

{un}faithful
Week of February 5, 2017
Bay Park Life Groups – Leader’s Guide

There are few books in the Bible that can compare to Judges for colour and intrigue. Fans of historical romance, military history, soap operas, conspiracy theories, spy novels, swashbuckling adventure, or political trickery will find it all here in the book of Judges. Judges is the story of a deteriorating nation and it serves as a sober warning against decline in our own lives. It highlights a variety of people who are called to become leaders of a nation that is lost in its identity and purpose. Whereas Joshua, the book before Judges, is centred around victory, Judges seems to be mainly concerned with themes of defeat, failure, and disobedience.

As with other Old Testament books, we want to see the broader and deeper message - it is the gospel unfolding in the lives of ordinary people. This book is about the God of mercy and long-suffering, who continually works in and through and for his people, even despite our best attempts to resist His calling. As we explore Judges together over the next several weeks, we hope that underneath the stories of the Israelite’s disobedience you will see the very same grace that is evident in our own lives.

Read Judges 1:1-36

1. List the reasons given (or hinted at) for why the tribes of Israel failed to settle in all the land God had promised them, pushing the Canaanites out.

v. 19: Because the enemy were militarily stronger (they had iron chariots)

v. 25-26: Because they had become friendly and made a deal with a Canaanite

v. 27: Because the Canaanites were determined to hold onto the land

v. 28, 30, 33, 35: Because they could use their enemies as forced labour

v. 34-35: Because the enemy wouldn’t let them take the land

2. What examples of whole-hearted obedience do verses 12-16 show us?

Caleb: (Along with Joshua, one of only two Israelites who left Egypt and did not disobey or disbelieve God in the desert, and so were allowed to enter the land [Numbers 14 v 26-38]) He believes Kiriath Sepher will be taken, and offers his daughter to the man who takes it. He wants for Acsah the life he chose for himself; one of faith and brave obedience

Othniel: He takes this town

Acsah: She wants to have her portion of the land (a field in v. 14 and a spring in v. 15)

The Kenites: These are not Israelites, but distant relatives of Moses. Nevertheless, they go into the land “to live among the people.” They must know God’s promises, and they make them their own.

3. How does Judges chapter 1 show us the difference between common sense and faithful obedience? Can you think of times in your life you have been brave because of your

faith? When do you find it hardest to follow God's commands instead of your own "common sense"? Why?

For example in v. 19: Common sense tells us "they have iron chariots and we do not so there is no way we can win a battle with them. We can live in the hills and that will be fine." Faithful obedience tells us "we are not strong enough to beat the men with iron chariots, but our God is, and He has promised us victory. So we will attack, in obedience and trusting God to keep His promises. Then we can enjoy all the land and blessing He has promised".

When we rely on ourselves, and base our walk with God on our own calculations instead of simply obeying, we find ourselves making decisions like the Judaites, instead of like Caleb and Othniel. Sometimes faithful obedience "agrees with" common sense and sometimes the two are opposite one another. Wholehearted discipleship means following God's commands rather than our sense.

Read Judges 2:1-3

4. How does God assess the reasons for the Israelites' failure to drive out the Canaanites? In verse 2, what does He say was the real purpose of this campaign?

To most readers of chapter 1, there seem to be very plausible reasons why the Israelites did not succeed in their campaign: superior military might, superior fortitude, economic convenience, etc. How could they drive out iron chariots when they had none (v. 19)? When the first chapter account says "they were unable," we are inclined to agree. They should not be held responsible. But God does not accept this evaluation, and he does not appear to give any credence to the reasons given. God's assessment of the Israelites' performance is scathing: "You have disobeyed me" (2:2). Period. This is a flat contradiction to the claim of verse 19 that they were "unable." God says in 2:3 that he had promised to drive the Canaanites out if the Israelites had obeyed him, but now "therefore . . . I will not drive them out." The reader asks, "Why didn't God drive them out before, when the Israelites tried so hard?" But God's lawsuit in 2:1-3 means that their efforts must have been half-hearted or nonexistent. God had promised to drive them out if the Israelites were "very strong" (Joshua 23:6a, 10).

Since 2:1-3 is a direct message from God, we must conclude that chapter 1 (which seems to contradict God's assessment) represents Israel's perspective and their "spin" on why they failed in their mission. Some commentators have noted that chapters 1 and 2 together are a narrative tour de force. Readers are lulled into sympathy with the Israelites by reading their press releases about their campaign. Then, suddenly, we are confronted and shocked by God's categorical condemnation. This leads us to realize that we are all like Israel in this self-deception. (See question #4 below.)

In summary, the Israelites essentially said, "We could not drive them out," but God said in response, "You would not."

The real purpose of the campaign:

In 2:2, God says that they failed to “break down their altars,” an excellent summary of the purpose of the campaign. As noted previously (see the issue of “Holy War” in the Introduction), the military campaign is not an “ethnic cleansing” since a converted pagan (Rahab in Joshua 2; 6:22-25) is allowed to stay in Canaan. Neither is the campaign an imperialistic conquest, since no one is allowed to take plunder or slaves. The purpose is to cleanse Canaan from idols. That is the point. By allowing the Canaanites to continue living in the land—for whatever reason—the end result is that idols were worshiped in the midst of the Israelites.

5. Like the Israelites, we sometimes make excuses for why we can't do certain things. How have we been unwilling to act in the following areas:
 - a) Forgiveness
 - b) Sharing the gospel
 - c) Being tempted

Read 1 Corinthians 10:13.

6. This verse is meant to be a reminder that despite how difficult or overwhelming life may be, God is still gracious and loving. Spend some time with your Life Group reflecting on the hope found in this verse and how we can transform those “I will not” times in our lives to “in God's strength I will” times.