

• *The generation after Joshua – ‘who did not know the Lord’*

The people of Israel lived together in one camp until Joshua had led them in the conquering of the main centres of Canaan. Then Joshua released the people and allowed them to move to the areas allocated to them ¹. During the forty years of Joshua’s lifetime they remained faithful to Yahweh, the God of Israel ². Then Joshua died ³ and a new generation grew up ‘*who did not know Yahweh and did not know what He had done for Israel*’ ⁴.

¹ 2:6
² 2:7
³ 2:8–9
⁴ 2:10

1. The people of God have within themselves a tendency to decline.

1. **The people of God have within themselves a tendency to decline.** The best thing older believing people can do is encourage a younger generation to discover God for themselves. An up-coming generation has to be able to say to their parents what the people of Samaria said to the Samaritan woman: ‘We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves...’ ¹. If this does not happen, then the passing of the generations produce a spiritual decline in the people of God.

¹ John 4:42

• *Spiritual ignorance*

The people of God tend to lapse into **spiritual ignorance**. They ‘did not know Yahweh and did not know what He had done...’ ¹.

¹ 2:10

• *Pagan ways*

They adopt **pagan ways** ¹. For the first time since the crossing of Jordan we read of Israel’s turning to ‘the Baals’, the fertility gods and goddesses of ancient paganism. People who lose sight of God tend to turn to what the average pagans around them believe. They adopt their views from the majority opinion.

¹ 2:11–12

• *Loss of sight of redemption*

They lose sight of redemption. ‘*They forsook Yahweh... who had brought them out of Egypt*’ ¹. The fertility gods had not brought Israel newness of life or forgiveness of sins. The Baals had never redeemed them from their enemies in Egypt by the blood of a lamb. Only Yahweh had done that for them. But they forgot their redemption by the blood of a lamb.

¹ 2:12

• *God’s anger*

They come under God’s anger. ‘*They provoked Yahweh...*’ says Judges 2:12.

• *Defeat*

They begin to experience **defeat**. In days gone by they had experienced amazing victories. Think of the things that had happened when they conquered Jericho. But now those experiences of the amazing help of God fell aside and they experienced defeat instead. They forsook Yahweh ¹. They started worshipping Baal (the god of fertility) and Ashtoreth (the goddess associated with Baal). In His anger God allowed Israel’s enemies to dominate the land and trouble the people of Israel. Their crops would be plundered; the people would fall into poverty and slavery at the hands of their enemies ².

¹ 2:12

² 2:14

• *God’s opposition*

They experience **God’s opposition** as God had warned them. God swore to give Canaan to Israel (although He did not swear to give it to any particular generation). And He swore He would chastise His people when they sinned. An oath is a promise than cannot be changed. The warnings of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 are oaths in the sense that they cannot be changed (but Judges 2:15 is not referring to an oath to a particular generation). ‘If you will not obey Yahweh . . . Yahweh will cause you to be defeated’ ¹. The threat could not be changed. Sin would bring God’s opposition and enmity.

¹ Deuteronomy 28:15, 25

2. Despite their sin, God preserves His people.

2. **Despite their sin, God preserves His people.** What does God do when His people failed to follow through with His instructions? I will tell you what He does **not** do! He does not abandon His people. The gates of death do not prevail against God’s plans for the church. Neither Israel nor the church – God’s restructured ‘Israel’ – will ever be wiped off of the face of the earth.

• *Saviours – judges*

• *God preserves His people*

• *A temporary measure and only partially successful*

3. God tests our allegiance to Him!

• *These nations were left by God to reveal whether or not Israel would obey Him*

• *God's people preserved until He sent David and then Jesus*

• *The pattern of decline and renewal exists in the church*

• *But the renewals are more powerful*

God sent 'saviours' or 'judges'. They were not people who preside in a law-court, but people who execute the decisions and judgements of God. God preserves His people. It would be a long time before God would send David to Israel, and it would be an even longer time before God sent Jesus. Meanwhile God preserved His people by periodically sending to them rescuers and deliverers who brought at least a measure of restoration – until God would act more decisively in David and more decisively still in Jesus.

Yet the 'judges' were only God's temporary measure. In Israel's story the pattern of periodic decline persisted despite occasional times of liberation when God would raise up saviours for His people. 'Then *Yahweh raised up judges...*' ¹. These judges were only partially and temporarily successful. They did not totally and permanently restore Israel, because after a while Israel would turn from the ways that the judges had brought in ². They would obey the judge for a while and follow his leadership when he urged them to turn to God ³. But once the judge had died they would return to their sinful ways again ⁴.

3. God tests our allegiance to Him! God punished Israel by leaving the pagan nations in the land of Canaan ¹. From that point on the pagans were always present. They were a permanent test of obedience for Israel ². At times of disobedience, Israel would adopt their ways. In times of obedience, Israel refused their ways. God allowed those nations to remain in the land ³. Although they 'tested' Israel – revealing whether Israel would turn to pagan ways – yet at the same time they were allowed to continue in Israel in order to give the Israelites after the days of Joshua a necessary training in warfare ⁴. It was an essential skill while God's people were a nation amidst other nations. Judges 3:3 lists the nations that were involved in this testing and training programme for Israel. The section ends with a key point of the book (the section is best taken as ending at 3:4 rather than 3:6 as is often thought). These nations were left by God to reveal whether or not Israel would obey God.

God preserved His people until He sent David, and until He sent Jesus. Now that Jesus has come there is still a pattern of decline and renewal in the church. However there are some contrasts between then and now. In the days of the judges the pattern of decline and renewal did not stop the steady deterioration of Israel. The times of decline were more powerful than the renewals! There is reason to think it will be different in the days of the new covenant. The renewing work of God will be greater than the times of declension! Meanwhile God still tests His people. All around us are pagan peoples – whether sophisticated and scientific or primitive and weird. God still looks to see whether we will compromise with the religious ideas of the world, accompanied as they are by much wickedness. Or will we break the pattern and show that God's times of renewal will lift the church higher than it could ever go in the days of the judges. A greater Saviour is here, greater than Barak, greater than Samson. God's rescuings will be more powerful than ever. Meanwhile He still has ways of testing our allegiance.

¹ 2:16

² 2:17

³ 2:18

⁴ 2:19

¹ 2:20–21

² 2:22

³ 1:30

⁴ 3:1–2



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