**There Arose Another Generation**

Judges 2:6-15

Introduction:

1. A few weeks ago I read an article entitled “The Desperate Need of This Generation.” It was written by Tim Jennings and published in FocusMagazine.org. (While I am not personally acquainted with brother Jennings I am with many of the other writers and know they are men who love the Lord.)

2. He began his article like this. He said, “I’m in real trouble. I need immediate help. You see, my grandparents and parents trusted in Jesus, and now I do too.”

3. You might not see his problem. You might even say, “I wish my parents and grandparents had been Christians. Jennings doesn’t know how well he’s got it!”

4. But he went on to speak of a disturbing pattern evidenced in Scripture. He said, “The conviction that blazes brightly in one generation becomes a torch. In the next generation it is only an ember and then in the next generations it becomes cold ash.”

5. The passage we have just read reminds us of this occurrence in the generations after Joshua. Are we doomed to repeat this pattern? What do we need to do to keep the fire burning bright in second, third and fourth generation Christians?

Discussion:

I. A cyclical pattern of deterioration is evident in the history of Israel.

 A. The Book of Judges is explicit.

 1. After Joshua, “there arose another generation who did not know the Lord” (2:10).

 2. The pattern is summarized in 2:16-19.

 3. The rest of the book describes the details.

 a. After Othniel (3:11-12). 40 years.

 b. After Ehud and Shamgar (3:30-4:1). 80 years.

 c. After Deborah (5:31). 40 years.

 d. After Gideon (8:28). 40 years.

 e. Abimelech, Tola and Jair, Jephthah Ibzan, Elon, Abdon (13:1, 40 years), Samson.

 f. The book ends with the tragic story of a group of Benjaminite men in Gibeah

 wanting to have sexual relations with a Levite traveler. They end up raping his

 concubine to death. This resulted in a civil war that cost the lives of 65,000 people.

 B. This cyclical pattern may be in evidenced in the ten commandments (Ex. 20:5-6; Deut.

 5:9-10).

 C. 1 Kings 11 cites Solomon as one “whose heart was not wholly devoted to the Lord his

 God, as the heart of David his father had been.”

II. Those old enough to have witnessed multiple generations have observed similar generational deterioration today.

 A. The sacrificial and passionate faith of the first generation is accepted as only an

 important set of doctrines by the second. The third generation continues the traditions

 of the faith, but they have little inner conviction or practical expression of it. The fourth

 generation brings the charade to an end and abandons the faith.

 B. In four generations faith goes from passionate, to important, to cold, to dead.

 C. With first generation Christians, their faith is a matter of their identity. It is who they

 perceive themselves to be. They are the people of God. In the second generation faith

 practices are a matter of inconvenience. They worship on occasion as if to maintain

 the family tradition, but their focus is elsewhere. In the third such practices are an

 annoyance.

 D. As the process unfolds a relationship to a personal God gives way to a relationship with

 an institution. The third and fourth generations are uninterested in maintaining the

 institution.

 E. It would be my observation that this is probably what historians have noted in the

 tendency of independent religious groups to develop into denominations. It is a move

 from personal relationship to a relationship with an institution.

III. The history of the nation of Israel gives us insight into the causes of this process and what to do to prevent it in our generation.

 A. The Book of Judges observes that Israel did not drive out all the Canaanites from the

 land. Instead they formulated covenants with them even though they were in a

 covenant with God that prohibited their involvement with other cultures (2:1-4).

 1. The people of God tend to allow the culture of the world to seep in and destroy the

 culture of God.

 2. Actually we are supposed to be working in the other direction. While Israel was

 supposed to eliminate the other cultures by force and influence. We are supposed

 to transform the other culture into the family of God.

 a. This is our salt and light influence (Matt. 5:14-16).

 b. This is evangelism as evidenced in the Book of Acts. It occurs not by military

 force or the exercise of power, but through the art and work of persuading

 individuals to accept Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins.

 c. In some churches today evangelism seems to receive little attention as we turn

 attention internally (to ourselves). Are we less interested in cultural

 transformation?

 B. The nation of Israel became interested in other things.

 1. They forgot the Lord and served the Baals and the Asheroth (Judges 7). These

 were gods associated with fertility in agriculture, animals and man. In effect, these

 were the gods of agricultural production in Canaan.

 2. God had warned against such a shift (Deut 6:10-15).

 3. But people tend to shift from a culture based on relationship to God to a culture

 based on economics, politics and religion. (I am distinguishing the worship of God

 from “religion,” that is associated with institutions and other man-made forms of

 devotion.)

 4. Israel did the very thing God commanded them not to do. They covenanted with the

 Canaanites (Deut. 7:1-6).

 5. King Solomon is illustrative of the failure (1 Kings 10-11). Even though his father had

 admonished him to walk in the ways of the Lord (1 Kings 2:1ff). The king was not

 supposed to multiply possessions and wives. He was supposed to write a copy of

 the law and carefully observe it (Deut. 17:14ff).

 C. Are we doing different than they? Are we focused on our relationship with God or

 economics, politics, religion? “Politics?” you say. See 1 Sam. 8:4ff. Note the

 intergenerational motivation in 1 Sam. 8:1-3.

 D. What are we supposed to do to prevent this deterioration?

 1. There was a difference between those having seen the work of the Lord and those

 not knowing the Lord, nor the work which He had done for Israel (Judges 2:7, 10).

 2. Moses warned of this problem (Deut. 11:1-7).

 3. The solution (Deut. 11:18-22).

 4. A three-fold solution is given in Deut. 6 and 7.

 a. Intergenerational teaching (6:1-9). Reminders of God’s work (6:20-24). Parents

 bear responsibility, but children do too.

 b. Care in not focusing on economics (6:10-15). Cf. James 4:1-5. Have we moved

 from worshiping the Creator to worshiping the things He has given us?

 c. Care in not making covenant with the world, but remembering their unique

 covenant relationship with God (7:7-11). Cf. Judges 2:1-2. They needed to

 remember who they were.

 1) But they wanted to be like the nations politically (1 Sam. 8:7).

 2) They became like the nations religiously (Judges 2:11; 1 Kings 11:4-8).

 5. They needed to have a personal relationship with a personal God. Do you know

 the Lord or do you know about the Lord? We are moving in the wrong direction

 when we exchange the intimacy of the family of God for an institutional concept.

 Ex. Institutionalizing the church.

 6. We need to serve the Lord’s purposes instead of our own (Judges 2:7; Acts 13:36).

Conclusion:

1. Brothers and sisters, I have seen these problems unfolding in families among us.

2. Are we oblivious?

3. We have a choice.

4. Joshua’s appeal is fitting and earnest. Serve the Lord. Put away the gods of the world! And his commitment: “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!”