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THE THEOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF JUDGES IN THE SECOND GENERATION: GIVING UP IS NOT AN OPTION!

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ABSTRACT

The tension between the first and second generation of immigrants in our churches is increasing. The large gap that should be closing continues to open. The Bible contains important biblical principles that leaders of the Church can use to help close the gap between the generations in immigrant churches.

INTRODUCTION

The second generation of immigrants grew up watching their parents have only three things in life: work, home, and church. Thus, they complain that the first generation is *old-fashioned*. They seem to be dissatisfied with the lifestyle of the first-generation (Salzaman and Ebaugh 2000, 122). When existential questions arise such as, “Where do I come from?” the answer given is often expressed in the metaphorical language of kinship with terms like “hometown, fatherland, mother tongue, and blood ties” (Portes and Rumbaut 2021, 161.) This creates difficulties for the second generation, including in the church.

Scripture highlights people as immigrants. Abram’s call is an example that shows God’s call made Abram an immigrant. The Lord said to Abram: “Go from your country” (Gen 12:1). The first words from God to Abraham were: לֶךְ-לְךָ, *lek-leka*. This word is difficult to translate because of the Hebrew thought. The construction of this word is *Lek* לֶךְ, which means “to walk” and *leka* is constructed with the preposition לְ (lamed) and the suffix (לְךָ), which suggests that, because of the preposition, it is possible to translate this “go *from* your country” and at the same time say: “go *to* your country.” According to Old Testament scholar Jacques Doukhan, “The intensity of this going is reflected in the

repetition of the keyword ‘go.’ which occurs seven times in this context” (2022, 17).

In addition to Abraham, the Bible reader will find more examples of immigration throughout Scripture. Some chose to leave by themselves and find better places. Immigration raises multiple issues, including the impact on the second generation. This paper will focus on the parallels between the issues for the second generation after entering Canaan under Joshua’s leadership, and today’s second-generation immigrants. In Joshua’s day, the second generation served Baals, Ashtoreths, and various other gods. Nevertheless, the Lord raised judges who saved them.

As a second-generation immigrant, I’ve drawn on my own experience, but also the testimonies of young people I’ve met. I then measured that with Bible principles. Here are three biblical principles I think would be most helpful when it comes to reaching second-generation immigrants in North America today. The first is a merciful God for the new generation. The second is the role of judges. The third is to turn the hearts of the children to their parents, and vice versa.

1. *My Recommendations with the Second Generation*: I propose to close the gap between

the immigrants and the second generations through the principles presented in the Bible. At the same time, I hope to motivate more people to research sociology, psychology, social work, and other related fields to use every potential area in which we could help this generation.

THE MERCIFUL GOD FOR THE NEW GENERATION

From the very beginning, Israel was a nation that knew it had been chosen, called, and set apart by God. The glue that cemented the relationship between God and Israel and that has bound them to each other through thick and thin is love. God demonstrates his love for his people through his determination to keep the oath that he swore to their forefathers—that they would continue to exist and be his people until the end of time (Bray 2012). Indeed, love is more than a feeling. God is love, which means that love belongs to or is the possession of God (Sproul 2012). After Joshua’s death, God’s merciful love did not give up on this second generation that “*did not know God.*”

The second generation after Joshua’s death abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers (Judg 2:12). Nevertheless, they knew God and asked him for help (Judg 2:15). This generation went through several cycles that moved from sin—idolatry, to servitude—oppression by a foreign power, to supplication—cry to the Lord, to salvation—the Lord raised up a judge, to silence—a period of rest until the cycle began again after the death of the judge (Boa 2011, 58).

Hamley highlighted the same cycle (2021). Between these cycles God acted with grace and mercy freely and completely, opening a window into the narrator’s theology of God. God’s love gets spelled out in word and action in both the Old Testament (Exod 34:6-7) and the New Testament (1 John 4:8). It is not only that God is love, but he acts according to his nature. This includes sending judges to the wayward second generation that entered Canaan.

The judges had two main characteristics: 1) They were raised up by God; and 2) They delivered Israel. God did not give up on the second generation! The *groaning* is an inchoate response to pain. The verb נ.ח.ם *naham*, translated *move to pity*, in the *nifal* is more usually translated as changing one’s mind or apologizing (Hamley 2021, 42-45). The absence of repentance in the text highlights God’s mercy and also suggests Israel’s spiritual poverty (Chisholm 2013). Even though the text mentions nothing about their repentance, God helped his people by sending

judges to protect them. God did not give up on his people. He kept fighting for them. The counsel taken from Scripture for the second generation is not to give up on them and at the same time be *naham*—moved to pity, repeatedly, in the same way God did.

What about second-generation immigrants today? Through interviews I heard statements such as this one from Salma Flores, “*I hate that leaders do not motivate me. I make mistakes but I do not feel Jesus’ grace in the church. That’s why I leave.*” Jennifer said, “*I will not return to the church. Elders were judging my hair, nails, and makeup, everything that I did was not good enough for them... So, I never want to know about the church again.*”

Many youth and young adult communities share the experiences of Salma and Jennifer. These communities need to be loved and protected because God loves them and he protects them. We may need to make this important change in order to follow God’s ideal love to share with the second generation of immigrants.

THE ROLE OF THE JUDGES

God raised up judges to serve the second generation of His people. What can we learn from them? Consider the structure of the book of Judges. The prologue and the epilogue show fights with the enemy and idolatry. In the middle of the book Gideon fought against the idolatry and Israel’s enemy (Way 2016). The center of the book suggests that the important role the judges played. In the middle of the chaos, the judges were protected God’s second generation.

When thinking of a judge, people usually think of a person who sits in a courthouse and makes decisions on legal cases. But in Old Testament times, judges were primarily known as military leaders who delivered the Israelites from their enemies. These individuals were used by God to rescue Israel. Thus, they were associated with saving, rescuing, and dispensing justice. Indeed, extra-biblical texts such as Mari, Ebla, Ugarit, Phoenicia, and Punic do attest to the use of terms cognate with the Hebrew “to judge” to describe provincial governors serving under a king whose duties included dispensing justice, maintaining order, collecting taxes, and providing information and hospitality (Boda 2022, 53).

Younger commented that the old gods are still with us. They have simply changed their clothes so that they merge more easily into the modern crowd (2021, 130). In the same way, judges are still with us to protect, guide, and lead God’s

people. God does not send judges to criticize people. The judge works as an instrument in God's hands because, as is suggested by the Scripture and the extra-biblical texts, judges are provincial governors serving under the king. That king represents God and he has a special work with this generation.

In theological terms, the judges in the book of Judges teach us the redemptive-historical dimension of the Old Testament (Younger 2021). This Biblical book begins by reflecting the grace of God and raising judges for the goodness of the second-generation community that did not know the Lord. Thus, understanding the functions of the judges within the context of the Bible makes a difference in our world. As Beldman proposed, "It is a story [Judges' stories] in which we find ourselves today" (2017, 111) maybe as the second generation or like a leader used by God.

The judges for the second generation bring hope. According to Barry Webb,

What hope is there for rebels and those who care deeply about them? What consolation is there for one generation that sees the next generation turn away from God? What hope is there for a Church or nation that abandons the Lord?... There is hope in this book. So those who must bear the pain of seeing others abandon the Lord are not alone. They stand with others who suffer as they do. And they stand with God and they hope in him (2015, 87).

Judges, as God's leaders, must bring peace to the second generation of immigrants and fight continuously to reach them so they can encounter God.

MY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE SECOND GENERATION

Here are three recommendations taken from Scripture that can be helpful to apply to this second generation of immigrants. The tension between first-generation immigrants and their children is real. These Bible tools could help close the gap.

1. First, local churches need comprehensive training to bridge the gap between U.S.-born Latinos and first-generation leadership. As Andrews Flores recommended in a previous 180° Symposium (2012), church pastors and leaders are in the ideal position to elaborate a plan to guide the first generation. This plan must help the first generation to understand

that they are judges who work in the churches and must be representative of God's image. This can be a reality if there is a comprehensive training program to close that gap. I consider that separating the worship services should be the last alternative.

2. Second, giving up is not an option. Pastors and leaders must train themselves through programs initiated by their conference. In this way they will have the capacity to confront this tension between the first and second generations. God was angry but he didn't give up on his people because he was moved to pity, *naham*, and sent judges so the people could be saved. In the same manner, it is important for leaders to not give up on the second generation. They need to have the capacity to resolve the gap between these generations, even if they face anger or disappointment along the way. That is God's call on our life. The biggest example of this is Christ's death on the cross.
3. Third, the book of Judges teaches us to fight against the devil and protect our people. It is important to have better tools to protect them. This could be possible if more people research areas such as sociology, psychology, and social work to use every potential field in which we could help this generation. It is not an easy job, but it is a call from God to use everything available to reach the second generation of immigrants.

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