THE WAY OF OBEDIENCE TO THE LORD

Passage: Judges 2:1-23

Key verse: Judges 2:17

Judges chapter 1 described the history of the late conquest of Canaan by the tribes of Israel after Joshua's death. There were significant victories, but Israel failed to drive out the Canaanites completely.

Today's passage evaluates they disobeyed God and broke the covenant with God. Their disobedience results in a vicious cycle of sin in the next generations. Despite their violation, God does not cancel the covenant with them. He gives them chances to repent their sins and return to God through tests. God also raised up judges to save the Israelites from the neighboring Canaanite enemies. However, their relationship with God gets worse over time.

Today's passage can reflect our Christian life today as we look in a mirror, so we should learn from their failures. This lesson helps us to live a way of obedience to God and enables us to get rid of our idols in and around us through sincere repentance. Today's lesson also helps guide the next generations to know God and what God has done for us.

Part I. They broke the covenant with God (1-5)

Look at verses 1a. 1 The angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bokim and said… The angel of the LORD came from Gilgal to Bokim. Gilgal is on the eastern border of Jericho, where the Israelites encamped after crossing the Jordan River. There, they erected 12 stones as a memorial to teach their children. It is also where Israelites had circumcision, which means they were no longer slaves of Egypt but God's covenant people. From there, the angel of the LORD came to deliver God's message. Look at verses 1b-2a. "I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land that I swore to give to your forefathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall not make a covenant with the people of this land, but you shall break down their altars.'

The covenant between God and Israel was established with the ten commandments at Mount Sinai that God is their God, and they are God's people, a priestly kingdom and a holy people to the nations. God has been faithful to his covenant with Israel. He led them out of Egypt and finally to the land of Canaan, promised to their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God brought ten plagues to Egypt, made a way in the Red Sea, and fed them with daily bread Manna for 40 years in the desert where there was nothing to eat. He protected them from all threats and disciplined them to be holy people. He stopped the Jordan River waters so that they could cross and destroy Canaan's fortified cities. How was this possible? It was only through God's power, love, patience, and faithfulness to his promise. Their forefathers grumbled and complained, tested and rebelled against God through idolatry; God did not break His covenant with them. But now what about Israel? They made a covenant with the Canaanites and did not break down their idols alters.

Under the covenant with the Canaanites, they tolerated Baals, the gods of materials, and its partner Ashtaroths, the goddess of production, beauty, and sensual pleasure. Ultimately, they accepted the lewd and evil Canaanite idols and culture.

Let’s look at verse 2b. Yet you have disobeyed me. Why have you done this? There might be some reasons for making a covenant with them. They might desire economic benefits and convenience by using them as their servants. The Canaanites were good at farming with iron farming tools. They had delicious and various food recipes. The women might be helpful for babysitting, and the men could be mobilized for war. In addition, Israel must have been greedy to retain the Canaanite's wealth rather than destroy them. Or the Israelites might have been self-confident that they could control the Canaanites with force, that they could not fall into the temptations of their gods of materials and pleasures, and that our next generation would live with the same strong faith as they did.

Yet you have disobeyed me. Why have you done this? Many of these excuses are unacceptable to this question. They should have kept the covenant with God above all else as the most critical value because numerous benefits can never replace God and his words.

Let's all read verse 3. 3 Now therefore I tell you that I will not drive them out before you; they will be thorns in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you. The Canaanites will become thorns on your side and torture you physically and mentally. The idols you did not smash will become traps against you and your descendants spiritually.

Look at verses 4-5. 4 When the angel of the LORD had spoken these things to all the Israelites, the people wept aloud, and they called that place Bokim. There they offered sacrifices to the LORD.

Hearing this, all the Israelites wept aloud. So the place's name was 'Bokim,' which means 'weeper' in Hebrew. Yes, they cried aloud and offered sacrifices to the LORD. We, too, must listen to God's words because the Word of God leads us to sincere repentance and enables us to drive out the 'Canaanite' elements within us. / Anyone can receive God's forgiveness of sins by believing in Jesus as our savior and Lord, who died for our sins. This grace is freely given to anyone by faith, but it had made with the great sacrifice of Christ Jesus. By his blood, we have the covenant with God. God is now our Heavenly Father. We are his precious children who serve only God and obey his Word. As pure brides, we wait for the bridegroom, Jesus. We became the heirs to the kingdom of God. However, we often disobey God's commands so quickly as we compromise with the temptation of the material things and pleasures of the world, and many Christians cry and repent but fail to get rid of their hidden idols like the Israelites did in this passage. We desperately need God's mercy and God's power. 1 Thessalonians 5:22 says, Reject every kind of evil. In Proverbs 3:7,8, Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil.This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones. Romans 12:1-2 says, Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. 2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. We must not pretend to repent only with our lips but root it out. I pray that we may obey God and keep our covenant with God.

Let’s look at verses 6-9. 6 After Joshua had dismissed the Israelites, they went to take possession of the land, each to his own inheritance. 7 The people served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel. 8 Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of a hundred and ten. 9 And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Heres in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. Verses 6-9 summarize the end of the 'wilderness' generations. Joshua, Galeb, and this generation served God to the end, unlike their parent generation, who disobeyed and died in the wilderness. They knew God and knew what God had done for them. Although they made a covenant with Canaanites and didn't destroy idols, their generations served the LORD throughout their lifetime.

I thank God that our Toronto UBF church has senior missionaries, P. Joshua and Sarah Lee, and senior shepherd Daniel Massey who eye-witnessed their love and faith from the beginning. Our leaders have also seen and experienced their life of faith and obedience and devotion to God. I pray that the precious legacy may pass on to the next generations.

Part II. Another generation grew up(10- 17)

Look at verse 10. 10 After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. In today's passage, the author of Judges refers to the 'Canaanite' generation who were born in the land of Canaan as 'another generation', not as ‘next generation.’ The word 'another generation' implies that this generation differed from the wilderness generation in many ways.

What would have been different? The wilderness generation was mostly born in the wilderness and lived on the same menu, only manna, for 40 years. However, the Canaanite generation was born in Canaan and ate milk, cheese, eggs, meat, and Canaanite specialties. The wilderness generation was the hearing generation. What to see in the wilderness was just a desert everywhere. Because of this, they have lived a simple life mainly by listening to the words of God. However, the Canaanite generation has so many things to see and enjoy in the land of Canaan. In this respect, cultures, lives, and ideas can differ. But there is an important thing that they should never miss.

See 10b again. The problem is that they did not know God or what God had done. This is the root of all the issues in the book of Judges. Having no relationship with God means they have no identity as God's people. Having no history of God means they do not have a God-centered view of history or values. Since they do not know God, they have no godly teaching, prayer, discernment, or sincere repentance. So Judges 21:25 says, In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit.

Let’s look at verses 11-13. 11 Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. 12 They forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They provoked the LORD to anger 13 because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.

They have gone from worshipers of God to idolaters. They chose to serve Baals and Ashtaroths, who promised material blessing and fertility and tolerated evil desire and sensual pleasure. They forsook God, the source of their blessings. They lost their identity as God's people. They became idolaters. They provoked the LORD to anger.

Let’s look at verses 14-15. 14 In his anger against Israel the LORD handed them over to raiders who plundered them. He sold them to their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist. 15 Whenever Israel went out to fight, the hand of the LORD was against them to defeat them, just as he had sworn to them. They were in great distress. They were redeemed people, but now to be sold to their enemies. The Canaanite people around them began to harass them like thorns in their side, and Israel could no longer overpower them with force. It is because the hand of God was against them. They experienced great distress. God wanted them to return to Him from idols in great distress.

Let’s look at verses 16-17. 16 Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders. 17 Yet they would not listen to their judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them. Unlike their fathers, they quickly turned from the way in which their fathers had walked, the way of obedience to the LORD 's commands. Another characteristic of the generation is that they quickly return to a sinful life, unlike their fathers. God raised up judges and delivered them from their enemies. But rather than listen to the Judges, they quickly turned to idols. The great difference between them and their fathers is whether they walked in the way of obedience to the LORD's commands. Another generation is the generation of disobedience.

Here we can learn what God values most, our obedience to him. These days, the young generations are unfamiliar with the word 'obedience.' They are reluctant to obey God's commands until they are understood or persuaded. In fact, the fallen human is by nature, disobedient and rebellious. When we meet God, we know who I am and can truly become humble. But God sometimes tests whether we humbly obey him or not. And he trains us until we become men and women of obedience to God. 1 Samuel 15:22 says, "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. I pray that we may listen to God's Word and practice obedience to his word.

So what do we have to do specifically for the next generation? To help them to know God personally through Bible studies. In Deuteronomy 6, God taught the Israelites that the most important thing to do when they enter the land of Canaan is to teach the Word of God. 6 These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.(Deuteronomy 6:6-9). Psalms 119:105 says, Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path. Psalms 119:9 says, How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word. We must study the Word of God, write reflections, and eat our spiritual daily bread. Instead of becoming another generation, we may become the next generation that serves God.

We must also help them know what God has done for us. What if your children don't know anything about you've done for them? Your children would think that I grew up by working hard on myself. If we don't know what God has done for us, we don't know God's grace. There is no ground or reason to dedicate ourselves to God. There will be no principles of life to live the life of obedience that God wants. I pray that we may not forget what God has done for each of us.

Part III. The LORD raised up judges(18-23)

Let’s look at verse 18. 18 Whenever the LORD raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the LORD had compassion on them as they groaned under those who oppressed and afflicted them. God sent judges to them each time to rescue them. It is because God had compassion on them. But they do not know the mercy of God. See verse 19. 19 But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their fathers, following other gods and serving and worshiping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways. Their cycle of sinful life gets worse and worse. It becomes like the Canaanites.

20 Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and said, "Because this nation has violated the covenant that I laid down for their forefathers and has not listened to me, 21 I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died. 22 I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the LORD and walk in it as their forefathers did." 23 The LORD had allowed those nations to remain; he did not drive them out at once by giving them into the hands of Joshua.

In Conclusion, Israel violated the covenant with God, but God did not break the covenant with them. God didn't give up on them but tested Israel to repent and return to him. We have the covenant with God through the blood of Christ Jesus. I pray that we may get rid of our idols completely and walk in the way of obedience to God's word. and I pray that our bible students and children may walk in the way of the LORD, the way of obedience to God.