

# WHY GOD'S PEOPLE FELL

• JUDGES 1–2 •

*"But you have not obeyed Me; what is this you have done?" (2:2).*

In the comic strip, "The Ryatts," Winky's mother is seen grabbing him by the arm and shouting, "Stop that fighting this minute." Dad calmly strolls in with his newspaper under his arm and says, "Where's your patience, Sue?" The mother glares at the father and answers, "I'm saving it for a rainy day." Anyone with children can relate to the feeling of utter frustration that this woman exhibited. At times, even the most patient parent comes to the end of his rope. In Judges we see many occasions where God could have given up on His children. In spite of those times, God continued patiently with them.

Before we can fully understand the events of Judges, we need a reminder of the history of Israel that has gone before. Most of this historical background is obtained from Joshua. However, some information is found in Deuteronomy. God gave instructions regarding the treatment of the inhabitants of the promised land during the days of Moses' leadership. In Deuteronomy 7:1-6 Moses made it clear that Israel was to have no communion with the people of Canaan. They were not to make covenants with them (v. 2) or make marriages with them (vv. 3, 4). They were to completely destroy the inhabitants of the land (v. 2) and tear down every idol, and every place of idolatrous worship (v. 5).

At Moses' death, God raised up another leader, Joshua. In Joshua 1–12 God brought His people to the promised land and fought for them as they began to conquer the land. Great victories were experienced. On each occasion, God commanded Israel to destroy all of the inhabitants. Even when Joshua was an old man, much land still had to be conquered (13:1). However, God told Joshua to divide among the tribes the land that had been conquered (13–22). In Joshua 23–25 Joshua died and the tribes were left without human leadership to finish conquering the land.

This brings us to Judges. In chapter 1, the history is given of how Israel set out to conquer the remainder of their inheritance. As they were fighting these battles, however, they failed to destroy all of the people. In fact, many of the inhabitants were left and agreements of different kinds were made with them. Therefore, the people of God clearly disregarded God's command.

In chapter 2, God's great displeasure with His people because of their rebellion is seen. In 1:13-19, the cycle of Israel's rebellion is outlined. Israel began the cycle by being rebellious to God's will. In His anger, God allowed the nations around them to oppress them. In their suffering, God's people turned to Him in bitter sorrow for their sin. God's heart was touched, and He sent a deliverer or judge to rescue them from their oppressor. Following the death of the judge, Israel returned to their rebellious ways, and the cycle began all over again. This cycle—

sin, punishment, repentance, deliverance, and sin—is traced several times in Judges.

Judges seems to be a story of the failures and weaknesses of God's people. However, one message which stands in the spotlight of Judges is the great victory God can give to those who will faithfully serve Him.

### **THEY FORGOT WHAT GOD SAID (2:1, 2)**

God made His will clear regarding the treatment of the natives of Canaan. Since the days of Moses' leadership in the wilderness, the Israelites knew what was to be done to the Canaanites. Because of their lack of regard for the will of God, His people fell. God's people today will fall if we disregard our Father's will. We must be extremely careful to follow the expressed will of our Lord.

### **In Our Faithfulness**

In 1 Corinthians 4:2 Paul said, "It is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy." The word "stewardship" has come to be applied only to the use of money. We must be good stewards in the use of our money, but this is not the only area in which we must be good stewards. W. E. Vine in *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*<sup>1</sup> states that the term "steward" referred to anything from a manager of a household to a treasurer of a city. It is used metaphorically sometimes to refer to preachers (1 Corinthians 4:1), elders (Titus 1:7), and believers in general (1 Peter 4:10).

Our stewardship consists of much more than the money that we have. Indeed, our stewardship entails every material possession, every available opportunity, every bit of knowledge, every minute of time, and every ounce of energy we have. Our entire existence is a stewardship from God.

Faithfulness involves being dependable and trustworthy. No room for procrastination or negligence must be allowed. If a faithful steward accepts a responsibility, he will get it done. If he cannot get it all done by himself, he will see that the task is completed by someone else. You will never hear a faithful steward saying he did not have time to serve God, for he understands that all of his time belongs to God. You will never see a faithful steward getting so involved in his pro-

fession or his family that he crowds out the work of God, for he realizes that his job and his family came from God. You will never hear a faithful steward excuse his laziness by saying that he was just too tired, for he would rather wear out in God's service than rust out in indifference.

### **In Our Priorities**

In Matthew 16:26 Jesus asks the question, "For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul?" That question has never been raised by many of us. Our energy is spent in worrying about paying our bills, paying our taxes, and providing for our retirement. The affairs of this world tend to occupy the bulk of our time while God's work lies in the rubble of our negligence. We wonder if we have ever listened to Jesus when He said, "Take no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself."

Birds build their nests and rear their young and no bird has ever tried to build more nests than his neighbor; no fox ever fretted because he had only one den; no squirrel ever died of anxiety because he had not laid up enough nuts for two or three winters; and no dog ever lost sleep because he did not have sufficient bones buried in the ground for his declining years. And we call animals dumb!

If we are guided by the will of our Father, we will seek the correct priorities.

### **In Our Moral Purity**

First Thessalonians 4:7 says, "For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification." God fully expects His children to be holy. God's people, however, have been caught up in moral decline. We should stand up in our communities against obscenity, but we do not. We should shine as beacons of light in this dark world by the success of our marriages, but we do not. God's people have failed to be the pure people He has called us to be. We let evil have its way in our communities, hoping that someone will do something about it. If we are to be guided by God's will, we must be committed to purity and holiness.

### **In Our Evangelism**

In 2 Timothy 2:2 Paul tells Timothy to share God's Word with others who would share it with people they knew. This commission has been

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<sup>1</sup>W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1966), 4:74.

given to all of us. Though some Christians try to convince themselves that they do not have to tell anyone about Jesus, no one can successfully deny that the New Testament gives that responsibility to every child of God. In our daily activities, most of us come into contact with dozens of non-Christians. We have a wealth of opportunities to share the gospel of Jesus. Paul said, "For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. *And who is adequate for these things?*" (2 Corinthians 2:15, 16; emphasis mine). The obvious answer is that nobody is "adequate for these things." No one can bear this responsibility by himself. That is precisely why Jesus concluded the Great Commission by saying, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." While He does not expect us to do it by ourselves, He does expect us to do it! If we are to be guided by God's will, we must share His gospel with the world.

Israel fell in the days of the judges because they forgot what God said. Have God's people today turned a deaf ear to the wishes of God? If so, like Israel, we must repent.

### **THEY FORGOT WHAT GOD DID (2:6-11)**

Judges 2:6-11 is one of the saddest sections of Scripture in all of the Bible. The people have been rescued out of bondage and led to a land flowing with milk and honey. After arriving, God won many battles for them. God gave them the leadership of Joshua (2:8). When Joshua died, the people remained faithful to God because they had all seen the "great work of the Lord" (2:7). When that generation was "gathered to their fathers" (2:10), another generation arose which did not enjoy the leadership of Joshua and had never seen God's wondrous acts. The result was this: The younger generation did not have the same motivation to serve God, and they "did evil in the sight of the Lord" (2:11). It is easy for us to condemn this younger generation. However, before we do, we need to look at some mistakes that the older generation may have made with this younger generation.

### **By Following Men**

It must be that the older generation made the mistake of following men rather than God. The

writer says, "The people served the Lord all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua." The apostasy began after these men were gone. Had the older generation instilled a love for and dependence upon God in their children, an apostasy would not have happened. Because they looked to their human leaders for strength, they fell when those leaders were gone.

### **By a Failure to Teach**

They may have made the mistake of failing to pass their experiences with God on to their children. They had seen the Jordan River part before their eyes. They had seen the walls of Jericho crumble and fall. They had participated in the mighty victories throughout the land beginning in the south and going up into the north. Above all people, they should have been eager to share their experiences with their children. However, it must be that they did not share the victories that God had given them. The result is recorded in 2:11: "Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord." What motivation did this younger generation have to serve a God that they had never experienced? Thus, it seems that the preceding generation made serious mistakes in training their children.

Are Christians doing the same thing today? Many of God's children are still following men instead of God. Many people have more faith in the preacher than they do in the Lord. They will be involved as long as the preacher is present. The moment the preacher leaves, these people will either move their membership or fall away altogether. We must remain faithful, and we must instill a loyalty to God within our children.

Many Christians fail to pass their experiences with God on to their children. Jehovah and the teachings of His Word are relegated to the church building. When everyday problems arise which require advice from the parents, the Word of God is never consulted. The parents do not read the Word to their children. God has said,

Give heed to yourself . . . lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons. Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, . . . (Deuteronomy 4:9, 10).

We must share our spiritual experiences with our children

If we fail to train our children in the way of absolute trust in their Creator, we will reap a generation of Christians who lean on their own understanding as they go through life, we will reap a generation of Christians who have no reason to love or be loyal to Jehovah.

### **THEY FORGOT WHO GOD WAS (2:11-13)**

When Israel forgot what God said and did, the next step for them was to forget who God was. They turned their backs on God, “followed other gods” (2:12) and “served Baal and the Ashtaroht” (2:13). Baal was the principle male god of the Canaanites. The worship of this deity entailed atrocious practices (Jeremiah 19:5). “Ashtaroht” is the plural reference to the Canaanite gods of fertility. The worship of these idols was a clear indication that the Israelites had lost even the remotest sense of who God was. After all, God had been the power behind the destroying of the people of the land along with their gods as He fought to give His people a place to live. This fact alone should have been enough to prove who the true God was (2 Chronicles 25:14, 15). In addition, all of the mighty acts of God from the days of bondage in Egypt until the conquest should have been a signal to them as to who the true God was. However, this generation of Israelites turned to the gods of the people around them. The ugliness of this situation is graphically illustrated in Romans 1:22-25 where Paul describes the spiritual condition of a people who had turned from the knowledge of God:

Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

Since Israel forgot who God was, Jehovah “gave them up.”

Man has a tendency to forget. Thus, before Israel ever entered the promised land, God warned Israel about forgetting Him. In Deuteronomy 6:10-12 God foretold of the days in which

Israel would live in cities that they did not build, drink of wells that they did not dig, and eat of vineyards that they did not plant. In this context God warns, “Then watch yourself, lest you forget the Lord who brought you from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” God expands this warning in verses 13 through 15. He discusses the consequences that would follow should Israel forget God and follow other gods. He tells them to remain faithful to Him and avoid the idols of the land. The reason is stated in verse 15: “For the Lord your God in the midst of you is a jealous God; otherwise the anger of the Lord your God will be kindled against you, and He will wipe you off the face of the earth.”

We must be careful to learn this same lesson. We may not have statues of precious metal and stone that we are tempted to worship, but we definitely have our own special “gods.” It may be a steady paycheck. It may be a career position for which we have worked for years to obtain. It may be material possessions we have accumulated. It may even be our family whose outside activities occupy every spare moment we have. These things are not wrong in and of themselves. Our only purpose for being on this earth is to glorify our Father (Isaiah 43:7, 21; 1 Corinthians 10:31). All of the necessary activities of our lives must fall under the umbrella of serving and glorifying God. If any one of these activities requires us to do something that is against God’s will, we must refuse it. If any one of these activities begins to rival our devotion and service to God, we must promptly put it back into its proper place. Only in this way can we avoid the trap of forgetting who God is.

### **CONCLUSION**

Patience is an extremely rare and precious commodity. Due to their rebellion, God demonstrated patience toward His people many times in Judges. From Judges 1—2 we have seen that God’s people forgot what God said and did and who God was. This resulted in the tragic cycle of sin, punishment, repentance, deliverance, and more sin. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 10:11, speaking of the experiences of Israel, said, “Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction.” Obviously, God’s desire for His children is to learn from the mistakes of His children in the past.

—Craig Tappe