

A Faithless Generation

Devotional Reading: [1 Corinthians 10:1–14](#)

Background Scripture: [Judges 1–2](#)

[Judges 2:6–15](#)

⁶ After Joshua had dismissed the Israelites, they went to take possession of the land, each to their 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.

¹⁰ After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. 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 ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They aroused the LORD's anger ¹³ because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. ¹⁴ In his anger against Israel the LORD gave them into the hands of raiders who plundered them. He sold them into the hands of 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.



Image © Getty Images

Key Text

Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals.—Judges 2:11

Generations: From Canaan to Jerusalem

Unit 2: From Settled People to Judges

Lessons 5–8

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the consequences of a faithless generation in Israel.
2. Compare the strengths and weaknesses of Israel's wilderness generation, those who entered the promised land, and the generation of the judges.
3. Write a personal statement of faith and commitment to the Lord.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Caught in a Loop
- B. Lesson Context

I. Generation Gathered (Judges 2:6–9)

- A. Dismissal (vv. 6–7)
- B. Death (vv. 8–9)

II. Generation Grown (Judges 2:10–15)

- A. Disobedience (vv. 10–13)

Differing Priorities

- B. Defeat (vv. 14–15)

Coverage

Conclusion

- A. Spirals of Life
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

How to Say It

Ashtareth *Ash-tuh-rehth*

Astarte *A-star-te* (first *a* as in *had*)

Baalim *Bay-uh-leem*

Gaash *Gay-ash*

Timnath Heres *Tim-nath **Hee**-reez*

Introduction

A. Caught in a Loop

If you need a humorous response to those who express concern about your love of certain sweet or salty snacks, try this one-liner: “I can resist anything except temptation.” All joking aside, addiction is serious. It involves the compulsive urge to engage with substances and behaviors (or activities) that simulate reward despite adverse consequences. A sense of immediate gratification overrides an awareness of long-term harm. Addiction changes one’s brain chemistry, rewriting the reward system to perpetuate the dependence. People with addiction, therefore, live in a destructive feedback loop.

My experience with years of compulsive negative behavior was not severe, but the difficulty of breaking any cycle is fierce. Some people never escape the loop. Others try but relapse. Sometimes the attempted rehabilitation and relapse become a part of an extended loop. However, it is possible to break negative cycles. A few fortunate people find their way out.

The book of Judges tells the story of an extended negative feedback loop that was experienced nationally. It warns us against temptation and tendencies while displaying God's steadfast faithfulness to his people. The book recounts events roughly between 1380 and 1050 BC.

B. Lesson Context

Joshua had no successor. After his death, God's people became a tribal confederacy, without a central political leader ([Judges 21:25](#)). Their shared ancestry, tradition, and service to God bound them to one another. However, the Israelites in the period of the judges regularly neglected their distinctive history. God's covenant was the structure for reinforcing their memories, but the people fell (or jumped!) away. They became more and more like the surrounding nations in this process.

The author of Judges is unknown but exhibits familiarity with previous books—especially Exodus and Deuteronomy. The book of Judges notes God's relationship with the ancestors of Israel through the story of the exodus ([Judges 2:1, 12; 6:8–10; 11:13–27](#)). It also cites Joshua's leadership ([1:1; 2:6–8, 21–23](#)), God's covenantal relationship with Israel ([2:1–3, 20; 3:4; 5:5](#)), and specific elements of devotion such as the Nazirite vow ([13:4–7](#); compare [Numbers 6:1–21](#)). It emphasizes portions of God's law given through Moses by focusing on remembrance of what God has done ([6; 8; 32:7–11](#)). It also reiterates the blessings and curses for national obedience and disobedience ([Deuteronomy 28:1–68](#)).

The focus of today's lesson comes from the book's introduction, a portion of historical review that leads into a doctrinal admonition. It supplies a framework for understanding the narratives of the specific judges that follow ([Judges 3:7–16:31](#)). Judges presents a repetitive cycle of sin often referred to as “the Judges cycle”: (1) a generation passes away, (2) the next generation ignores God's expectations, (3) the people follow false gods, (4) God is provoked to anger, (5) the Israelites experience oppression under foreign rule, (6) they cry out to God in their distress, (7) the Lord raises up a deliverer for the people, and (8) peace is restored to the land ([2:10–19](#)). On a simplified level, one may remember this cycle as *duplicity*, *disaster*, *distress*, and *deliverance*, or, using a different alliteration, *sin*, *suffering*, *supplication*, and *salvation*.

I. Generation Gathered ([Judges 2:6–9](#))

A. Dismissal (vv. [6–7](#))

6. After Joshua had dismissed the Israelites, they went to take possession of the land, each to their own inheritance.

The book of Joshua concludes with a parallel passage to this verse and the three that follow ([Joshua 24:28–31](#)). As his final recorded act of leadership, *Joshua* had called the twelve tribes of Israel together in Shechem to renew their covenant with God. The specifics of this covenant renewal are recorded in [Joshua 24:1–28](#) (see [Lesson 5](#)).

The departure of every man *to their own inheritance* refers to the land distribution that is described in [Joshua 13:8–19:51](#). Each tribe except Levi received a portion of Canaan in which to settle.

Until this point in Israel's history, the people have moved together as a cohesive whole. There has been evident unity under the leadership of Moses and Joshua. But now, for the first time, the Israelites are dispersed across a larger region as *each* departs to *take possession* of a slightly different portion of the *inheritance*.

What Do You Think?

Can we “do” faith on our own, or is formal Christian community necessary for faithful obedience to God?

Digging Deeper

How do [Acts 2:42–44](#); [Galatians 6:1–2](#); and [Hebrews 10:24–25](#) influence your answer?

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.

Piecing together various data points, *the lifetime of Joshua* ended around 1400 BC. Allowing twenty years or so for all the days of *the elders that outlived Joshua*, we come to the period of the judges, which began in roughly 1380 BC (see [Introduction](#)).

The Hebrew word translated *served* occurs in various contexts to depict subservience, either to other people (example: [Judges 9:28](#)) or as the worship of a deity. The writer intends the latter sense here. The word can also signal the worship of pagan gods (see [2:11](#), below). Service unto God was the original indication of God's faithfulness promised to Moses when God spoke to him through the burning bush ([Exodus 3:12](#)). The Israelites accepted their identity as God's people (“my treasured possession”) when they gathered at Mount Sinai to receive God's commands ([19:5](#); [20:1–17](#)). Under Joshua's leadership, *the people* worked for God and worshiped him as well. They continue faithfully for a generation.

The word *elders* does not signify age alone; the term also applies to local leadership. Elders adjudicate disputes and administer justice as community-recognized authorities (example: [Deuteronomy 21:18–21](#)). The elders who *outlived Joshua* most likely represent the end of the second generation after Egyptian bondage. The first generation—the generation of the exodus itself—was sentenced to forty years in the wilderness for lack of faith; only two people from that generation entered the promised land: Joshua and Caleb ([Numbers 14:20–24](#); [26:65](#); [32:10–13](#); [Deuteronomy 1:34–35](#)). Therefore, the second generation would be those who followed Joshua's leadership after Moses. Those of the second generation had crossed the Jordan River with him when God miraculously stopped the waters, and the riverbed became dry ground ([Joshua 3:9–17](#); [4:22](#)).

What Do You Think?

How are worship of God and service to God connected?

Digging Deeper

How do [Deuteronomy 10:12](#); [Psalm 100:2](#); and [Romans 12:1](#) affect your answer?

B. Death (vv. 8–9)

8. Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of a hundred and ten.

The book of Joshua describes Moses as *the servant of the Lord* more than a dozen times. We see that characterization echoed here, now applied to *Joshua* (compare [Joshua 24:29](#)). Scripture designates a handful of other people in a similar way. These include Abraham ([Genesis 26:24](#)), David ([2 Samuel 7:5, 8](#)), Caleb ([Numbers 14:24](#)), and Job ([Job 1:8](#)). To be God's servant should be the goal of every believer.

Like his ancestor Joseph, Joshua dies at *a hundred and ten years old*. Interestingly, their ages are each recorded twice ([Genesis 50:22, 26](#); [Joshua 24:29](#); [Judges 2:8](#)). Someone who lives that long today is called a “supercentenarian.”

9. And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Heres in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.

This verse repeats [Joshua 24:30](#) almost word for word. Joshua is *buried* in the place he personally inherited after the allotment of lands to the tribes ([Joshua 19:49–50](#)). He is buried *in the hill country of Ephraim* because he is from the tribe of Ephraim ([1 Chronicles 7:22–27](#)). The allotment of land for this tribe is described in [Joshua 16:5–9](#). It was a relatively small area, given that Ephraim was the second smallest of the twelve tribes ([Numbers 26:12–56](#)).

The precise location, including *Mount Gaash*, is disputed (compare [2 Samuel 23:30](#)).

II. Generation Grown **([Judges 2:10–15](#))**

A. Disobedience (vv. [10–13](#))

10. After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel.

A generational shift occurs, and the first element in “the Judges cycle” emerges (see [Lesson Context](#)). The reference to *that whole generation* applies to the second generation of the exodus; the phrase *another generation* refers to the third since escaping Egypt (see commentary on [Judges 2:7](#), above). The text poetically notes the deaths of those in the second generation as being *gathered to their ancestors*. Similar descriptions are found in [Genesis 49:33](#), [2 Kings 22:20](#), etc.

The new generation hasn't experienced God's miraculous works in the same way as either the first or second generations. A breakdown seems to have occurred: the second generation failed to transfer what they knew about *the Lord* to their children in a way that compelled them to accept and live by it (contrast [Deuteronomy 6:6–7](#)).

The word *knew* in this context points beyond information in and of itself. It includes the concepts of recognition and acknowledgment. This new generation is not unaware of the Lord, but the people do not pledge their undivided loyalty to him as their God. For example, Eli's sons, who were priests, certainly knew God's requirements, yet they failed to obey him ([1 Samuel 2:12–17](#)). The same Hebrew word translated as “knew” in our passage is translated as “had no regard” in [1 Samuel 2](#) when referring to these unfaithful priests.

What Do You Think?

What is the role of [Psalm 78](#) in the spiritual life of the Israelites?

Digging Deeper

What are you purposefully doing to shape the understanding, belief, faithlife, and moral choices of the next generation?

11. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals.

A form of the phrase *did evil in the eyes of the Lord* occurs dozens of times in the Old Testament. In the book of Judges, such behavior signals the second aspect of “the ‘Judges cycle’” (see [Lesson Context](#); compare [Judges 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1](#)). It refers primarily to idolatry (examples: [1 Kings 11:6–7; 2 Kings 21:1–5](#)). Prior to the judges, Scripture uses the saying to characterize the Israelites who died in the wilderness because of doubt, fear, and a lack of faith in God’s deliverance ([Numbers 32:13](#)).

The phrase *the Israelites* refers to the third generation of God’s people counted from their release from Egypt, the new generation presented in the previous verse. Although God claims them as his children, this new generation repeats the rebellion of their ancestors, ignoring warnings the Lord gave about forsaking him for other gods ([Exodus 20:3–5; Deuteronomy 4:25–26](#)). God is aware of the evil they do; he sees what is happening despite any belief otherwise ([Psalms 10:11; 94:7](#)). The Israelites’ acts are not hidden from him. God is watching and evaluating his people in his wisdom.

The word *Baal* here is plural in the original language. It refers to fictitious gods known individually by the same designation, which means “lord” or “master.” Among the Canaanites, the Baals are gods of storms, weather, and fertility. Since agriculture was a fundamental building block of ancient Near Eastern society, Baal was understandably popular. Baal generally represents all Canaanite gods or the various local manifestations of Baal present in the region. Baal is the most frequently mentioned false god that the Israelites rebelliously worship throughout the Old Testament. Ancient people worshiped Baal to receive agricultural abundance; therefore, the Israelites’ idolatry is directly connected to whom they choose to credit for their provision and prosperity.

What Do You Think?

Are false gods present in modern society? If yes, list examples.

Digging Deeper

What tools has God given believers to overcome the temptation of worshiping false gods? What strategies will you personally implement to protect yourself?

12a. They forsook the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them.

The action implied by the word *forsook* in the book of Judges includes the concept of abandonment and the replacement of that which is abandoned with something else (compare [Judges 2:13; 10:6, 10, 13](#)). The Israelites of this third generation do what the second generation swore not to do ([Joshua 24:16](#)). God is faithful, but the Israelites are not (compare [Judges 2:1](#)).

The text commemorates God, who rescued the people from bondage in *Egypt*. After setting them free, God identified Israel as his covenant people and himself as their God ([Exodus 6:6–7](#)). He is the *God of their ancestors*—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ([Exodus 3:6](#)). This designation should tie Israel's generations together as it speaks to God's faithfulness. But God knew in advance what his people would do as they lived among the land's inhabitants ([Exodus 23:32–33](#)).

The Israelites succumb to the temptation of other gods because the people *around them* negatively influence them. The Israelites' actions exemplify a theme that spans from Genesis to Revelation: allegiance versus assimilation.



Visual for [Lesson 6](#). Place the visual in a prominent place. Point to the visual and ask students to consider which way their lives are headed.

Differing Priorities

Years ago, I worked for a well-known credit card company. A prominent businessman owned it and purchased the controlling shares to save the business from going bankrupt. He cared deeply for the company and all its employees, nurtured it, and worked hard to keep it healthy. When the busi-

nessman died, his son became the CEO. He callously sold the company to the highest bidder, who closed the doors for good.

Similarly, when the founder of a well-known discount mart died, the employees who worked under him reported a decline in integrity after his son assumed leadership. They missed the family-like atmosphere the founder developed and encouraged. Under the son, they felt they were no longer known and valued. They sensed a significant shift in priorities.

In both situations, the sons did not know their employees like their fathers did. The new generation made business decisions based on values and priorities other than those of their fathers.

Whether we look at a modern case like those above or one such as in [Judges 2:10–12](#), we naturally wonder, “*Whose fault was it?*” Perhaps those in the older generation bear some responsibility for not having instilled proper values in their children (compare [Deuteronomy 6:6–9](#)). Yet, history affirms that people are personally responsible for their actions. For many reasons, a new generation of Israelites emerged who did not know the Lord, and evil resulted. How does this stark fact affect your priorities? What might you need to reprioritize or reorder?

—PM

12b–13. They aroused the LORD’s anger because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.

God’s displeasure at his people’s disobedience results in *anger*. The Hebrew word translated here as *aroused* means to be vexed, sorrowful, and troubled. The people’s choice to turn away from God grieves him.

Ashtoreths is the plural for the Canaanite goddess Astarte, who is associated with war, sexuality, and healing. She is imagined to be the consort of Baal, and some people believe that together they bring fertility to the land and humans.

B. Defeat (vv. 14–15)

14. In his anger against Israel the LORD gave them into the hands of raiders who plundered them. He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist.

Anger is often described as “burning” (*hot*) in Hebrew. The root image is a blast of hot air from the nostrils. The Lord’s anger is caused by Israel’s failure to be exclusively loyal to him. Israel’s violation of the covenant is serious. Hundreds of years later, this continuing tendency will be likened to sexual immorality ([Jeremiah 3:6–10](#); [9:2](#); [23:10–14](#); [Hosea 2:1–6](#); [4:12–13](#)).

Consequence kicks in as God gives his people over to oppression by *their enemies*. God had warned Israel through Moses that they would face such domination by adversarial nations as a curse for their disobedience ([Deuteronomy 28:15–68](#); [31:16–21](#)). Therefore, they face *raiders* who loot and plunder their wealth. They become subject to local rulers and live in oppression.

When the Israelites entered Canaan, the hearts of the land’s pagan kings “melted” in fear ([Joshua 5:1](#)). The Canaanites lost their courage because of God’s power and might. They yielded to the Israelites both voluntarily and involuntarily. This time, God gives the Canaanites the upper hand.

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.

The declaration regarding *the hand of the Lord* is an anthropomorphism, which means using a human characteristic to describe God. Other texts use this technique regarding God's eyes and ears ([Psalm 34:15](#)), his mouth ([Isaiah 62:2](#)), and his face ([Exodus 33:20](#)). Here the word *hand* signifies God's power and might. His hand brought Israel out of Egypt; Scripture declares this in other places by using the words *hand* and *arm* as near synonyms (examples: [Deuteronomy 4:34](#); [5:15](#); [26:8](#)). His hand was with Israel when they entered the promised land ([Joshua 4:24](#)), but now it is turned *against them to defeat them*. This verse doesn't refer to a moral evil since God doesn't tempt people to sin ([James 1:13](#)). Rather, it relates to physical distress; the same Hebrew word is translated as "adversities" in [1 Samuel 10:19](#).

What Do You Think?

How does God correct waywardness in modern times?

Digging Deeper

What are the consequences of sin? How do [Isaiah 59:2](#) and [Romans 6:23](#) impact your answer?

Coverage

Hailstorms in Colorado are sometimes so severe that insurance companies only write policies with a high deductible for hail damage. This requirement can come as a rude shock to the unaware. The financially wise person reads the policy beforehand, so there are no surprises.

The generation of Israelites in view here had one of two problems: either they weren't aware of the costly "deductible" present in God's covenant (the Law of Moses), or they *were* aware of it but chose to ignore it. Either way, the price of their folly was inexcusable. They decided to do what was evil and suffered the consequences.

As modern believers, we also face consequences for disobedience. God is our ultimate insurance and assurance; he is our protector and provider. Thankfully, Jesus Christ purchased God's coverage for you; by Jesus, our "sins are covered" ([Romans 4:7](#)). How much time do you spend studying the terms of that coverage?

—PM

Conclusion

A. Spirals of Life

There may or may not be a valid indictment against the older generation for failure to adequately teach their descendants ([Deuteronomy 6:20–25](#)). Yet, the choice to follow God must be personally accepted and enacted. Unfortunately, humans are inconsistent and bent toward sinfulness. We make bad choices and fail to follow God's rules. Like the Israelites, we struggle to do what is right and often

find ourselves stuck in negative spirals.

The book of Judges depicts a series of vicious downward spirals that exemplify the problem (see [Lesson Context](#)). Wherever God's people dwell, there is a temptation to absorb negative aspects of the cultural environment. These cultural pressures tend to pull us away from allegiance to God. The tension clouds our vision and degrades our decision-making. When God's Word is not kept faithfully in the forefront of our minds and a relationship with him is not a priority, we fail. What are you doing to protect yourself from the sinful influences of the surrounding culture? How can you support the next generation in resisting as well?

B. Prayer

Father God, our provider, protector, and deliverer—thank you for giving us examples of both what to do and what to avoid. Help us remember who you are and recount the miraculous and wonderful things you have done. Empower us to set aside temptations, false gods, and cultural tendencies that will corrupt us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Every person must choose God deliberately and personally.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible Student](#) (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the [NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition](#)).

Into the Lesson

Welcome participants to class and invite the group to play “Telephone Pictionary.” Ask all participants to stand in a single-file line. Secretly show the person at the back of the line (Participant A) a simple geometric drawing (house, cat, flower, etc.). Instruct Participant A to trace the drawing with their finger on the back of the person in front of them (Participant B). Ask Participant B to secretly determine what they think the picture is and trace it on the back of the person in front of them (Participant C). Continue the game this way until the drawing reaches the front of the line. Ask the last participant to draw the picture they received on the board. Then reveal the original image and compare them. Gather for group discussion and ask, “What was the most challenging part of this activity?”

Say, “As we study today’s passage, consider why it is important for us to pass along the legacy of our faith in a way that is received accurately, remembered appropriately, and shared faithfully.”

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read [Judges 2:6–9](#) aloud. Divide participants into two groups: the **First Gen** and the **Second Gen**. Have the **First Gen** read [Deuteronomy 1:26–39](#) and the **Second Gen** read [Joshua 1:1–11, 16–18](#). Instruct each group to identify the main points in their passage. Say, “The Deuteronomy verses are about the first generation, who came out of Egypt; the verses in Joshua are about the second generation, who grew up in the wilderness.” Draw three columns on the board and label them “1st generation,” “2nd generation,” and “3rd generation.” Ask each group to report their main points and write them in the appropriate column.

Ask a volunteer to read [Judges 2:10–13](#) aloud. Complete the third column as a class. Invite participants to discuss: 1—What benefits or blessings did this generation lack? (*Expected answer:* They did not experience the miracles of the plagues, deliverance, provision, and victories first-hand.) 2—What benefits or blessings did this generation enjoy? (*Expected answer:* They saw the fulfillment of God’s promises.)

Option. Divide participants into small groups of three or four and distribute the “How Not to Forget” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Allow several minutes for groups to complete this exercise as indicated. Then allow groups to share their reflections with the class.

Ask a volunteer to read [Judges 2:14–16](#) aloud. Draw a horizontal line below the words that populate your three columns, creating six sections on the board. In the empty lower sections, ask a representative from each group to come forward as a scribe. Ask these volunteers to write what God did for the first and second generations because of their response to him. Then have the whole group discuss the consequences the third generation faced (consider [Judges 2:14–16](#)).

Into Life

Pass out index cards and pens. Ask participants to find a partner. Instruct pairs to read [Deuteronomy 30:11–20](#) quietly to themselves and then share words or phrases that stand out as significant to them and why. Using this passage as an inspiration, ask each participant to write a personal statement of faith on their index card. Encourage partners to pray for one another, asking the Lord to help them remain strong and steadfast in their commitment to him.

Alternative. Distribute the “Personal Commitment” exercise from the activity page. Give participants a few minutes to work on the exercise. Encourage participants to post their responses somewhere they will see them regularly and be reminded of their commitment.

To print the reproducible activity page, simply click the highlighted text below to create a pdf file on your hard drive. Then open the pdf file in Acrobat Reader and print.

[Activity Page \(October 11—A Faithless Generation\)](#)
