



Time to Reflect

- How good are we at seeking God, and having sought the guidance of God how effective are we at obeying Him?
- What are some of the main differences and divisions within the Church today?

As we begin our study series looking at the Book of Judges, it's important to establish that it had been forty years since Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land. This was a time of triumph and expectancy. Yet, forty years later, a new generation had emerged and pockets of resistance from the Canaanites, Hittites and Philistines still existed. Here, at the very beginning of Judges, it was time for God's people to complete the conquest of the Promised Land.

"The book of Judges begins with a series of victories and defeats that took place after the death of Joshua...When Joshua was an old man, the Lord said to him, "You are old, advanced in years, and there remains very much land yet to be possessed" [Josh.13:1]. The people of Israel *owned* all the land, but they didn't *possess* all of it, and therefore they couldn't *enjoy* all of it."

(Warren. W. Wiersbe, *Be Available: OT Commentary Judges*, p19)

Specifics

- When Joshua was an old man, the Lord spoke to him. **"You are now very old, and there are still very large areas of land to be taken over"** (Joshua 13:1, NIV).
- The people of Israel were yet to take possession of all of the Promised Land and as such they couldn't enjoy all of what God had intended for them. Time had passed by and now, at the beginning of Judges, they were eventually moved to action.
- It is encouraging that, in the first instance, they sought God's guidance (v1) and they asked the Lord which tribe was to engage the enemy first. God answered that Judah was to go first and He offered a reassurance that He had **"...given the land into their hands"** (v2).
- How often we all press on ahead with our own plans and desires, at the expense of seeking the guidance and direction of God. Rick Warren issues a stark warning. **"The most common mistake Christians make in worship today is seeking an experience rather than seeking God."**
- Interestingly, the men of Judah invited the Simeonites (their fellow Israelites) to go into battle with them. Warren Wiersbe helpfully reminds us, **"Since Leah had given birth to Judah and Simeon, these tribes were blood brothers"** (Gen. 35:23).¹
- (v3-7) highlight that the attack was successful, and there is even a bizarre episode recorded about the cutting off of the big toes and thumbs of Adoni-Bezek. This, evidently, was common practice at the time (v7) and was designed to be an act of humiliation.

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *Judges: Be Available* (Colorado Springs: David. C. Cook, 1994), p19.

- This initial episode conveys the image of togetherness and unity within the tribes of Israel, and with Joshua as leader this was indeed the case. However, throughout the Book of Judges this does not appear to be the regular pattern.
- The lack of unity, which we will encounter in Judges, is so reflective of the Church in the world today. There are increasing numbers of denominations, splits occurring within churches, and so many differing opinions offered. Regularly, these differences are articulated loudly within the public sphere and only serve to discourage unchurched and dechurched people from connecting or reconnecting with the Church and the Christian faith.
- It is important to realise, however, that unity in and of itself was the not the reason for the first wave of victory in Judges.
- (v19) offers a clear reason why the tribe of Judah was successful. **“The Lord was with the men of Judah.”** Human strategy was not enough to bring about success. The blessing of God was of paramount importance.
- We are reminded about this in the New Testament where we read, **“What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?”** (Romans 8:31).
- This remains a very important teaching for each of us as we seek to live out our Christian faith. No matter what comes against us in our journeys of life, we must hold tight to the reality that God is always greater and we need to continually draw close to Him.
- Further successes were experienced by the men of Judah in the hills (v9-15), on the southern lowlands (v16-17), and in the coastal regions (v18). It really does appear that everything was going well.
- But cracks did begin to appear! The first scent of failure appears in (v19-21). **“They took possession of the hill country, but they were unable to drive the people from the plains, because they had chariots fitted with iron”** (v19).
- Incomplete victories started to occur and although ground was being taken, total victory eluded the Israelites. We read in (v27) that their enemies were not totally driven out, and this terminology is used a further six times in (v27-33). A new pattern emerged, Wiersbe refers to it as **“Sparing the Enemy.”²**
- This is not what God had intended (Deuteronomy 7). The Promised Land was to be taken possession of and enjoyed, but the tribes of Israel settled for less. Wiersbe reflects on this and writes, **“Benjamin, Ephraim, Manasseh, Zebulun, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan all failed to overcome the enemy...This series of tribal defeats was the first indication that Israel was no longer walking by faith and trusting God to give them victory.”³**
- Joshua was faithful to the Word of God and because of this he grew in faith and courage. The new generation began to gradually deviate from that same Word and as a result they didn't claim their full inheritance. It is important not to neglect the Word of God but generations of people have continued to do just that. This was also taught against in 2nd Timothy 4:3-4.
- Wiersbe offers a warning. **“I fear that too many believers today are trying to live on religious fast food dispensed for easy consumption (no chewing necessary) by entertaining teachers who give people what they want and not what they need. Is it any wonder that many churches aren't experiencing God's power at work in their ministries?”⁴**
- May we seek God, follow His Word, and strive to embrace all that He has planned for us.



² Warren Wiersbe, *Judges: Be Available* (Colorado Springs: David. C. Cook, 1994), p22.

³ Ibid, p22.

⁴ Ibid, p23.