

## September 3

**Scriptures:** Read Judges 1 & 2

**Key Verse:** “I said... ‘You shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.’ But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this?” (Judges 2:2)

### Overview

Unlike Moses, Joshua had not left a divinely appointed strong leader to replace him and to lead in the continued conquest of the land. Therefore, when he died, the people were perplexed and inquired of the Lord concerning who would lead them into battle. The book of Judges begins with the Lord assigning the largest tribe of Judah with the responsibility of leadership. Their obedience, faithfulness, and loyalty to God and His covenant would assure them the victory. However, with the exception of a few victories for Judah (1:4, 8, 12-13, 17, 25), we see that, on the whole, the majority of the tribes of the tribe of Dan were even driven back from their inheritance by the Amorites (1:34).

The defeats and failures of Israel are shown to come as a direct result of their disobedience and compromise with their heathen enemies. Rather than driving them out as God ordered, Israel merely put them under subjection as their vassals and made them pay taxes (1:28, 30, 33, 35). However, Israel paid dearly for this mistake, for just as God had warned, the heathen were thorns in their sides (2:3).

The first victory God gave to Judah was over king Adoni-Bezek. It may seem terrible to hear that Judah cut off his thumbs and big toes; however, at that time it was a common practice, signifying subjugation and humiliation. In those days, such mutilations disqualified a person from both political and religious office, as well as disabling him from ever fighting in battle again. This king himself admitted doing the same to many other defeated kings, and his words implied that he was getting what he deserved—the just punishment from God.

Sadly, Israel did not continue in obedience to the Lord. After Joshua and the elders who served with him had all died, the new generation forgot the great miracles of God and his goodness in delivering them. They even forgot their covenant with God (2:10). Obviously their parents had failed in their divinely ordered responsibility (which Moses so often stressed) to instruct their children in the ways of the Lord, and to teach them continually about the goodness of their God so there might not be apostasy in future generations. As a result, the Israelites disobeyed God and failed in their mission; they let the heathen remain in the land, and this led to their own disastrous downfall—for they, too, became idol worshippers.

The Messenger of the Lord came to warn them and call them to return to loyalty to Him (2:1-3). This must have been a pre-incarnate appearance of our Lord and Savior. He questioned them about being disobedient. If they realized all that God had done for them, they should have been loyal and obedient. However, they had not torn down all the heathen idols and altars as God commanded; rather they made peace with them. Therefore, God’s judgment was that He would

not drive out the heathen inhabitants, but leave them to bring much trouble and pain upon Israel (2:3), as well as to test their faith and loyalty to Him (2:22).

The Lord's message caused weeping, probably because they felt sorry for themselves, yet it did not lead to real repentance. Each successive generation fell further into sin, and the Lord chastised them. But God, in His mercy, heard their cries and would rise up godly judges to deliver them. However, once rest was restored, they quickly forgot the Lord and once again fell into idolatry. This cycle recurred over and over again in Israel's history.

The Lord had given them victory and rest, but it was their responsibility to maintain it by nurturing their own personal relationship with Him, walking in obedience to Him, and continually driving out any evil from among them so they might remain pure and holy before God. This illustrates very well the way a believer today can keep the victory and a right relationship with God that our Lord Jesus attained for us when He won the victory over Satan, sin, and death.

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, You won the victory over sin, the flesh, and the devil. Enabling grace from your hand is needed daily so that we may maintain in our lives the victory You have won. We are determined to serve You and walk with You always, teaching our children and grandchildren every day by example and by word. Amen.