

Thoughts From Other Minds:

Israel's relapse to corruption after the death of each judge. – It is a painful and humiliating picture of the corruption of our common nature. ... Well may God exclaim (Hos. 6:4), "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away!" The chastisements, and the gracious interpositions of God, seemed alike to fail in reforming this perverse people. Yet whilst we condemn them, is there nothing similar among ourselves? How often God hath stricken ... yet with all our superior privileges we have not grieved. How often has the designed lesson of correction by sickness, losses, and trials been lost; how often the people refuse to return to Him that smiteth them, and will not seek the Lord of hosts? Israel's judges, after having fulfilled their saving mission, died. But our Saviour "ever liveth, able to save them to the uttermost who come unto God by Him" (Heb. 7:25). The back-sliding Christian forsakes for the idols of self and the world not a dead Deliverer but the living Saviour, who is also our coming Judge. Each fresh interposition of Divine love leaves the sinner, if not renewed to holiness, more corrupt and hardened than ever. Then at last there remains to such only "a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries" (Heb. 10:27).

Jehovah's consequent resolution to stay Israel's victories, and to leave the Canaanites, in order to prove Israel. – Israel's transgression was sparing the Canaanites, in neglect of God's command; Israel's punishment was to be oppressed by the Canaanites whom God had doomed, but, Israel spared. ... The offending people were beaten with their own rod: "Because that this people hath transgressed my covenant, I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left, when he died." Our Joshua, though through death He destroyed him that had the power of death, has not yet put all things under Him and His people. A tempting world remains outside, and the corrupt old nature within each professing Christian. Our duty and our happiness consist in obeying our Lord's commands, by "mortifying our members which are upon the earth", — "crucifying the flesh, with the affections and lusts", and "being not conformed to this world, but being transformed by the renewing of our mind" (Rom. 12:2; Gal. 5:24; Col. 3:5). But if we give quarter to these, and even make provision for them, instead of these being our servants ministering to our pleasure, as we had hoped, they shall become our masters and cruel oppressors. God in righteous retribution chooses men's own delusions (Isa. 66:4), and gives them over to a reprobate mind" (Rom. 1:28). Their own backslidings reprove them, and too late they will discover that it is an evil thing and bitter that they have forsaken the Lord their God (Jer. 2:19). The spiritual paramours, after whom they have gone a whoring (ver. 17), become the executioners of God's just vengeance upon them (Ezek. 23:9, 10, 20-30).

Andrew R Fausset, *Judges*, pp. 55-56.

Camperdown Noorat Terang Presbyterian Charge

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Sermon: "Serving the gods of Canaan—and its consequences" (Judges 2:11-3:6)

Scripture: Judges 2:6-3:6

Sermon Notes

Introduction: Although the first generation of Israelites in Canaan served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived him, afterwards their arose a second generation 'who did not know the Lord or the work he had done for Israel'; they did not know him or his deeds to love and serve him.

1. Provoking the Lord

So not knowing the Lord they abandoned him to serve the gods of Canaan, and provoked the Lord to anger (2:11-13). The first generation had settled among the Canaanites, and so the Lord had said he would not drive them out, but they would be thorns in their sides, and their gods would be snares to them (2:3).

They had got to know the Canaanites as people, as neighbours, even friends—and so the Canaanites had introduced them to their gods who prospered them in farming the land. They would have been happy to acknowledge the Lord as great in many ways—but 'in Canaan for fertility you need to worship our gods.'

The Lord was the God of fertility, both in Egypt, where he had multiplied 72 into a great nation of Israelites, and he was still the God of fertility in Canaan—but this generation did not 'know' him; they didn't know his power or trust him; besides, unlike the gods of Canaan, he had no wife, no partner or consort.

The Canaanites worshipped the Baals and the Ashtoreth; Baal was the god of storm and fertility and Ashtarte was his consort; in Canaanite theology, fertility on earth depended on fertility in heaven, upon sex between Baal and Ashtarte, which, they believed, could be encouraged by sacred prostitution.

So Canaanite men would have sexual intercourse with temple prostitutes, in the hope of inspiring the gods to copulate above so that the rain, grain, wine and oil would flow on earth below—like teaching a child to blow its nose! And worse followed, as the sacrificed their children to demons (Ps 106:35-38).

There is danger for us in discovering that unbelievers are often nice people—the danger of getting to know, like and respect them, and concluding that people as good as they are don't need the gospel. So a young person from a Christian family reaches maturity, but without being gripped by the gospel, without being passionate about salvation by grace alone through faith alone by Christ alone—and they meet another young person—a Roman Catholic, or a Jehovah's Witness, or a Mormon, or a Hindu, or perhaps of no religion at all; at first they are wary—but then they get to know them as a nice person—and they think, 'surely that's enough'!

The second generation were sucked in by the culture of Canaan and its gods because they didn't know the Lord, or value his truth as exclusive; if we are not grounded and gripped by the scriptures; if we are not passionate about the gospel of the free grace of God, then we are liable to be snared by false religion or by immorality by discovering that those who believe or practice such things are 'nice' people.

One reason why the second generation did not know the Lord was that their parents had not wholly followed the Lord; another reason was that they chose not to know him. Canaanite culture, like modern pagan Australian culture, was seductive, offering prosperity and pleasure, sex without relationship, gods that could be manipulated to give wealth; so child sacrifice.

No doubt many Canaanites were nice people—but their religion and culture were evil, as was the Israelite imitation of it, so the Lord was against them, and they were in terrible distress (v. 14). Sometimes they called on the Lord, and sometimes they didn't—but his love that aroused his anger also aroused his pity, and he raised up judges who saved them from those who plundered them (v. 16).

These 'judges' were mostly warrior saviours, who in different ways point us to the Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ; one way they point to him is by their inability to save the people from their real enemy, their chronic rebellion against the Lord. They delivered them from those who oppressed them, for the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning (v. 18). What an amazing God he is—no repentance, no 'sorry', but he saved them all the same—and yet they did not listen to their judges (v. 17) and when the judge died, they turned back and were even more corrupt (v. 19).

2. Proving the people

This 'third' generation were even more debased than the second generation, and again 'the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel' (v. 20) - and he said he would no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua had left, to 'test' or 'prove' Israel by them.

Because the Lord is patient with his people his anger did not lead to their destruction, but to his testing and teaching them; to teach them war, and to test them, whether they would obey his commandments which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses (3:1-4).

Israel was a type of us, the church militant on earth, and we must fight our way to victory; as soldiers of Christ we must endure hardship (2 Tim 2:3); we must put on the whole armour of God with prayer (Eph 6:11, 13); by conquering we prove ourselves to be true disciples of Jesus, and win an eternal reward (Rev 2:7, 10).

The Israelites failed the test; they lived among the Canaanites and intermarried with them (3:5-6). As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ we must maintain a separation of lifestyle and community from unbelievers (2 Cor 6:14-16); this applies especially to marriage (1 Cor 7:39) 'only in the Lord', lest we serve other gods.

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My Notes:

Questions for Reflection:

1. Read and reflect upon Judges 2:10-15; why did the people of Israel (v. 12) abandon the Lord to serve the Baals and the Ashtaroth? What parallels exist in our culture, and who might we avoid being seduced by them?
2. What was the effect of the Lord's anger? Why was this anger justified? What would have happened if the Lord had done nothing?
3. Read and reflect upon Judges 2:16-19; why did the Lord raise up for them judges, and how successful were they? How do they point us to the Lord Jesus? What could they not do that he does for those who believe in him?
4. Read and reflect upon Judges 2:20-3:6; what reasons did the Lord give for his not driving the remaining Canaanite nations out before the Israelites quickly? How is their need to learn war relevant to us as New Covenant believers? (1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 4:7; cf. the rewards for 'conquerors' - Rev. 2 & 3)
5. Reflect on the effect of intermarriage between Israel and the Canaanites; read and reflect upon 1 Cor 7:39 and 2 Cor 6:14-16 in the light of what happened in the time of the Judges, and what has happened in the church in our time.