

Israel's Partial Obedience Results in Enemy Resistance

Judges 1:16-36

Judges 1:16-36 - *"Now the children of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up from the City of Palms with the children of Judah into the Wilderness of Judah, which lies in the South near Arad; and they went and dwelt among the people. ¹⁷ And Judah went with his brother Simeon, and they attacked the Canaanites who inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. So the name of the city was called Hormah. ¹⁸ Also Judah took Gaza with its territory, Ashkelon with its territory, and Ekron with its territory. ¹⁹ So the LORD was with Judah. And they drove out the mountaineers, but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the lowland, because they had chariots of iron. ²⁰ And they gave Hebron to Caleb, as Moses had said. Then he expelled from there the three sons of Anak. ²¹ But the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who inhabited Jerusalem; so the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.*

²² And the house of Joseph also went up against Bethel, and the LORD was with them. ²³ So the house of Joseph sent men to spy out Bethel. (The name of the city was formerly Luz.) ²⁴ And when the spies saw a man coming out of the city, they said to him, "Please show us the entrance to the city, and we will show you mercy." ²⁵ So he showed them the entrance to the city, and they struck the city with the edge of the sword; but they let the man and all his family go. ²⁶ And the man went to the land of the Hittites, built a city, and called its name Luz, which is its name to this day.

²⁷ However, Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth Shean and its villages, or Taanach and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Ibleam and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages; for the Canaanites were determined to dwell in that land. ²⁸ And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites under tribute, but did not completely drive them out.

²⁹ Nor did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites who dwelt in Gezer; so the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them.

³⁰ Nor did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron or the inhabitants of Nahalol; so the Canaanites dwelt among them, and were put under tribute.

³¹ Nor did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Acco or the inhabitants of Sidon, or of Ahlab, Achzib, Helbah, Aphik, or Rehob. ³² So the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; for they did not drive them out.

³³ Nor did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh or the inhabitants of Beth Anath; but they dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land. Nevertheless the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh and Beth Anath were put under tribute to them.

³⁴ And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountains, for they would not allow them to come down to the valley; ³⁵ and the Amorites were determined to dwell in Mount Heres, in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim;^[a] yet when the strength of the house of Joseph became greater, they were put under tribute.

³⁶ Now the boundary of the Amorites was from the Ascent of Akrabbim, from Sela, and upward."

Background Notes

The Jebusites, the Amorites, the Canaanites! Who were all these “ites” that lived in the Land? Turn back to Genesis 10 where we have the Table of Nations and all the descendants of the sons of Noah. Genesis 10:15-18: “*Canaan begot Sidon his firstborn, and Heth; the Jebusite, the Amorite, and the Girgashite; the Hivite, the Arkite, and the Sinite; the Arvadite, the Zemarite, and the Hamathite. Afterward the families of the Canaanites were dispersed.*” So a lot of “ites” were descendants of Noah’s grandson, Canaan. (Sometimes when I read these lists of “ites” in my Old Testament Survey classes, I’ll read in the term “electrolytes” - and very few students seem to notice!)

Throughout the Old Testament, whenever the inhabitants of the land of Canaan are designated, sometimes the broad category of “Canaanites” is mentioned. At other times the specific descendants of Canaan (such as Jebusites or Amorites) are mentioned. The point is that the Lord commanded Israel to completely drive **all** the Canaanites out of the land! Israel failed to do so, and Israel reaped some bitter consequences as a result.

Some folks have a problem with the fact that God told Israel to kill all the inhabitants of the Promised Land: “*Of the cities of these peoples which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance, you shall let nothing that breathes remain alive, but you shall utterly destroy them: the Hittite and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, just as the LORD your God has commanded you...*” (Deuteronomy 20:16-17). Some people ask, “Why all the killing? Why a good and loving God would command such a thing?” The answer is found in Deuteronomy 20:18 - “*lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against the LORD your God...*” The Canaanites were a very wicked and idolatrous people. God didn’t want His people contaminated and polluted with the gross immorality and idolatry of the Canaanites. But unfortunately Israel didn’t fully cleanse the Land. They obeyed the Lord – but only partially.

Doctrinal Points

1. Partial obedience results in plenty of bad fall-out.

Verse 19: “*So the LORD was with Judah. And they drove out the mountaineers, but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the lowland, because they had chariots of iron.*” Was God’s power limited because of the iron chariots? Of course not! What is a iron chariot, compared to the omnipotent all-powerful God of Israel? The real problem was that Judah didn’t fully trust and obey the Lord!

Verse 21: “*But the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who inhabited Jerusalem; so the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.*” Was it God’s fault that Israel could not drive out the Jebusites? No, it wasn’t God’s fault! The tribe of Benjamin didn’t fully trust and obey the Lord. “*Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants...*” (v27). “*Nor did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites who dwelt in Gezer; so the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them*” (v29). “*Nor did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants...*” (v30). “*Nor did Asher drive out the inhabitants...*” (v31). “*Nor did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants...*” (v33).

Why was Israel only partially successful in driving out the enemy? Was God's power limited? Did God's promises fail? No! **The people failed to fully obey the Lord!** In Joshua 1 God promised, *"Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses" (v3)*. And, *"No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you" (v5)*. That's the promise of God!

In Joshua 1:7-8 God said, *"Only be strong and very courageous, that you **may do according to all the law** which Moses My servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, **that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it**. For then you will make your way prosperous, **and then you will have good success**" [emphasis added]*. Israel was only partially successful because they were only partially obedient.

God's promises hadn't failed! The people had failed to trust God. They had failed to obey Him by driving the Canaanites out of the land. Lots of bad fallout was the result. The idolatry and immorality of the Canaanites began to penetrate into the lives of the people of Israel, and ultimately it resulted in the downfall of the entire nation of Israel. What a sad story!

Partial obedience results in plenty of bad fallout today as well. If you only obey the Lord partially in what you do with your body, for example, there will be plenty of bad fallout. If you only obey the Lord partially with what you do with your mind, there will be plenty of bad fallout. Partial obedience results in plenty of bad fallout.

2. Partial obedience results in pockets of enemy resistance.

I think most of you are aware that there are some great pictures of spiritual warfare in both Joshua and Judges. The Land of Promise represents the land of spiritual blessings that God has promised us. Our land of spiritual blessings is not heaven when we die, but "the heavenlies" now. There is a land of spiritual blessings now for the Christian - but it's also the land of spiritual **battles**. Read the whole book of Ephesians in this connection.

However, even though there are spiritual battles now, we don't ever have to be defeated in spiritual battle. The key to victory is full obedience! Partial obedience results in residual pockets of enemy resistance and control.

In the spiritual picture, all of Israel's enemies in the land of Canaan represent our enemies in the land of spiritual blessing that God has given us to enjoy. When we become Christians the power of the enemy's control over our lives is broken, but partial obedience results in pockets of enemy resistance remaining in our lives. The enemies in the land can represent sins of the flesh -- even demonic forces.

Does Satan have a foothold in pockets of resistance in your life? What about impure thoughts? What about an unforgiving spirit? What about jealousy or a root of bitterness? What about the sin of materialism? We need to root these sins out of our lives by practicing full obedience to the Lord, because partial obedience allows Satan to keep us from enjoying the blessings of the land. **Partial obedience results in pockets of enemy resistance.**

Practical Application

Don't let the enemy come back to hurt you!

Verses 23-26: *“So the house of Joseph sent men to spy out Bethel. (The name of the city was formerly Luz.) And when the spies saw a man coming out of the city, they said to him, “Please show us the entrance to the city, and we will show you mercy.” So he showed them the entrance to the city, and they struck the city with the edge of the sword; but they let the man and all his family go. And the man went to the land of the Hittites, built a city, and called its name Luz, which is its name to this day.”* What right did Israel let this Hittite man go free? **All** the Canaanites were under the judgment of God! They had no right to let him go on his way.

You may wonder, “Well, what about Rahab?” The case of Rahab was different, because Rahab became a believer. She believed the Lord and asked for mercy from Him. She became an Israelite; she married into the covenant community. But this pagan Hittite didn't become a believer! He went out and built another pagan city, and even gave it the same name – Luz. The Hittites continued to be enemies of Israel.

The spiritual lesson here is: Don't let the enemy come back to hurt you! We must deal ruthlessly with the sins of the flesh, because our enemy will use those areas of weakness to bring us down. Don't bargain with the desires of the sinful nature - root them out! Pockets of sin that are not judged will survive in our lives, and they **will** come back to hurt us.

When Israel became stronger, they forced the remaining enemy to pay tribute or labor - but **the enemy was still there** (v28, 30, 33 & 35). That's like a materialistic Christian giving a nice token amount of money to God - but he's still a materialist! The underlying sin of materialism is still there! That's partial obedience. I know a number of Christians in this category, and some of them have lost their families to the world as a result. That's sin coming back to really hurt, for sure!

Don't let the enemy come back to hurt you!