land they possessed was a gift from Him. Their nation was a fulfillment of His promise to Abraham. They had the priests. They had the law of Moses. They had the tabernacle. How could they not know God?

They also were ignorant of the works which God did for Israel. They must have imagined the previous generation won the land by their military strength and strategy. Moses warned the people this could happen. Of course, that warning was given to the previous generation.

Deut 8:11 *Beware that thou **forget** not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, :...13 And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; 14 Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou **forget** the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; ...17 **And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth.***

We forget frequently because our mind and time are occupied with something else. For Israel the crisis time was gone.

They had won the war. The land was theirs. They were busy planting vineyards, establishing cities, and refurbishing houses. They were setting up businesses, raising families, and looking for diversions after a long day's work. God moved from being in the back of their mind to not being on their mind at all. The stories their fathers shared seemed like fables in the real world in which they lived. They did not have time to worship, listen to priests, or support Levites in their religious fanaticism.

Judges 2:11 says, "*And the children of Israel did **evil** in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim:*"

When men forget God, evil enters their lives. Why practice any restraint if there is no God, no punishment, and no reward? Once the true Lord is removed from his mind, man's intrinsic need to worship will lead him to imagine or accept new gods. The Canaanites they had failed to drive out completely had many false gods the Israelites could explore and adopt.

This was the first step in the Judges cycle. A process of four events that happened repeatedly throughout the book of Judges. We use the acronym SORD to remember them.

Sin begins the process. Israel forsook the Lord and began to worship idols (Judg. 2:11-13) This led to **Oppression**. God allowed an enemy nation to grow in power and subjugate portions of Israel to them (Judg. 2:14-15). After years of this domination Israel would see the light and **Repent** of their sins (Judg. 10:15-16). God took pity on them and **Delivered** them by raising up a judge who would defeat their enemies and restore them to the Lord (Judg. 2:16). **Sin, Oppression, Repentance, and Deliverance** is the Judges' Cycle (SORD). Is there a lesson we should learn from this repeated cycle?

When we are in desperate need of God's help it is easy to remember Him, and call upon Him in prayer. We look forward to worship and cherish the fact that there is an all powerful God who will hear our appeals. Because our physical world is in disarray we look to a spiritual Deliverer.

What happens when our physical life is in good order? How many Christians forsake the assembly for recreation? How many saints fall away because they have great comfort in wealth, health, and a well funded retirement package? How many of us disregard the crisis the world is in if it does not interfere with our routine or pocketbook? When all is fine in our flesh do we tend to **forget** about our spirit and our eternal destination?

I have never known a Christian who left the church to start worshipping an idol like Baal, but they do bow down before other altars. It may be a god of wealth, convenience, or comfort. It may be an actor or an athlete. Some will worship a hobby or a sport. There are members who embrace a denomination to show their dedication to their spouse or girlfriend. Idols come in all shapes and sizes. Two things they all have in common. First, they are all phony. They are not the real God. Secondly, they are powerless to deliver us when we are in need.

We are concerned about people who serve God based on their physical circumstances. What if the Lord returns when things are good in life? Will they be lost? Of course, there are others who desert God when things are bad. They blame Him. The fact is we should never let our physical environment determine our spiritual devotion. **If we cannot get our minds off of this world then we can never get our souls into heaven.**

The cycle of the judges reminds us of the importance of putting God so completely in the center of our lives that the next generation cannot help but know Him. May our children see God in His word, in our lives, and in their minds. May they pass the truth of God to their children and their children's children. Amen.