

“There Arose Another Generation Who Did Not Know the LORD”

Scripture Readings: JUDGES 2:6-3:6 (text); Ephesians 6:1-4

Rev. Nollie Malabuyo • June 12, 2016 (ZCRC Pasig & BSCC)

Dear congregation of Christ: This is a quote from a young professing Christian girl who turned into an atheist:

“If God was absolutely moral, because morality was absolute, and if the nature of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ surpassed space, time, and existence... then why were some things a sin in the Old Testament but not a sin in the New Testament?”

The young Christian girl is Rachael Slick, who three years ago declared to the world that she has become an atheist. Why is this such big news? Because Rachael is the daughter of Matt Slick, a well-known Christian theologian and defender of the faith. From her confession, Rachael says that her father did all the right things in raising her up in a Christian home and a Christian church. She even homeschooled. Her father had her memorize many Bible passages, and also the Westminster Shorter Catechism. But after she went away from home to college, she struggled with her faith, and finally rejected it.

But did she become an atheist because she couldn't defend her faith anymore? Most recent polls tell us that 70-80 percent of young adults stop going regularly to church, or even reject their faith after they finish high school. In her confession, Rachael said, “For a long time I couldn't have sex with my boyfriend (of over a year by this point) without crippling guilt. I had anxiety that I was going to Hell.” When she became an atheist, her guilt about her sexual immorality disappeared. So her falling away was not really due to her inability to defend her faith, but to her desire of a world of pleasure completely opposed to Biblical values. And the barrier to this world of pleasure, the Bible and her Christian faith, has to be demolished.

In our text today, we read about the difference between two generations of Israel. The generation of Joshua, who were faithful to the LORD, and the generations after Joshua died, who were unfaithful. What happened to these next generations spanning about 300 years? Was Joshua's generation guilty of failing to teach the next generation? Can these next generations absolve themselves of guilt because their parents did not teach them? Did Joshua's generation do their duty to teach their children, like Matt Slick taught her daughter, but the children still rebelled against God? How does this text relate to us today in warnings, instructions and promises?

We will meditate on this second introduction to the Book of Judges. So our theme today is “**There Arose Another Generation Who Did Not Know the LORD,**” under three headings: first, **Joshua's Faithful Generation**; second, **The Unfaithful Next Generations**; and third, **God's Wrath Against the Unfaithful Generations**.

Joshua's Faithful Generation

Last Sunday, we studied the first introduction to the Book of Judges, 1:1-2:5. In this opening, we saw the roots of Israel's unfaithfulness and disobedience. They did not drive out the inhabitants of Canaan, God's Promised Land, and instead, allowed the conquered peoples to

live with them. This disobedience angered God, and so had dire consequences for Israel. But in spite of this anger, God still promised, *“I will never break my covenant with you.”* This promise foreshadows the fulfillment of this promise by the coming of Jesus the Messiah, who was perfectly obedient to God's commandments in order to save God's people from their unfaithfulness and disobedience.

At the end of the Book of Joshua, the twelve tribes of Israel had conquered and settled the Promised Land. So we now come to the beginning of our text today. We read that during the time of Joshua and the elders after him, *“the people served the LORD.”* They were the generation *“who had seen all the great work that the LORD had done for Israel”* (verse 7).

Which is this generation who had seen all of the LORD's mighty works for Israel? Remember that God was angered when the people refused to believe his promise that he would give the Promised Land into their hands? And the people refused to enter the land fearing the mighty inhabitants and well-fortified cities there? God punished them by leading them to wander back in the desert for 40 years. In those 40 years, those who left Egypt who were 20 years and older died in the wilderness, except for Joshua and Caleb (Num 32:13). These two were the only ones who believed God's promise.

So the people who served the LORD during the time of Joshua were the second generation after they left Egypt. Though most of them did not see God's mighty signs and wonders in Egypt, they saw all his great works in the wilderness and in the conquest of the Promised Land. They saw manna and quail fall from heaven for their food. They saw water gushing from a rock. Their clothes and sandals did not wear out during their 40 years in the desert. They saw the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire that protected and guided them. They saw the Jordan River parted so they could cross on dry ground into Canaan.

Joshua and his generation heard God's commandment to *“be careful to do all the law which my servant Moses commanded you.”* They believed God's promise of reward, *“then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success”* (Jos.1:7-8). Then they acted upon their faith, crossing the Jordan River, conquering Jericho, and all the other cities of the Promised Land. So God fulfilled all his promises, *“Thus the LORD gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers... Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass”* (Jos 21:43-45).

This generation of Israelites believed God and they acted upon it.

The Unfaithful Next Generations

But verse 10 is ominous, like dark clouds gathering before a storm, *“And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel.”* The generation under Joshua's leadership died, and another generation followed.

What was different with this generation? This generation did not “know” two things. First, they *“did not know the LORD.”* Second, they did not know *“the work that he had done for Israel.”* Surely, they must have known God and his work in their heads. But this was not intimate heart and head knowledge. They knew *about* God, but they *did not know* God.

What were the characteristics of these people who did not know God? The most obvious is that they abandoned the LORD, the God of their forefather Abraham. Instead they worshiped the Baals and Astaroth, the idol-gods of their pagan neighbors erected in different places. This was *“evil in the sight of the LORD.”*

If Joshua's generation knew the LORD and his mighty works on behalf of Israel, how did the next generation not know? There are two answers. The first is that Joshua's generation did not teach their children, as God has commanded them in Deuteronomy 6:7, *“You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”* They were to teach their children at all times at home and outside. When their children asked them what God's commandments meant to them, the parents were to answer that the LORD gave the Law to them after he brought them out of Egypt. And by obeying these laws, they will *“fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive”* (Deu 6:24). When the children asked them what the Passover celebration was all about, they were to give same response (Exo 13:14). But alas! The parents failed in this duty.

But even if the parents did not teach them, the children should know better. They are responsible for their own actions, not their parents. In 2:17, after God sent them the judges, they continued their rebellion against God, *“Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they whored after other gods and bowed down to them.”* The judges taught them, but they did not listen. Why? Because it was their pleasure to worship the pagan gods of the Canaanites living with them.

Why was Baal and Astoreth more desirable to them? It was because this religion involved temple prostitutes. Because Astoreth was the god of fertility, men who wanted to be blessed with children must have sexual encounters with the temple prostitutes. Other features of this religion were fertility rites, drunken sexual orgies, snake-worship, homosexuality, and even human sacrifice. This is why the word for “whore” or “prostitute” or “harlot” was used in the text.

It was a religion of sexual pleasure. And Israel paid severely for this evil desire.

God's Anger Against the Unfaithful Generations

So *“they provoked the LORD to anger... the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel”* (verses 12, 14). When the LORD's anger was kindled against them, Israel was in big trouble. How did God show his anger? *“He gave them over to plunderers.”* He also *“sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies”* (verse 14). God stopped fighting for them, so they lost their wars against their enemies. After they lost their wars, they became slaves of the conquering nations, just as they were slaves in Egypt.

Moses warned them of their disobedience, *“The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies”* (Deu 28:25). Joshua also warned them, *“If you turn back [from the LORD]... know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations before you... until you perish from off this good ground that the LORD your God has given you”* (Jos 23:13). Their tenure in the Promised Land depended upon their obedience to God's laws.

Because of this slavery under their enemies, *“they were in terrible distress.”* So *“the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them.”* He would then

raise up a judge to save them from slavery, and all will be well with the people all the days of the judge. But when the judge died, *“they turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them. They did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways”* (Jgs 2:19). Notice that each generation was more corrupt, more idolatrous, and more stubborn than the last. So God would be angry at them, and the whole cycle repeated itself until God sent the last of the 12 judges.

God condemned Israel because they have broken the covenant laws. He vowed that he would not drive the nations out of the Promised Land, as a way of testing their faithfulness. Judges 3:3-5 lists these nations, Canaanites and other “-ites,” that God left to test Israel. But our passage ends in verse 6 with another ominous statement, *“And their daughters they took to themselves for wives, and their own daughters they gave to their sons, and they served their gods.”* Again, this was a gross violation of God's commandment (Deu 7:3).

But in spite of God's anger, there is a hint of his continuing faithfulness to his people. Earlier God promised that he will never break his covenant with them. Verse 2 gives another reason why God left the other nations untouched, *“in order that the generations of the people of Israel might know war, to teach war to those who had not known it before.”* In their continuing struggle against the surrounding nations, God would teach Israel the skills of warfare so they could defend themselves. Even in his anger, God still cares for his people, and would not let them be blotted out of the face of the earth.

Dear friends, just as in the days of the judges, we live in an “evil and adulterous generation.” Today, there is a label to this generation: Generation X. As in all labels, it is hard to define who they are, but most sociologists agree that Generation Xers were those born between 1965-1980 or so, the so-called Baby Busters. So today, they will be about mid-30s to early 50s. GenXers were raised during the explosive growth of the Internet, global conflicts and terrorism, pragmatism, and political correctness. So they're suspicious of tradition and authority. They are also known for their tolerance and pluralism, accepting everything under sun as truths.¹

Most of us in this congregation have Generation X children and grandchildren. While you may have raised them up in the discipline and nurture of the Lord, they have also been influenced by their GenX culture. This is why their attention span is so short that they can't bear to listen to sermons more than 15 minutes long. They have a low regard for church history and creeds and confessions. Many of them don't care for doctrines, because they believe that all religions lead to heaven. They hate liturgical worship, because it smells of tradition.

So they mirror generations of Israel under the judges, who also tolerated and even worshiped all kinds of idol-gods, and who hated God's strict laws and doctrines. This is why GenXers don't have a problem with using entertainment and gimmicks in worship. These are what the culture demands, so why not use them and attract unbelievers? Use anything that would bring in numbers. Don't offend GenXers with preaching and teaching about sin, God's wrath, and Jesus' bloody death. Come as you are to our church, and no one will offend you. On

¹ Wallace M. Alston, Michael Welker, eds., *Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity*, vol 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 224.

any given Sunday, you can choose to go to any church of your liking. Or choose not to go to church at all if you don't feel like it. This is the GenX culture of *pluralism*: whatever you believe is fine; of *political correctness*: labels should not offend anyone; and of *pragmatism*: it works for me, it should work for you.

As Christian parents and grandparents, you are tasked by God to teach your children, so they may know God and his mighty work of saving his people through the death and resurrection of Christ. This duty is difficult because we are faced with an anti-Christian culture that has influenced our children.

But you must persevere, because all is not lost. As God has sent judges to Israel to save them from their oppressors, he has sent his Son Jesus Christ to save your children from sin and God's wrath. Christ will save them from their evil and adulterous Generation X. Through you, God will teach them how to wage war against these idols of today: pluralism, political correctness, and pragmatism.

When you do persevere in your duty to teach them, you will not lose them to these idols. Their generation will not be like the unfaithful generations of Israel. Trust God's promise that if you nurture your children in the ways of God, they will believe and then continue teaching the next generations to fear God.