

Judges 2:6-23

Intro January 14, 2007 Spiritual ADD

Life distracts us every day. Some call this the *tyranny of the urgent* or others *attention deficit*; but we all battle the forces of nature that conspire against us. We are drawn into the fray of juggling life's demands while keeping our minds on things above. Let's face it; it's not easy to think heavenly thoughts while we have so many earthly tasks. While many struggle with distractions you may identify yourself as having Attention Deficit Disorder, commonly known as ADD. How do you know if you're ADD?

- * If you finally find your pen in your backpack, only look up to see the rest of the class are no longer in the room ... you just might be ADD.
- * If you haven't sent out the baby announcements yet...and you're at his commencement. ... you just might be ADD.
- * If you lose your car keys before you even get out of the car! ... you just might be ADD.
- * If you realize that you've forgotten to schedule the sitter for tomorrow night and your 7 year old informs you that SHE took care of it yesterday! ... you just might be ADD.

While professionals debate the classification of ADD in kids and adults, at our core we all struggle with a spiritual form of ADD, that is, the bright shiny objects of this world snatch our interest so that God must grab our attention back. While I am not advocating that our sinful condition is reduced to a mental health issue, I think the framework can help us better understand why our lives are in such disarray.

The sparkling and attractive objects of our fallen world distract us from the life God has called us to live. What we need is not a dose of Ritalin to give us focus, but the cross of Christ to redirect our minds and hearts to God's desire for our lives. But to see the answer, we must see the need.

As we have begun this study of Judges in the Old Testament, we are transported to a time at the end of the second millennium before Christ. Israel has left slavery in Egypt under the leadership of Moses; they have crossed the Jordan and begun the conquest of the Promised Land under Joshua.

But Moses and Joshua are now gone and there is much work still to do in Canaan. The first chapter paints the historical overview of the book, describing the partial obedience Israel gave to God, as they rid the land of some of the inhabitants, but others they merely subjugated as slaves, so that the temptation to follow the gods of land remained strong.

The angel of the Lord reminded them of God's covenantal faithfulness despite their breaking the covenant. There, at Bochim, the people wept, for they were told that the presence of these other people would be thorns in their sides and their gods a snare.

Now in chapter 2 we are given a second overview. Chapter 1 describes the historical events and 2 the theological, giving us more details how they were attracted to the bright shiny objects of the Promised Land. What we are given is a pattern, a downward spiral, for they are about to suffer 350 years of ADD ... apostasy ... distress ... discipline. READ Judges 2:6-23.

The pattern is set. As God's people wander off, distracted by other gods, God grabs their attention through distress so that they are disciplined. We, just like Israel, are too pleased with ourselves and our world to take notice any other way.

How does God grab our attention? Not by chasing us with pleasures, but showing us that what we think will please us only pains us in the end. He turns our trinkets into troubles so that we know where our attention should be. Why does God have to grab our attention.

There are three reasons. Because our generation is fleeting, our society is fascinating and our spirit is fickle.

GOD GRABS OUR ATTENTION BECAUSE OUR GENERATION IS FLEETING 2:6-10

The past generation is fleeting into irrelevancy

This recap takes us back to the early conquest when all went so well. The prior generation did do it just right, the people took possession of the land and they served the Lord.

While all that is true, this is not to say they did not have their own issues. It is not as though the author is immortalizing the past generation, for the reader of Joshua knows that not was all rosy in that day. Achan was attracted to the shiny objects of Jericho and hid the forbidden objects under his tent, only to be discovered after the debacle at Ai.

Yet, when all was done, the people committed themselves to God. That generation saw God work and they responded by obedient service. They struggled, but ended well. They had seen God's hand at work and responded by trusting the Lord.

But that generation is now gone. Joshua is dead and in time all those who knew Joshua would be gone. The strong finish of the previous generation is irrelevant to the present generation. Their status is summed up in v10: they did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel.

At first glance it seems that the next generation is blamed for being born at the wrong time. Is it their fault they did not see the Jordan part or the walls of Jericho fall? No, they are not being blamed for not seeing what happened before, but for not seeing what God was doing in their own day. We can not rest our standing before God based on the benefits the previous generation.

Because your grandfather was a man of faith is of little benefit for you if you do not know the Lord and know the work he has done for His people. That generation is gone – what is happening today? But what is also important to realize is that this generation is fleeting, too.

The present generation is fleeting into obscurity

In verse 10 we are introduced to the next generation of the time of the judges. They do not know the Lord or his works. What we see take place is the fearsome second-generation syndrome. God was a second hand experience for them, so a lukewarm complacency set in. Now apathetic about biblical truth they soon will turn from God, apostatize – the first phase of spiritual ADD.

It is not that they hated God. They were apathetic toward him, a response much more deadly than hate. Unable to coast on the prior generation's coattails, they spiraled down hill.

"Here is a sober lesson. Even after times of spectacular revival, reformation, or covenantal renewal, the people of God are never more than a generation or two from infidelity, unbelief, massive idolatry, disobedience, and wrath."¹

We see here that as we struggle with our own sins, we can neither blame our parents for not doing a better job, nor can we ignore the legacy we leave behind. The problem with spiritual ADD is that we too quickly blame the apostasy on our parents and leave our children to deal with the distress and discipline. That intense self-centeredness is concerned only with itself.

For this reason we must take seriously not to become so captivated with our world that we not neglect two important considerations

First, if you were raised in a Christian home, do not neglect the heritage which God gave you. This is especially important for the younger generation, that you own the covenant your parents made for you at baptism. That you make their faith your own and know the works that God has done for you at Calvary, not being ignorant like this generation in the Promised Land.

In your attraction to the world, be careful not to forget what God has done in your life.

Second, for all us here, young and old, our generations are fleeting. We will be the prior generation in 20 or 50 years. What legacy will we leave for those that follow?

This is a commitment to our covenant family, that we not go chasing the shiny objects of the world, the pursuit of pleasure and personal peace, but that we engage our children in spiritual growth. If we live before them the desire for the things of this world and show coldness toward God, how can we expect them to go any deeper?

This commitment flies in the face of the individualism of American society which has infiltrated the church so that there is a false spirituality that seems to make the family unit the be all and end all of God's covenant working. The shiny object ceases to be the covenant community and becomes just me and my family.

The father becomes the de facto pastor and the kids the congregation. With the rise and benefit of home schooling there is the danger of making the family an idol and not releasing our children into the covenant community. There is a duty we have toward one another's children that can not be fulfilled unless we see this need.

This attraction to this world may be the idols of our own kids, as we apostatize from our covenantal duty by worshipping their immediate pleasures, thus allowing a creeping Mormonism to control our actions.

Hindering your kids from youth group, refusing to make use of the beneficial material from Sunday School, sets them up to find the world much more attractive, pleasing.

Parents scratch their heads as to how to catechize their children, all the while every week memory verses and work papers are sent home. They want good role models for their kids but keep them at home or in sports. The generation is fleeting and will God have to grab your attention through troubles in your family until you make the necessary changes?

Society fascinates us with powerful pleasures

As the generations fly past, a central reason we see God so little is because we find our society so fascinating. The word *fascinating* comes from the Latin meaning to enchant or bewitch and in English used to mean to cast a spell. The culture's incantation brings us to the refrain we see in Judges 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1 ... the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

What the evil was needs some unpacking, but with it I give a caution as to the content. This caution applies throughout this series, as God's Word does not mince words. That God needs to grab our attention is because the fascination society offers is hard to resist. The Baals of v11, the other gods of v12 and the Baals and Ashtaroth of v13 point to the power of society.

Canaan was an agrarian society, where crops demanded rain and the soil must be fertile. The chief deity, Baal, was the god of the storm and fertility. Ashtaroth or Ashtart was Baal's companion, a name brought by the Philistines, new inhabitants in the land around the time Israel began their conquest. The Philistines came from the Greek isles and brought with them the Greek pantheon, and the Aphrodite, goddess of love and war became Ashtart, the lover of Baal.

In Canaanite theology and agriculture the fertility of the land depended upon the sexual relationship between Baal and his consort. But the Canaanite faithful didn't simply sit back and say, "let Baal do it." There was no "let-go-and-let Baal" thinking. Instead their verse was: "Serve Baal with gladness, all ye glands!" Hence the Canaanites practiced sacred prostitution as a part of their worship. The activity of the holy whore at the temple would encourage the divine couple (Mr. and Mrs. Baal) do the same thing, thus bringing rain, grain, wine and oil.

Like mom coercing a child to blow his nose, places the tissue up to her nose and makes a blowing sound, and then to the kids, hoping he will imitate the procedure and catch on. It is the same idea with Baal and Astart.²

At first glance, this is so foreign to us. There is nothing like it in our culture, but while the exact connection does not exist, the principles are consistent.

The culture surrounding Israel offered a view of the world in which they, through personal pleasure, could make a positive contribution to society. Were the crops failing? Go to the temple and enjoy yourself and all will be well. Escape through pleasure and all will be well.

You've got money problems? Check out Potawatomi and you can both have fun and make some money. Not your kind of temple worship? How about just doing the rain dance called overtime at the expense of the family, multiple jobs and leave the constant care of the kids in someone else's hands. Perhaps work is overwhelming and you know family is important. You may go to the temple of personal pleasure called the weekend and consume yourself at the expense of community worship.

The key is that society has always fascinated us with pleasures which promise us the power to create our own existence. The pagan gods had to be coerced, manipulated, whereas the Lord God calls us to trust him.

Society fascinates us with destructive pleasures

The old gods are still with us. They have simply changed their clothes so that they merge more easily into the modern crowd. They still claim to provide meaning to life, to explain the universe, and to provide the basis for personal security. They still demand wholehearted commitment from their worshippers.³

It is for this reason their destructive power should never be ignored. They offer pleasure and seemingly ask for so little in return ... other than eternal and undying gratitude.

We are entranced by the specter of pleasure, so God grabs our attention to the destructive powers by showing us the lie that society gives to us.

We think we get so much and give so little when we follow the world. The Israelites thought the same, but notice what they received in return ... v15 the very people they were fascinated by plundered them. God grabs our attention when in his righteous anger gives us over to the very pleasures we think we'll receive and they rob us off all we have.

Who hasn't thought the payoff for neglecting time spent with God is worth the exchange of more hours at work or in front of tube. But those deities we worship will plunder us of even more than we ever thought we'd give to them.

Are you fascinated with being told you matter because of the clothes you wear, the job you hold? The self-confidence boost you receive today will be the critique tomorrow, as the world steals your self image with the passing years or the missed opportunities.

GOD GRABS OUR ATTENTION BECAUSE OUR SPIRIT IS FICKLE

2:16-23

Our fickle spirit must be tested

The pattern of the judges is the pattern of our own lives. We may determine that we will be the generation who will trust and obey God like none ever has. We could vow to cease our fascination with society's sensuous amusements and be wholly dedicated to God. But in the end of the chapter we see why this is so impossible. Our hearts need to be tested not to prove our ability, but our need.

The reason we can not just try harder is seen in vv16-23 – that our spirits are fickle. We are easily deceived. It's easier telling the ADD kid to sit still and concentrate all the while the world spins around than for you and I to force our hearts to do what is right.

Our fickle spirits vacillate not just on superficial choices, but are whores who chase after any warm embrace. The language of v17 is strong, but should not be missed. While God would send judges to save them, they would not listen to them. Why? They whored after other gods.

This term is far stronger than simply saying they committed adultery, but is reserved for those who habitually open themselves for personal gain. They are hardened women who seek not commitment but cash. Self-interest is the motivating factor.

And like the prostitute there is little thought of love, but of immediate benefit, so they can not imagine why God is so vexed at their actions. But God demands exclusivity of a marriage. There are no options for other lovers.

When God sends a judge who rescues them from themselves, there is momentary reprieve (18) but when the judge died, they went right back to their old ways.

Like little Kevin in Home Alone, he is a pain to his family while they are around, but he is restrained. Yet when the family leaves and the house is his, he gorges himself on junk, jumps on the beds, and runs through the house screaming like a banchi. There is nothing in us to restrain us. What is truly sad in v19 is that the next generation drops to even greater depths of sin. There is generation degeneration, as one generation out rebels the previous one. There is no restraint other than the possible loss of pleasure.

The reason God left the nations in the land was to test Israel (22), as to whether they will take care to do what is right.

For the same reason God leaves trials and troubles in our lives to reveal the fickleness of our own hearts. Who here when a difficult day descends on us falls to our knees. More often we collapse in a chair and sigh that God's abandoned us.

Our fickle spirit must be changed

It is not enough to be regulated, we must be regenerated. We have a hint at God's answer here in Judges; the fullness of the picture comes as Scripture unfolds the picture of Christ.

Since the grip of sin is too great for us to break, that we don't even really want it broken, God acts even before we ask. This is pictured for us in v16. In the midst of their sin and distress God raises up judges who saves them out of the hands of the very plunderers whom he sent to torment them. He is moved by their groaning (18), but groaning is not repentance.

Mercy precedes repentance, grace brings change in us. While they played the whore, God prepared a Savior. There would come one from among them who would not give amnesty from further torment, but who would take on their sin and wed them to himself.

The darkness of Judges mirrors the darkness of all of our lives. It is in the midst of that dark world that the light of Christ shines all the brighter. The incredible grip of sin on the human heart diverts our attention every day from God's design for our lives to the pleasures of sin. Yet, here is where the gospel shines all the brighter.

God grabs our attention through the troubles we face every day to remind us that we have no hope with the pleasures of this world. When and where there is apostasy there is distress and in that distress there is discipline. Our spiritual ADD is answered by a Savior, who turns us toward him every day we get diverted and calls us anew to see Him as the lover who will not let us go. When you find yourself entranced by the world's allure, know that Christ too was tempted by this world's power, but where we fail, Christ succeed, and his refusal to be fascinated by the world and whose spirit was resolute to die for us – we there have hope.

¹ D. A. Carson, *For the Love of God*, vol. 1, [Crossway: 1998], July 19.

² This section owes much to Dale Ralph Davis, *Judges: Such a Great Salvation*, Christian Focus, p 32.

³ Iain Provan *To Highlight All Our Idols: Worshipping God in Nietzsche's World. Ex Auditu* 15 2000