

UNIT 9

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THERE IS

NO FEAR OF GOD

BEFORE

THEIR EYES

“The Lord Raised Up a Judge”

by Matt Capps

As the people of God, we are faced with the daily choice between following God or following the spirit of our age. Too often we find that the spirit of the age is a powerful force like that of an undertow pulling unwitting victims out to sea. As a parent of small children, I am reminded of this often. There are times after my children make bad decisions that I ask them, “Why did you get in trouble?” I often hear this answer: “Well, everyone else was doing it, and I just followed along.” In response, I often remind my children, “Remember what I have taught you.” The reason all parents teach their children is for them to learn to discern right from wrong. The reason parents remind their children of their previous instruction and discipline their children for their rebellion is to make it clear that there are blessings in obedience and consequences to disobedience.

It is important to remember when reading the Old Testament that all instruction and warning from God flows from a heart of love, like a parent to a child. God warns

His people that spiritual decline—and eventually death—is inevitable if they do not remember God’s commands. We also need these reminders. It’s been said before, “People do not drift toward holiness.”¹ This was the heart of the message for ancient Israel in the time of the judges, a time when people did what was right in their own eyes (Judg. 21:25). Throughout the Book of Judges, we are introduced to the men and women God raised up in the midst of Israel for the task of rescuing and correcting His people. How did Israel get to this place?

A FAILURE OF TRUST

Decades earlier, Israel had crossed over the Red Sea on dry ground. After centuries of slavery in Egypt, they finally had been redeemed under the leadership of Moses and by the overwhelming power of the Lord. Later, after Moses’ death, Joshua became their leader, and they crossed the Jordan River on dry ground, yet another testament to God’s awesome power. The Israelites had entered the territory of the

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Canaanites, ancient enemies of God and His people. But at the same time, they had crossed over into their promised land, the inheritance the Lord had promised to give to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

So the Israelites set out to drive out their enemies, trusting again in the power of God, who had declared, "I will be with you." The Lord promised to give Israel the land, and He did. But the first chapter of Judges indicates the conquest was not complete; pockets of resistance remained. And then Joshua died, but no new leader had been appointed to take his place.

God's people had failed to drive out all the inhabitants of their land, and those who remained became a source of corruption. Israel's command from God to drive out the wicked Canaanites was the call of God for them to act as an agent of justice—God's justice. Instead, Israel often intermingled and even intermarried with the Canaanites, leading to their foreign gods becoming Israel's gods. Israel had failed to trust the promises of God and thus disobeyed the commands of God.

The great lesson we learn from Israel's digression is that sin is a serious matter. We see this depicted even more clearly in the downward spiral that is the Book of Judges. After Joshua's generation, another generation rose up who did not know the Lord or the works He had done for Israel. In forgetting God's commands and promises, this newer generation began to slip away from the faith. What began as toleration eventually became apostasy.

It was the judgment of God that allowed Israel to face trials from their enemies. At the same time, it was God who raised up judges to save Israel from complete and total judgment. What a beautiful picture—even while Israel was suffering under the punishment for their unfaithfulness, God was still moved by love to rescue them.

What we see in the Book of Judges is that even as the people spiraled downward and failed to remember God's word, God remained faithful to His word. God's faithfulness is seen even in His warnings. After all, every warning before the final judgment is an act of mercy.

FAILURE POINTING THE WAY FORWARD

One of the things we will quickly see about the Book of Judges is a predictable cycle or progression. This magnifies the patience and grace of God! Israel's pattern goes as follows: First, Israel does evil in the eyes of God by abandoning Him and serving idols. Second, Israel's actions provoke God's anger, and God sends a foreign enemy to oppress Israel. Then Israel cries out to God for deliverance. As always, God raises up a deliverer to save Israel from their enemies. For a time, Israel and the land experience rest and peace. It's not long, however, before the cycle repeats! What is predictable in Judges is that Israel will eventually be unfaithful to God's word. At the same time, it is also predictable that God will be faithful to His word. God raises up judge after judge to call the people to repentance to save them from their ways. But with every judge, the situation seems to get worse and worse. The judges come, they deliver, but cannot bring about the salvation and blessing that Israel needs.

We are not much different than Israel, are we? We haven't completely obeyed, always remembered, or perfectly

worshiped. We too have patterns of obedience and disobedience. Thankfully, in the New Testament, we are introduced to the true and faithful Judge, Jesus Christ, the One who can end the deadly cycle of rebellion and captivity. But Jesus is not only our Judge, He is also our Savior. Jesus took on the judgment that we deserve for our sin. Christ did this not so we would receive partial relief like Israel under the judges but so we would receive, by grace through faith, a permanent and eternal solution.

God gives us a Judge and Savior who does what we cannot do for ourselves. God gives us a Judge and Savior who achieved what Israel's judges could not. Like Israel, we are great sinners, but Christ is the true and faithful Judge and our even greater Savior.



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