

When I first moved to Central Oregon... I just could not do enough exploring of all our fascinating natural and geographic attractions. Of course I love all the lakes and rivers and waterfalls. But I am also fascinated with the ice caves... lava flows... and mountains of obsidian. I would drive from attraction to attraction... never really considering how connected it all is. Then one day... they opened the new visitor center at Lava Butte. ... When I walked in and immediately saw the 3D map of the area... I gained new insights that my mind could not piece together on its own. I know that I could not have been taken as a local resident of this area... but more like a tourist... because I stopped... and stared at it for a long time. ... The map brought order to... and made sense of all the details that surround us.

Judges 2:6-3:6 functions as a sort of visitors'-center 3D map for the Book of Judges. It provides the necessary bird's eye view... for understanding what is happening in the rest of the book... starting next week with all the stories. Today's section... is a summary which interprets for the reader the significance of the judges' stories. ... If you want to understand Judges... you must stop... and gaze here for a while... to gain perspective... to get a handle on what to look for in these upcoming narratives... and how to understand the various episodes we will study. In particular... our passage today... Judges 2:6-3:6... will show us what God is doing... in the period of the judges – and... for anyone who is serious about understanding the Bible... nothing could be more crucial than that.

### **Judges 2:6 - 3:6**

Comparing the God of the Bible with every world religion... we have to conclude that this God of Israel - is strange. ... Only when we contemplate how the false religions depict their god... can we begin to grasp how different... how holy... the God of the Bible is! ... This is especially true when we look at the gods of the Canaanites... which our passage mentions... Baal and Ashtoreth.

Now... let me issue a word of caution. These gods were far beyond disgusting! ... It will be necessary for me to speak a little with unpleasant terms... that I am not accustomed to use in the pulpit... in order to grasp the meaning of our passage.

Baal was the god of storm and fertility... and... for the Canaanites... of course... fertility was the name of the game – fertility of crops and livestock and family. ... Baal... the Canaanites god... nature god that he was... had his female companion... her name was Ashtoreth or Ashtart. ... When Baal and Ashtoreth had sexual relations... the Canaanites believed the resulting fertility of this action... is what brought them rain and crops and children. If Baal and Ashtoreth did not mate... Canaan would suffer drought... famine... and lack of childbirth. ... So... it was important to the Canaanites to inspire their gods to stay sexually active with each other. ... The revival of nature... each spring... they thought was due to sexual intercourse between Baal and his partner.

Therefore this demonic religion had the Canaanite faithful practice “sacred prostitution” in their temples. The idea was that the worshipper and the temple prostitute would excite the divine couple... and encourage them to

likewise engage in it. ... How strange the God of Israel must have seemed!  
... In paganism... the gods must be coerced... rather than trusted.

Understanding a little bit about the Canaanite's gods helps us to realize how the Israelites were enticed away from the One True God... Who led them out of Egypt... and to... instead start following Baal. It also provides us with a warning about our own culture's enticements.

Can't you almost hear a helpful Canaanite trying to talk a little religion – and sense – to his Israelite neighbor: *“O yes, having Yahweh who brings you out of Egypt, who makes someone as powerful as Pharaoh to cry 'Uncle,' who divides the Jordan – all that is fine; and I've got nothing against this Yahweh, mind you; but now that you are here in Canaan... this is what has worked for centuries! Now it is time for you to get into the rhythms of nature. You are here now... and it is time to start managing the day-to-day situation with crops and flocks and so forth. Naturally, I might be able to help you know some of our secrets. Maybe you and your son would like to come with me to the high place for our midweek service?”*

Israel already knew Yahweh - the real 'fertility God'. ... Nevertheless Israel fell for a profound lie. ... As believers you and I already know the God Who fills us with every spiritual blessing and lavishes us with His provision. ... But once we lose our gratitude... we are just as vulnerable to the same lie ... *“There is something more that you are missing!”*

We can benefit by trying to understand why Israel caved in to Canaanite faith and practice. ... A big reason... is that the Israelites maintained no

distinctive separation... from the paganism that surrounded them. ... They did not drive out the Canaanites... who remained after Joshua's conquest.

Several times we have seen in Joshua and already in Judges... that God required the most radical separation. God told them that the people of Canaan had to be completely destroyed... because they were so polluted... with their life and culture. (It was even contained in the Law of Moses... 40 years before Israel crossed over into Canaan... Lev. 18; Deut. 9:4ff.). Israel did not do this... and so lived with and established friendships with the Canaanites - to Israel's destruction. Israel failed to properly combat a godless culture.

In our own day of "pluralism," our society contains people of opposing beliefs and lifestyles. ... It's very easy to get confused and start thinking that *tolerance* is the same as *approval*. ... It isn't. ... The democracy that we enjoy here in America... has laws which give people the freedom to worship as they please. ... So you and I must exercise patience... and tolerance... with those who believe and practice things that we read God has condemned in His Word. ... Unlike what we have read in Joshua and Judges ... we are not given... in this day... such a mandate to swing a destructive sword at the pagans we live among. ... But we do have the obligation before God to maintain a separate walk... so we won't become defiled by those who disagree with us. ... We must seek by prayer... witness... and loving persuasion to win those to Christ who as yet haven't trusted Him.

We must retain a distinct **separation** from the paganistic ways of our culture... or else we will eventually blend with it. ... LISTEN! – We have

become so afraid of being called a “prude” ... or “naive” ... or “out of step with society” ... or a “legalist” from fellow Christians... that we don’t exercise any care to be distinctive among a pagan world. We’ll keep ourselves up-to-date on the latest slang words and terms of perverted ideas... so we don’t look too nerdish. We will fill our minds with the world’s raunchiest entertainment... just so we can be conversant with our friends about the characters and situations in 50 Shades of Gray. ... To look “cool” and fit-in means everything to us... even though in order to do so... we must **not** look distinctive from a pagan society. We’ll participate in raucous humor... and tell dirty jokes... for the same reason. ... This is the exact same reason why Israel left the God Who took them out of Egypt and went after the false gods of Canaan.

Just like what we so often do... the Jews eventually became so accustomed to the sinful ways of their pagan neighbors... that those ways didn't seem sinful any more. ... The Jews then became interested in how their neighbors worshiped... until finally Israel started to live like their enemies and imitate their ways.

The Jews did not suddenly turn from the Lord and go after the Canaanite gods. It was gradual. ... And for believers today... it is also a step-by-step process. ... The first step away from the Lord is "friendship with the world" (James 4:4), which then leads to our being "identified with the world" (1:27). The next step is to "love the world" (1 John 2:15) and gradually become "conformed to this world" (Rom. 12:2).

The church doesn't need any more cowards... secret saints... who are too afraid to be distinctive. ... Is this not our mandate? 'Instead of being molded to this world... have your mind renewed and transformed:

**Romans 12:2 (ESV)**

*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

Another cause of Israel's apostasy was the lack of experiential religion in the succeeding generation.

**Judges 2:10**

When we contrast this description with that of the previous generation 'who had seen all the great work of Yahweh'... we might conclude that the problem was ignorance... that the next generation did not know *about* Yahweh and his works. ... But that is surely incorrect (or perhaps I should say... incomplete). It was not that they did not know about Yahweh... but that they did not know ... Yahweh! ...

The 'they did not know Yahweh' of verse 10 is parallel to the same clause in 1 Samuel 2:12, where it describes the two evil sons of Eli, who were, unfortunately, priests at Yahweh's sanctuary. 1 Samuel says of them... *'they did not know Yahweh.'*

That does not mean they did not know about Yahweh... (Obviously they did!)... Neither does it mean that they were ignorant of God's mighty acts. Instead... it means that they *'had no regard for'* ... or that *'they cared nothing for Yahweh'* ... So... here... in Judges 2:10... this next generation 'did not know Yahweh' or his works... has the same meaning. ...They did

not acknowledge Yahweh... Yahweh and His works didn't matter to them... These had no influence over the new generation of Israelites.

That is a situation we need to be careful about. ... One generation can rejoice in a living faith... enjoy intimate communion with God... revel in the kingship of Jesus over daily life... even delight to teach their faith to those closest them. ... Yet the next generation may come along and care nothing for God. ... Maybe they won't formally renounce everything. ... It's just that perhaps yours and my kids will only know about the Lord... rather than know ... the Lord. ... They might maintain a faithful church attendance... in their cold... dead... formal way. ... But there is no fire in their 'faith,' no warmth in love... no joy from hope. ... You might even be such a child of godly parents... who only knows about the Lord. ... You need to own your own faith.

Israel's loss of historical memory also helps to explain why they walked away from the Lord.

In his popular novel "1984"... George Orwell wrote... "*Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.*" Orwell first published this book in 1949... after he had observed the likes of Hitler and Stalin. ... These two men achieved a lot of momentum for their movements by using this principle. ... Once Hitler and Stalin got in control of the present... they rewrote past history... so they could control future events. ... For a time it worked.

I must confess that I am very concerned for our future generations. Those who control our present society... are active "revisionists"... who are re-

writing the history of our nation and removing all the signs of our Godly Heritage. ... This is making it easier for our culture to turn away from the ways of God.

### **Judges 2:12**

The very description unmasks Israel's ingratitude. Yahweh is called the 'God of their fathers.' ... The term was intended to include their *grandfathers*... and *their* fathers... going all the way back to Abraham. ... So all the pre-exodus stories... from Genesis 12 forward... to the point of Yahweh's faithful preservation of His people coming out of Egypt... and into Canaan. All of this was Yahweh's mighty act in behalf of a hopeless people. - Israel abandoned this God! ... What revolting ingratitude!

The Bible is clear: forgetfulness and thanklessness will produce apostasy. When we make little effort to remember all that the Lord does for us... and when we lose our thankfulness... we won't worship well on Sunday mornings. ... Then... for lack of satisfying worship... eventually we say... what's the use...? And we go our separate way from God. That is why Scripture is so frantic about the church not forgetting - especially what Christ did for us on Calvary. Christ commanded that we practice communion regularly... so that we do not forget.

Even though the Israelites forgot and were not thankful and turned away from God... the writer of Judges does not hurl the exasperated invectives at Israel... that they deserved... *"You foolish and ignorant oafs!!!"* *You are completely banished to the hottest flames of Hell... "*

### **Judges 2:14-18**



The anger of God is just as real as the love of God. This is not something many want to hear about. ... Many want to hear only about the love of God, not the wrath of God. ... But Scripture has much to say about the wrath of God. We need to hear about God's wrath to know better the seriousness of sin. ... Notice the faithfulness of His anger as it is expressed in verses 14-15:

Notice especially those words "*as Yahweh had warned*" ... and "*as Yahweh had sworn*"... ... When the Lord gave Israel over to her enemies... He was only executing what He had already threatened to do if they proved faithless. ... Yahweh's hot anger shows His faithfulness to His word. It is a *faithful* anger.

Such anger should not surprise us. It is the price we pay for being loved. Yahweh had told Israel He would have no rivals, 'for Yahweh's name is Jealous; he is the jealous God' (Exod. 34:14).

Imagine for a moment... a husband who has the sad but true evidence that his wife is having an affair with another man. It is not a matter of gossip or innuendo, but the matter has been established. Now just imagine too... that he had been... for the most part an attentive... devoted... and tender husband. And now she is having this affair. What if the husband's reaction were: '*Well, OK... I guess that is just the way the cookie crumbles*'? ... What would you think? ... Wouldn't such a response suggest to you that the man really didn't love his wife...? If he truly loved his wife... wouldn't you expect more than a *nonchalant* response...? If lively love was there... he would be upset... probably he would be jealous. At the very least... he should be angry.

Now that is the problem with having the God of the Bible as our God. To have a God who loves His people is to have a *jealous* God... and to have a jealous God is to have an intolerant God. ... 'Love divine' is not soft leniency... but blazing intolerance... Such is the God of Israel Whose jealous love makes Him faithful in His anger toward you... whenever you turn away from Him. ... If you forsake Him... He will pursue you – in His anger.

God does chastise or discipline His people when they continue to sin. He chastises the believer when he goes on and on in sin, committing the same sin day after day. But chastisement is for a very specific purpose: to drive the believer to his knees, arousing him to turn back to God. It is the suffering of chastisement that shows a believer the error of his way, that drives him to cry out to God for deliverance. And when a believer cries out to God in sincerity and repentance, God delivers him.

However... our passage today shows how God is even more astonishing with His love for us than even this. ... Next we will consider the incredibility of His salvation.

Put verse 14a and verse 16a together and notice the amazing sequence: *“the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel,”* ... *“Then the Lord raised up judges who saved them.”* ... If any one of us were writing this... we would not have allowed those two statements to stand together. ... Either we might have added a sentence after verse 15... just before the sixteenth verse... along the lines of... *“Israel turned from their evil way... they stopped worshipping Baal, and they returned fully to the Lord.”* ... or ... instead of verse 16 we would write... *“God banished these ingrates forever from His*

*presence...*” But there is none of that. ... Placing verse 14 and verse 16 so close together makes no sense!

I propose to you... that verse 16 was intended to stand out. Observe how it sits in the structure of verses 11-23 as a whole:

Judges 2:11-13 is a section about Israel’s apostasy – their turning from the Lord and running to Baal.

Judges 2: 14-15 announce the wrath of God... which Israel had earned for themselves.

Judges 2:16 announced God’s surprising grace.

And then Judges 2:17-19 speaks more about Israel’s terrible apostasy.

This is followed by Judges 2:20-23 which depicts further the wrath of God.

So we see... apostasy... wrath... grace... apostasy... wrath. Grace is in the middle... and it serves as a hinge. What a wallop this pattern... I think... is suppose to hit us with. ... The Lord... Who 'gave them into the hands of their plunderers'...'saved them from the hand of their plunderers'!... The hand that is against them... is nevertheless mysteriously for them! ...

This is one of the fundamental miracles of the Bible. ... The God who rightly casts us down to the ground – surprisingly (and for reasons only His Own) – stoops to lift us up.

I said “for reasons only His Own.” ... But here is one... that we might try to wrap our minds around... because it might benefit us... It is the depth of His compassion... This is definitely something for us to stop and to marvel at!

Even in the face of Israel's persisting apostasy... Yahweh would raise up judges and use them to save Israel from their enemies. ... Why? ... Look at the final phrase of verse 18... It says... Wow! ... Get this!... “*For the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them...*”

The 'groaning' by the Israelites depicts misery – not their repentance.

Now next week... we will again see this same kind of crying out (ne'auah) by Israel to Yahweh... Once we come to chapter 3, verse 9... we will see once again... this word for groaning only depicts misery... repentance was not necessarily involved. ... God's heart is stirred by the sheer misery of His people.

LISTEN! - God is moved by strong emotion... to see His people – even His sinful people – crushed. ... Once you see God's heart in Judges 2:18 you are not shocked when you meet Christ in the New Testament. God is the same yesterday... today... and forever! ... And this very same God is yours and my High Priest... Who authoritatively sits on His throne in heaven.

Who could make this stuff up...? ... Once we begin to comprehend what is communicated here to us... we will be convinced of one irrefutable fact: the God of the Bible is absolutely uninventible.

One thing more. The 'groaning' of verse 18 is a noun (Hebrew, ne'auah) used only three other times in the Old Testament, two of which are in Exodus (2:24; 6:5). There the 'groaning' is that of Israel under Egyptian slavery... a groaning that God hears – and He remembers His covenant and delivers them. ... The very word in Judges 2:18 should carry our minds

back to Exodus. ... So when we read that 'Yahweh was moved to pity on account of their groaning' ... it is as if the text is saying: 'See! Yahweh is still the same as He was 300 years earlier... *His* mercies never come to an end! ... Hundreds of years do not cool the warmth of His compassions. This should make reading the ancient word of God an exciting matter for you and I even today!

Yahweh continues to amaze us... for we see the length of His patience...

### **Judges 3:1-6**

Israel would only listen to the judges who delivered them... until they died. Once their deliverer died... time... and time again... Israel persisted in her passion for other gods... and each time they became more vile than the last time. ...In light of all this... we might expect Yahweh's anger to flash out against such covenant-breakers. ... But Instead... Yahweh places them under disciplinary judgment to 'test' them.

The word "test" (nasah)... it is used three times... First in verse 22 of the second chapter... and then two more times in the verses we just looked at. ... God's disciplinary judgment to test them... is also a manifestation of God's grace. These tests were extended opportunities to show them how much they needed God's rule over their lives.

God did not test them because **He** wanted to find something out. ... He is omniscient (all-knowing) ... The Lord already knew what the result would be before the test began. ... God tests us... so that **we** would know. ... So that we would know how much we need His rule over our lives.

Think about some of the trials or struggles that are in your life right now. Maybe... they are the consequence of your poor choices... maybe even a turning away from the Lord. But perhaps... also... God allows you to suffer the consequences... and is not removing them... because He intends to use them in your life as a test. ... God may want you to know your great need for Him. ... Or maybe they are tests to see if you really meant it when you said you were giving your life to Him. ... Maybe He wants you to know how sincere your promise was.

When Israel failed to drive out all the Canaanites... left them living there... and then tried to live holy lives before the Lord... the Canaanites became their tests. Israel said with great conviction that they would follow the Lord... as we closed the Book of Joshua. Joshua even said... “No you won’t.” – and they all the more emphatically said... “Yes! Indeed! We will!” ...The presence of the Canaanites living in the land made it very difficult for them to live up to their promise of commitment. They tested it... to show Israel what their commitment was – beyond their mere words.

Is yours a commitment of mere words...? Have you come to rest in the full measure of grace that He gives you every day...? You probably have tests in your life... that will show you.

From 1577 to 1580... Sir Francis Drake and his crew made the second voyage around the world in a sailing vessel. ... Many remember this famous sea captain for his exploration during the Elizabethan era of history. As interesting as that is... I read something about him... that I think points to an even greater bravery. I read one of his prayers... that I think drives

home the point of these last few verses of our study this morning... Would you have the guts to pray like Sir Francis Drake...?

Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves, when our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little, when we arrive safely because we have sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when with the abundance of things we possess, we have lost our thirst for the waters of life; having fallen in love with life, we have ceased to dream of eternity; and in our efforts to build a new Earth, we have allowed our vision of the new heaven to dim.

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly, to venture on wider seas where storms will show your mastery; where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars. We ask you to push back the horizons of our hopes; and to push into the future in strength, courage, hope, and love."