

## Disobedience brings Weeping Judges 1:1-2:5

What were your **favourite** subjects at school?

As you cast your minds back through the years, what brings a smile when you remember your time at school?

For some of us this isn't a memory experiment, you'll be at school in the morning. What are you looking forward to? And what are you **dreading**?

Or what **were** the subjects that killed your enthusiasm for all things education?

**I used to love all sorts of things at school.** Subjects like maths, chemistry, physics and history. However, there were two subjects that used to sink my heart when I saw them on the timetable. PE and geography.

We may talk about my lack of interest in PE in another sermon but for today let me talk about school geography.

For me it was so **boring**. All I saw were lots of maps, lots of diagrams about the steepness of the landscape and lots of colouring pencils to colour in all the maps and diagrams.

I don't know what you make of **school geography** but let me ask you what you make of **bible geography**?

How do you respond when you see a long list of ancient places that are hard to pronounce and impossible to locate?

This is what we are confronted with in **Judges chapter 1**.

For many people the Old Testament is a harder section of the Bible to read and understand.

I know that some in our church family are excited as we begin this new teaching series on the book of Judges. However, I also know that for others this new series feels **like being asked to jog up to the top of Oliver's Mount on a cold January morning**. And now look at chapter 1. All these ancient names. It's as if you are about to start your run up the hill and the rain starts to pour.

To help us engage with this part of the Bible, whether we are a person of faith or someone still trying to work out if there is a God, let me introduce you to a new word I heard from one of my friends.

It's the word **God-ography**.

Let's be clear. Bible geography is not about old places that have no relevant to our daily lives.

No, **bible geography is God-ography**. It is the story of God's involvement in the lives of his people.

The **places** may **sound strange** and the **people** may **seem ancient** but here's the truth. God never changes. The God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament. And the God of the New Testament is the God we worship and adore.

So as we open up the book of Judges there is much for us to learn about the **true hero of the universe**, the glorious Trinity whom we trust and obey.

And here's my tip as we open up chapter 1. Forget geography. Think God-ography. See this chapter as the story of God and his people as they out their faith or lack of it in the nitty gritty mess of real human places. **Are you ready?** Let's do some **God-ography**.

## First, God's instructions (1:1-2)

Look at verse 1. **Read verses 1 and 2.**

The events of this chapter take place around the year **1370 BC**.

In terms of the Bible timeline we've reached the point when God's people have been rescued by God from Egypt under the leadership of Moses, and then after wandering for 40 years in the desert because of their disobedience, God has brought them into the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua. Under his leadership major parts of the land are occupied by the people of God.

However, **it's not game, set and match**. The battle is not finished. Yes, the back has been broken but the conquest is still to be done.

In **verse 1** God's people start off in the right place. They don't look to themselves for human wisdom about what to do next when Joshua dies. No, they look above. They ask God which of the tribes should lead the charge. Which one of the twelve should go up first to fight the Canaanites?

Don't you just love God's answer? It's **crystal clear** and **extremely comforting**. Judah shall go up, **and** I have given the land into their hands.

Before we look at how the people responded to such a clear command, let me **cement** one truth about the battles to be fought in Canaan. God authorised them. **God told his people to fight the Canaanites**.

This doesn't mean that God commends everything recorded in the book of Judges. There is much description that is simply the horrific story of sinful human attitudes, choices and actions.

However, the requirement to rid the land of the Canaanites came from heaven itself.

The question is **why?** It's all about the spiritual protection of God's people.

The Canaanites were a wicked people who were in danger of **severely corrupting** the pure faith of the Israelites.

To give **one example**, they regularly killed and sacrificed their children in an effort to control the actions of the gods.

They were like a **spiritual cancer**. A **severe threat** to the spiritual health of God's people. Because of this, the LORD himself told his people that they must get rid of them.

Let's see how they responded to his instructions.

## Second, the people's response (1:3-36)

Look at verse 3. **Read verse 3.**

It seems to me that this is a bad start to this stage of the battle.

God says Judah is to go and fight but the first response of this tribe is to ask another tribe to join them.

### **Not everyone thinks this is a bad move.**

- Some think it's common sense to get some extra support
- Others think it's a great sign of unity between the people
- Some think it's inevitable as the land inheritance of Simeon was actually within the boundaries given to the tribe of Judah.

However, this isn't what God says. He doesn't say, "Judah will go up and they can ask anyone else to join them." No, it's **Judah on their own** who are to get **this phase** of the battle started.

**This is so often the test for us as God's people.** Will we do exactly what God says or will we change the terms if we can come up with a good reason that makes sense to us?

It seems the men of Judah decided on **partial obedience**.

And yet look what happens in verse 4. **Read verses 4 to 7.**

Despite their half-hearted obedience God's grace gives them a victorious outcome.

**We have to be careful that we don't allow the outcome of our activities to tell us whether what we are doing is right or wrong.** It may well be that God's grace and desire for his glory overrides our sin and produces an outcome of blessing!

In **verses 8 to 18** we read of many more victories brought about by God's generous kindness. We hear of **general battles** and we hear of **specific individuals** like **Othniel** who stand up to be counted.

And then something changes in **verse 19**.

Listen to this. **Read verse 19.**

**Why are iron chariots a problem?** The LORD who made the heavens and earth is fighting for them!

Maybe this is this a one off? Maybe it's a blip, a temporary setback?

Sadly it's not.

Look at verse 21. **Read verse 21.**

Or verse 27. **Read verses 27 and 28.** So what if the Canaanites were determined to live there. Remember who is fighting for the Israelites, the God who brought them out of Egypt with a mighty hand.

As we read the remaining verses we see that this **torrent of failure** continues for the rest of the chapter.

It all culminates in the dark words of verse 36. **Read verse 36.**

What a remarkable ending to a chapter that should have been about the victories of Israel. Instead of hearing about the boundaries of Israel we are told about the boundaries of Amorites.

**What are we to make of all this?**

**Imagine you were on one of those post event talk shows**, like the Extra Slice, you the know the one that analyses the Great British Bake Off? Imagine we were on something like the **Extra Solider** where we are discussing the outcome of Israel's battle, what would we say? What would our **analysis** and **assessment** be?

I think **our temptation** would be to conclude that they did reasonably well against the opposition they encountered. Let's not be too hard on them. They did at least have a go. But against **superior technology** and **home advantage** we can't really expect the Israelites to have total victory. In fact, they're only human so let's cut them some slack. At least they have a foot in the door and let's not knock them for using a bit of **common sense** along the way.

Before we settle for such conclusion let me remind us of God's assessment at the beginning of **Judges chapter 2**.

### Third, God's assessment (2:1-5)

Look at 2:1. **Read verses 1 and 2.**

God gets to the heart of the issue.

God's people cry out, "**We can't do this.**" The odds are against us. The Canaanites are too strong. We can't do it."

God says, "No, the truth is **you won't do it.**"

I am your strong and gracious God. You can do all things through me. Do you not remember I brought you out of your slavery in Egypt? So what's all this nonsense about "We can't do this."

The truth is that you have disobeyed me.

**Your partial obedience is no obedience.**

This is a **devastating verdict** from the angel of the LORD and we see the **deep response** from the people of God in verses 4 and 5.

Listen to this. **Read verses 4 and 5.**

### In Conclusion

What are we to make of this?

What lessons has our **God-ography** revealed?

As we finish I want to mention **three.**

**First**, Jesus expects whole-hearted, faith-filled obedience

Where are the areas of your life where you are currently saying, "I can't do this God" and the truth is actually, "I won't do it Jesus."

Let's **weep** and let's **go to the place of sacrifice**, to the cross of Jesus for a refreshed sense of our forgiveness.

**Second**, we can be wholehearted in our commitment to Christ even if we are surrounded by loads of other Christians who aren't.

Remember **Othniel**.

**Third**, we can be wholehearted in our commitment to Jesus even if we have a track record of half-hearted compromise.

Judges doesn't end at **chapter 2 verse 5.**

The grace of God keeps the story going. The people of God get worse and worse and the mess gets bigger and more complicated. But again and again we see the kindness of God bring restoration and peace.

Let's get this clear. We shouldn't aim for half-heartedness.

However, God's wonderful grace **meets us in the moment**. This is enough to take our focus away from our failures in the past.

This means we can draw a line in the sand and serve Christ today as he deserves to be honoured.

**Let's pray.**