

101

JUDGES 1

SUCCESS AND FAILURE

opening ILLUSTRATION

Before your group meets this week, prepare twelve note cards. On ten of them, write “Do nothing except stand around and look awkward, distracted, or unconcerned.” On the remaining two, write “Your job is to stack the blocks, one on top of the other, as quickly as possible.” Bring a set of blocks to class and scatter them on a table. Invite twelve volunteers up to the front and give them each a card. Say, “You all are a team and you have been given the instructions to make your team successful.” Explain that you’ll set your timer for one minute and see how well the team follows the plan. Obviously, there will be two people working and the rest standing around; that’s the point. Some frustration will likely be evident in the two. After the minute ask those two unlucky participants, “How did it feel to be the only ones working?” Explain that this is basically what happened in Israel after Joshua died.

context

In the books of Exodus through Deuteronomy, Moses had led God’s people out of Egypt, provided for them during their time of wandering, and brought them to the edge of the Promised Land. After Moses died, his aide, Joshua, took the leadership role and began the period many Bible writers call the “conquest,” during which the Israelites began the systematic destruction of the godless people groups living in that same promised land. At the end of the book of Joshua, we see two significant statements: Joshua had died, and Israel had faithfully worshiped the Lord in Joshua’s lifetime (see Josh. 24:29-31). Reading between the lines of Joshua and Judges, it’s almost like we hear, “But . . .” as we step into the next book.

expository OUTLINE

JUDGES 1:1-5,17-19 *Obedience to God’s call leads to victory.* At this point in Israel’s history, the people had a very specific command from God: Go into the Promised Land of Canaan and eliminate the inhabitants because they were evil (see Deut. 20:16-18). If God’s people had allowed the original inhabitants to remain, the temptation to idolatry would have overwhelmed them. So the descendants of Judah and Simeon (two of Jacob’s sons) joined tribes and decided to do exactly what God had commanded them. Note carefully that first they “inquired of the Lord” (v. 1), who decided that Judah should be the first to go. He did, and Simeon helped. As they obeyed, God opened the door to victory: they conquered the Canaanites and Perizzites (see v. 4), and destroyed several towns (see vv. 17-18). And although God was with Judah’s descendants, we see a little stumble in verse 19 because a new technology—iron chariots—gave their enemies the upper hand in battle.

JUDGES 1:22-26 *We can find courage to obey God when we remember His faithfulness.* In these verses, we see that the “house of Joseph” decided to obey God’s call to rid the land of its inhabitants. Joseph was a son of Jacob, but his allotment was shared between his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh (which are also the tribes talked about in verse 22). Together they attacked Bethel, which was an ancient city where Abraham had offered his first sacrifice to God there (see Gen. 13:3-4) and Jacob had received his revelation from God (see Gen. 31:13). As with the tribes of Judah and Simeon, “the Lord was with them” (v. 22). They enlisted a person from the city to help them infiltrate it, and allowed him to live and move to another place after the attack. This may remind some of us of the time when the spies teamed up with Rahab to take over the city of Jericho; she chose to help God’s people and was rewarded for it, as well (see Josh. 2).

JUDGES 1:21,27-33 *God’s call on for our lives is for our good; He knows what is best for us.* You probably find these verses very repetitive: *so-and-so did not drive out some group of people, and they live among them to this day.* Hopefully, you grasped the terrible significance of these tribes’ failures: one after another, they simply chose not to do what God had commanded them to do. You might have even noticed that the sons of Joseph—Ephraim and Manasseh—stopped obeying even after their success in Bethel (see vv. 27,29). It’s a bit like when a teacher leaves the room and says, “No talking while I’m gone”: as soon as she’s out of sight, pandemonium erupts. But God is no absent teacher; He is the Lord Almighty, and He was fully aware of what was going on. For the rest of the book of Judges, we’ll see how these choices affect God’s people.

group DISCUSSION

The following are suggested discussion questions on each section of verses. They can be used for leading a small group session, or in sermon deliveries that include discussion.

ASK A STUDENT TO READ JUDGES 1:1-5,17-19.

.01 How can you see the leaders of Israel honoring God in these first verses? How do you seek to obey God and help others in your own life?

.02 If the Lord was “with Judah” (v. 19), why do you think they couldn’t drive out the people who had iron chariots?

ASK A STUDENT TO READ JUDGES 1:22-26.

.03 How did the spies convince the man from Bethel to help them (see v. 24)? How did this act show mercy?

.04 What do you think it means that “the Lord was with them” (v. 22) and why do you think it is repeated here?

READ OR ASK A STUDENT TO READ JUDGES 1:21,27-33.

(Note: this passage contains a lot of hard-to-pronounce Hebrew words.)

.05 Why do you think this passage is so repetitive? What do you think the author of these verses kept using the same words?

.06 What would God say to these people at this point in history? How do you know that? How might God speak a certain word to you during a certain period of your own life?

session CONNECTION

In the opening words of Mark’s Gospel, Mark introduced Jesus. Starting with some Old Testament prophecy, Mark showed how the Old Testament prophecies pointed to a messenger and a Messiah. Mark then revealed that John the Baptist prepared hearts by calling for repentance and showed how the Holy Spirit landed on Jesus after He was baptized. This introduction sets the stage for the amazing story of Jesus! The introduction of Judges, however, doesn’t point to faithfulness and miracles; in fact, we feel pretty crummy after reading it. It starts out strong—tribes taking over the Promised Land as they were supposed to do—but they don’t finish the job. We celebrate with Caleb and the tribe of Judah, but the end of the first chapter leaves us scratching our heads: what are they doing?

application

Say something along the lines of this: “God hasn’t called us to conquer a land full of people who worship idols, but we have a definite calling on our lives.” Read Matthew 28:19-20 aloud. Invite students to share the things that Jesus instructed His followers to do in those verses (examples: making disciples, going, baptizing, and teaching). Ask, “Can you think of anything else Jesus has told us to do?” (Answers include loving, praying, forgiving, serving, and more.) Remind students of the opening activity, in which two people were working and the rest were simply standing. Impress the importance of our calling: we’re not called to simply know Jesus, but to do things to help others know Him, as well. Challenge students to consider their own commitment to living out the calling that Jesus has for each of us.

When we follow
God’s commands in
faith, He will be with us.