

A Generation Arose that Did Not Know the Lord

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Students of Scripture are very familiar with the wonderful leadership of Joshua. Stepping into the sandals of Moses, this great man of faith led Israel into the land of Canaan. When Israel had secured the land promised by God (Jos. 23:14), Joshua delivered these powerful words to the people:

If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

Joshua 24:15

In response to these inspiring and challenging words, we read:

The people answered and said, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods.”

Joshua 24:16

Israel’s commitment to serve the Lord is repeated in the verses that follow (Joshua 24:17-28). However, when the scene essentially continues in the book of Judges, we find a very troubling situation. Of the generation under Joshua’s faithful leadership, we read this:

All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them **who did not know the Lord**, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel.

Judges 2:10 (Emphasis Mine)

What happened? Why did the next generation get to a point where they knew not the Lord, nor the work which we He had done for Israel?

This verse is often interpreted as if the fault lay completely upon the previous generation. It is said, they failed in their responsibilities of teaching the next generation about all God had done for them. However, is this an accurate conclusion?

The Bible illustrates the importance of teaching the word of God to our children (Deut. 6:7; Eph. 6:4; 2 Tim. 3:15). We even see dangers when we fail to properly teach them. For example, consider Eli and his sons. Eli was the high priest and spiritual leader in Israel for forty years (1 Sam. 4:18). However, of his sons who were also priests, we are told that they did not know the Lord (1 Sam. 2:12). Eli himself is rebuked by God for not properly dealing with his son’s iniquity (1 Sam. 3:13-14).

Is this what happened with the generation that followed Joshua and his generation? Though it is often understood as such, perhaps we are reading more into the text here than we should. In doing so, we assign the blame to the previous generation. However, notice these words of God as spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth;
For the Lord speaks,

“Sons I have reared and brought up,
But they have revolted against Me.
“An ox knows its owner,
And a donkey its master’s manger,
But Israel does not know,
My people do not understand.”

Isaiah 1:2-3

Was the faithlessness of Israel due to something God had done wrong, or neglected, as their “Father”? Of course not! In the same way, how many of us have known faithful members of the Lord’s church, who diligently and consistently taught their children about God, the Bible, and the church of Jesus Christ, only to see their children abandon the Lord as adults? Was the falling away of their children the fault of the parents? If so, what more could they have done? What more could God have done to make sure Israel remained faithful?

Let us remember we all possess free will. Each generation, regardless of the teaching they received as children, must decide for themselves if they will serve the Lord.

Let us pray that the generation following us, and subsequent generations following their time, will declare just like Joshua:

“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!”