

Last week, we began looking at the book of Judges. We looked at chapter 1 and the start of chapter 2, and saw that things began well in the promised land after the death of Joshua, but did not last long. The reasons for failure were seen to be weak excuses when God came to assess the situation at the start of chapter 2.

Then in verse 6 of chapter 2, Joshua is back on the scene. It is not a reincarnation, nor a ghost, but we have a rewinding of the tape of history, and what we are given in chapter 2 is not history from the Israelites' perspective, but from God's.

In 2 steps we have a summary of life in the land after Joshua.

1. (v7) *The people worshiped the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who'd seen all the great work that the Lord had done for Israel.*

2. (v10) *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.*

Those generations did evil, and abandoned the Lord.

The conquerors had run out of puff, because they ran without God. It was not just a loss of morale. It was not just a loss of confidence. It was a loss of theological anchorage... a loss of their theological foundations. And the rest of the chapter shows how they fell prey to the allurements and disillusionments of the Canaanite culture. They did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and served other gods.

One of the major stresses in the teaching that Moses had received from God was that when the people were in the land, they were not to forget God. Parents were to instruct their children of the good things that God had done for them. Levites were to read portions of scripture to the people to remind them of their heritage and their God.

The 10 commandments even begin with *I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of slavery, you shall have no other gods but me. You shall not make for yourself an idol... You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the 3rd and 4th generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to*

the 1000th generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Yet the people of Israel did not stay faithful to their rescuing God. They did not know Him. They did not know his deeds. *They abandoned the Lord, and worshiped Baal and the Astartes.* (verse 13)

How did God respond? (verses 14-15) *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, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies.*

Whenever they marched out, the hand of the Lord was against them to bring misfortune, as the Lord had warned them and sworn to them; and they were in great distress.

The Lord became their enemy. Like salt that had lost its saltiness they were thrown out and trodden underfoot. His anger burned against his people.

Yet even in his anger, he continued to love them. He waited patiently for them in their turmoil to turn back to him.

In verse 18 we are told *Whenever the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge, and he delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the Lord had compassion on them in their groaning because of those who persecuted and oppressed them.*

After this occurred a few times, you would think that they would get the pattern and be faithful, wouldn't you? Yet verse 19 says *But whenever the judge died, they would relapse and behave worse than their ancestors, following other gods, worshipping them and bowing down to them. They would not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways.*

And in response we are told by the end of chapter 2 that God resolved that the people had so offended him that he would no longer drive the people out of the land. The Israelites would constantly have these offending tribes living with them like thorns in their side.

This would then be the pattern in the book of Judges. In a worsening spiral, the people would turn from God, God would call up an enemy to afflict his people. In their suffering they would eventually turn back to God for help. God would then raise up a judge or leader who would bring relief and destroy

the invading army, and there would be peace until that judge died. Then they would turn away from the Lord etc.

Over the coming weeks we will see how this panned out in the experiences of the judges God raised, and how the situation of the Israelites grew worse and worse as the spiral went down until there was complete anarchy in the land with everyone doing whatever they thought was right in their own eyes, totally ignoring the Lord.

So what do we learn from Judges 2? Do we just gain an academic idea of the pattern of the book, so we can make sense of it as we read it?

If that is all, then we have just wasted a lot of time.

However, if we are reminded that we should be faithful to our Lord, and be less likely to fall into temptation, then that may be a very helpful thing.

If we also can see that the behaviour and attitudes of God's people are vital in their relationship with him, then we may be getting a much more important message. What we do does matter to God. What we believe as individuals and as a church does matter. God does get angry at his people's unfaithfulness. God does have compassion in his love for us too.

If we can also see that God's judgement and compassionate love is seen united in the cross of Christ, then the passage begins to really sing. The Father's white hot holy anger at our sin is seen in pouring his wrath on His Son. Yet not only was a man hanging there on the cross, it was God himself. The punishment we deserve was being poured out on him. Because of his love for us, he offered a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. So we are called to be faithful to Jesus our Lord.

Others may not know the Lord... others may mock... others may live in ways that God says do not live like that. But we are to live for Him, becoming more and more like Him.

The Israelites went astray when their saviour judge died. Yet ours died but rose again, never to die again. Follow Him. Be faithful to Him. When you're tempted, remember the cross and what it means.

I have a 1989 Kenyan Holy Communion service.

At the end of the service, the minister and people

sweep their arm towards the cross and he says "All our problems" they reply "**We send to the cross of Christ.**" He says "All our difficulties" they reply "**We send to the cross of Christ.**" He says "All the devil's works" they reply "**We send to the cross of Christ.**"

And then they sweep their arm toward heaven and he says "All our hopes" they reply "**We set on the risen Christ.**"

If we remembered that in our daily living, then we will grow more like Christ.