

American Decency Association

PO Box 202, Fremont, MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org
Encouraging Christians to guard their hearts May 2018

What Judges Teaches the Church

By: Nathan W Bingham



And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel. (Judg. 2:10)

It seems incredible that it could happen. Only a generation after Joshua, Israel no longer knew the Lord. How is such a development possible?

This is a very important question, not just for the ancient Israelites, but for us. Churches, too, have seen sudden decline from one generation to another. How can we understand and prevent this kind of calamity?

The book of Judges provides a very clear answer to our questions. Its answer does not say every-

thing that might be said in general, but it does say specific, crucial things that we must ponder to understand both Israel's situation and our vulnerability.

To begin with, Judges shows us that Israel descended into calamity when it moved away from living by faith in the Word of God to living by sight in the wisdom and values of the world. As we see in Judges 2–3, Israel rapidly descended into gross sin and disobedience, serving the statues and altars of the Baals and intermarrying with those who did not worship the Lord. Idolatry and intermarriage are the great sins against which Joshua warned Israel again and again (Josh. 23:6–13). And with good reason, for these two great sins are interconnected. The one leads to and reinforces the other.

This descent into idolatry and intermarriage did not just happen, however. These gross sins were the end results of various compromises that Israel had made earlier. Israel had served the Lord faith-

fully in the opening of the book of Judges, but that begins to change at Judges 1:19, where we read, “And the Lord was with Judah, and he took possession of the hill country, but he could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain because they had chariots of iron.” It does not appear that the Israelites actually fought against the chariots of iron and were defeated; rather, it seems that they saw the chariots of iron and decided not to fight. That decision seems very reasonable and proper—to a people living by sight. Chariots of iron were the most powerful military weapon of that time.

Israel, however, was called to live by faith in the Word of God. The Word of God had come to her through Joshua, who said, “For you shall drive out the Canaanites, though they have chariots of iron, and though they are strong” (Josh. 17:18). Later in the book of Judges, we are shown how God kept His promise because Deborah and Barak were able to defeat Jabin, a king of the Canaanites, even though

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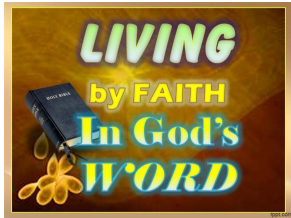
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he had nine hundred chariots of iron (Judg. 4:3). The Word of God reminds God's people that God's "delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the legs of a man, but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love" (Ps. 147:10–11).

We can see what went wrong—living by sight and not by faith—but that does not show us why things went wrong. For that, we must turn again to the words of Joshua:

But Joshua said to the people, "You are not able to serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm and consume you, after having done you good." (Josh. 24:19–20)

Now wait a moment, you

may be saying. If Israel was not able, how were they accountable? In what sense were they not able? What did Joshua mean when he said those words? He did not mean that the people were individually unregenerate and so were unable. He did not mean that they would not be perfect in keeping the law and so would be unable. He seems to have said that they would be leaderless—having neither Moses, nor Joshua, nor the elders who knew them—and so would not be led and guarded in faithfulness to the Word of God.

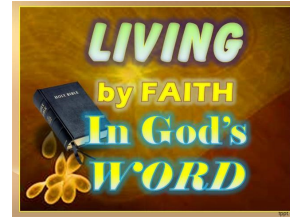
Joshua was recognizing that God would not give them another Moses or Joshua. He would give them judges who would be for them saviors (Judg. 2:16). But these judges would be only regional and temporary leaders. The lesson that God was teaching Israel—and us—in a variety of ways in the book of Judges is that the people needed a good and faithful king. Israel's problem was clear: "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (17:6).

Israel had to learn its need

for a king and in turn to yearn for a king—not a king like the nations as they would have in Saul, but a man after God's own heart, namely, David. Yet even David could not protect and lead God's people ultimately. He sinned, his house was divided, and he died. Who, then, is the leader—perfect, faithful, and undying—for God's people? Obviously, only Jesus is such a king.

What is the antidote, then, for the church and its problems? What will preserve a saving knowledge of God from generation to generation? It is following King Jesus according to His Word. Where the church fails to do so, it will find itself, like Israel, unable to live by faith rather than sight. But where the church turns to Jesus and follows ministers who faithfully preach His Word, it will live before Him. The book of Judges is a mirror held up to the church that forces us to ask ourselves, "Is Jesus our king and do we live by faith in His Word?" If the answer is yes, the church from generation to generation will know the Lord.

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