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Immediate Context

After the overview of Israel's initial failure to conquer the Canaanites in Judges 1, and the pronouncement of judgment against Israel by the Angel of the Lord in Judges 2:1-5, we rise above the immediate flow of the text and gain a 30,000 foot view of the entire book of Judges, from the death of Joshua to the ongoing cycle of spiritual decay that will occur in the time of the judges. While the prior passages told us what God would do, we now learn why He would do it.

## Judges 2:6-9 – The Flashback

- This passage takes us back to the conclusion of Joshua's final address to the leaders of Israel at Shechem (the de facto capital of Israel in Manasseh). Read the main point of the address in *Joshua 24:14-15* and also the conclusion of the event at *Joshua 24:28-31*. What do you notice about our text and this latter passage from Joshua? Why is this repeated? Judges 1:1 places this book after Joshua's death, and repeating this passage from Joshua provides us with a seamless perspective on what occurred after his death and why the Lord was so upset with Israel.
- What do we learn from the wording of verse 7? The nation's worship as a whole was not sincere, but was reliant upon the presence of specific leaders.
- What was it that made the leaders of Joshua's day faithful? What does that imply about what was lacking in the next generation? The leaders of Joshua's day had experienced the hand of God protecting them, providing for them, and helping them to overcome their enemies. They realized that God was intervening and they knew and worshipped Him. The next generation did NOT have these experiences; their relationship with God was superficial.
- Note that Joshua died and was buried in his inheritance. **Mission accomplished for him.**

## Judges 2:10-13 – The Second Generation

- The second generation was characterized by their lack of knowledge of the Lord, or about the work He had done for Israel. What does this mean? This is more than being ignorant of history. It was a lack of personal faith and experiential knowledge of God. This lack of knowing God would be reflected by the way they would treat Him (verses 11-13) and failed to respond to His voice (*Judges 2:20* and *John 10:25-27*)
- What does it mean, to do "evil in the sight of the Lord"? Consider this in light of one of the themes of Judges (see *Judges 21:25*).
- Note the progression of their apostasy: forsake God, follow other gods, bow down to other gods (see a similar progression in *Psalms 1:1*). All of this is summarized in verse 13: they forsook the Lord and served Baal and Ashtaroath.
- Who are Baal and Ashtaroath? Baal was the god of storms and fertility: home, livestock, and produce. Ashtaroath was his companion. The Canaanites looked to Baal and Ashtaroath to make them fruitful in all aspects of life. Recall that the Israelites were former slaves and wandering pilgrims who came into this land flowing with milk and honey. While they knew the Lord could deliver them from Egypt, the Canaanites convinced them that Baal could make them productive in the Land of Canaan (even though God told them this wasn't so: *Exodus 23:23-26*). In order to

convince Baal and Ashtaroah to make the people prosperous, the “gods” had to engage in copulation, which the Canaanites tried to induce through temple prostitution. Thus, the Canaanites tried to appeal to pragmatic logic (Baal was the proven ticket to prosperity in Canaan) and the natural sinful desires residing in the hearts of the people. **Sin will try to tempt us from many different angles!**

### Judges 2:14-15 – God’s Response: Part One

- What was God’s response toward Israel? Is this really an appropriate response? God’s response toward Israel was to burn with anger. He was livid over their spiritual adultery. See *Exodus 20:4-5*. This anger was aroused by more than their actions alone. His anger was a result of His demonstrated love for Israel and their subsequent rejection of Him. **The source of this anger (His love for Israel) would craft His response toward them.**
- What happened to Israel in verse 14? They were weakened so that they lost what they had gained to plunderers, and then lost any ability to self-govern as they fell before their enemies. **They became slaves.**
- Who was Israel’s true enemy during the cycle of the judges? It was God. Israel was fighting against God, who allowed their enemies to prevail over them. **God was actually working to help them change by means of bringing difficulty into their life.**
- See *Deuteronomy 31:16-22*. God prophesied of these circumstances during the days of Moses and even made a way by which the Israelites could remember where they fell from and how to return (see *Colossians 3:16*). **This is why it is so important for our songs to be true. They are instructive!**

### Judges 2:16-18 – God’s Response: Part Two

- What motivated God to raise up a judge to deliver Israel? It was His pity over their cries that caused Him to raise up a deliverer for the people. Notice that He was not moved by their repentance, but rather by their cries. The two parts of His response to Israel’s adultery were intended to demonstrate their spiritual poverty and the riches of His goodness (see *Romans 2:40*). Man does not initiate a return to God. God must initiate it and draw man (see *Romans 3:10-11*).
- What do we learn about the role of judges from verses 17-18? They were empowered to deliver Israel from their enemies, but also intended to lead them back to know and follow the Lord.
- The “second” generation did not respond to God as their father’s did. Yet, how does this compare to the first generation? See *Exodus 32:7-8*. What does this teach us about the nature of sin and of righteousness? The hearts of the “second generation” was like the hearts of the generation led out of Egypt. Even though there was a righteous generation in between, the spiritual state of the “second generation” was not improved. **Sin is hereditary; true righteousness is not. It only comes from being born again.**

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Judges 2:19 – The Following Generations

- What is the spiritual state of the following generations? Their sinful activities became worse and worse, drawing them farther and farther from God.
- Was any legitimate national repentance occurring in the cycle of judges? There is no evidence of a sincere national repentance. They refused to abandon their practices or ways. The cycles of deliverance should be recognized as divine displays of unmerited favor.
- Why would the people offer a token of obedience during the days of the judge, but rebel as soon as they passed? Israel's appreciation for the deliverance was directed to the individual, rather than to the One behind the individual. In Judges, we will see that Paul Washer's oft-quoted statement rings true, *"There are no great men of God. There are only pitiful, weak, sinful men of a great and merciful God."* **This truth is just as necessary in our day as theirs!**

## Judges 2:20-3:4 – The Reason the Lord Allowed the Canaanites to Remain

- What was God's charge against Israel? They had violated the covenant with Him, and did not listen to His repeated attempts to get them to return to Him.
- Why did God choose the specific consequence for Israel's violation of the law? The purpose of allowing the nations to remain was to test the generations that grew up in the Promised Land who had not known war.
  - Who learns from a test that is given by God? God already knows where we are at and what we will do. Notice *Judges 2:23*, in which God purposefully did not give all the Canaanites into Joshua's hand because He knew how the successive generations would behave. The one who learns from the test is the one who takes it, and sometimes also those who are around them. **When God tests us, it isn't for His benefit but ours. We are the ones who need to know where we stand and then respond appropriately. This also speaks volumes about our need for God to reveal the state of our hearts to us.**
  - How does a test fit in God's purposes? See *James 1:1-15*. God does not entice (tempt) people to sin, but He will introduce difficulty and conflict into their life in order to humble them and produce faithfulness. **He was drawing generations that did not know Him or the deeds that He had done to come and experience Him for themselves.**
- In verse 23, we see that God was purposeful in not allowing Joshua to conquer all of the nations. What do we call this? This is the foreknowledge of God combined with His sovereign wisdom and power to bring about a good end for His people. This is an application of the concept we see in *Romans 8:28-29*. **God is just as purposeful in our lives!**
- What is significant about the listing of the four people groups left to test Israel (Philistines, Canaanites, Sidonians, and Hivites)? Apart from the Canaanites and Sidonians, the Philistines and the Hivites have not been previously mentioned in this book. The Philistines were originally from the island of Crete and settled on the southwestern shores of Israel's territory. The Hivites lived in the northeastern portions of the land. The Sidonians were probably the Phoenician remnants of the original population of the land and lived on the northwestern shores of Israel (see *Judges 1:31*). The Canaanites were focused primarily in the southeast. Collectively, we see that Israel is completely surrounded and that the test of Israel would be a test of all the tribes.

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Judges 3:5-6 – The Final Assessment

- Why is the list in verse three distinct from the list of nations in verse five? It appears that the term Canaanite could be used to represent a specific group, or a general group (verse three is general, while verse five is specific). Also, it implies that the Philistines and Sidonians had distinct and sovereign territory, while the other nations were intermingled with Israel.
- What does verse five tell us about Israel's influence among the other nations? The entire nation of Israel is now "among" the other nations, who now have the controlling influence.
- What does the intermarriage with the Canaanites represent (see *Deuteronomy 7:1-5* and *Genesis 34:16*)? It is a further step in Israel's rebellion. Now things get even messier. They have not only made covenant with a people, but individual covenants that conjoin two lives with two different gods. Turning back to God would involve destruction of families. This compromise guaranteed that their rebellion would deeply affect future generations. **If Israel emerges from the book of Judges as a distinct people under the influence of the true and living God, it will be by the hand of God and not by their own doing.**
- As we compare God's commandments for Israel with those for New Testament Christians, we notice some significant distinctives. For example, the Israelites were told that they were not to live in the midst of the Canaanites, but to destroy them and their gods. Yet, we are not told to live in a commune, destroy unbelievers, or burn down mosques (see *Matthew 26:51-53*, *1 Corinthians 5:9-13*). Why not? The answer to this question is multi-faceted, but put simply, Christ's kingdom is not of this world (see *John 18:33-36*). Our passion toward holiness should be no less than Israel's should have been, and in fact should be even greater. However, it must be directed toward the constant sanctification of our personal lives, our homes, and our church. When directed toward those outside, it is in the form of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a testament to the power of the Spirit of God indwelling believers and within His churches, that we can live holy before God in the midst of the Canaanites. **We are not seeking to destroy them, but to see them saved from sin, and the weapons of our spiritual warfare are divinely powerful to accomplish this glorious mission** (see *2 Corinthians 10:3-4*).