

Divine Directions Judges 1-2

Notes

The blessings of God are tied to the obedience of his people. God does not bless those who continually follow their own path.

Have you ever not paid attention to directions? Have you ever tried to go at a situation, a circumstance, a relationship, or even life in general, your own way? How did that turn out for you?

When I was a kid, around 11 or 12 we used to ride on the river on Saturdays and Sundays. A large group would ride for hours, stopping to swim, party, and rest. One particular day we were riding from Norwood, Louisiana to Jackson, Louisiana. I was on the back of my dad's Honda 250R three-wheeler. We decided to ride away from the pack, the rest of the group. We wanted to go our own way. We road on the opposite side of the river than the rest of the group. Well, as we were riding, suddenly, the ground was no longer under us. We had unknowingly ridden onto a large sandbar. We went off that sandbar and hit the ground. I was knocked out cold with minor injuries. My dad broke a few ribs. After waking me up and making sure I was ok we got back on and finished the trip, going to the hospital later that night to get checked out.

How did this happen? We ended up hurt because we decided to go our own way and follow our directions.

The same is true for life in general. When we decide to go opposite of God's directions for our lives, we can be sure that we will get lost, injured, and have regrets.

God has given us the Bible, his holy word to let us know our directions for life. When we decide to disobey the Bible, and to set up our own rules for life, we end up having to live by the consequences of those rules.

God has given us as individuals and a church, a specific set of instructions to follow as we walk through this life.

If we obey his instructions and follow his directions, he says he will personally bless us and grow us in his Son.

If we fail to listen and obey his directions, he also tells us that he will personally discipline us and remove his hand of blessings from us.

Today, I want to talk with you about God's divine directions and what happens when we decide to make our own way without God's directions.

What about your life? Are you following God's will for your life? Are you allowing the Word of God to dwell in you and guide you?

It is important for us, as a family, and as individuals to understand that if we are to have the blessings of God in our lives, on our family, and in our church, we will be sure to follow his directions for our lives and our church.

DETERMINE AND OBEY DIVINE DIRECTIONS (1:1-5,8-10)

The first principle we notice as we begin to read chapters 1 and 2 is the importance of determining and obeying God's divine directions.

Chapters 1 and 2 are an introduction to the book, showing how even during the end of the life of Joshua who led the people into the Promised Land, the next generation was beginning to desert the faith of their fathers. Chapter One also shows us how the beginning conquest takes place.

The book of Judges picks up with the death of Joshua. It follows a period of about 400 years from Joshua to the death of Sampson or the time of the prophet Samuel.

Judges gets its title from the 12 central characters in the book known as Judges. These judges are not like judges in the sense of how we think of Judges. These judges rescued and guided the people.

The book is highlighted by the constant alternation between Israel choosing to obey God and be blessed by him and then turning from God to worship the gods of the lands, God punishing Israel, them crying out to him, and God sending a judge to rescue them, for the whole process to repeat itself.

Beginning in verse 1 of chapter 1 is the introduction to the book of Judges.

Now it came about after the death of Joshua that the sons of Israel inquired of the Lord, saying, "Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?"² The Lord said, "Judah shall go up; behold, I have given the land into his hand."³ Then Judah said to Simeon his brother, "Come up with me into the territory allotted me, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I in turn will go with you into the territory allotted you."

So Simeon went with him. ⁴ Judah went up, and the Lord gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hands, and they defeated ten thousand men at Bezek. ⁵ They found Adoni-bezek in Bezek and fought against him, and they defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites.

Notice what the first thing that the tribes of Israel did after their leader was dead.

They went to the Lord for directions. Mark this.

When you don't know what to do, or you need to find out what to do, how to respond, act, or speak-go to the Lord.

They asked a simple question. "Who shall go up first to fight?"

At this point in history Israel was not yet a nation. They were still a collection of 12 individual tribes. Each tribe had been given an allotment in the Promised Land and they wanted to find out how God wanted to go about conquering the land.

Before they did anything they sought God. Now, if they would have only kept this practice, they might not have gotten into the mess they did, but their initial act was the correct one.

God told them the tribe of Judah would go first and conquer its allotted land.

Before anything took place, they went to God and what did God do? Did he ignore them? Did he side-step their question?

No-he answered them. He answered them because he not only had a plan for them; he had their best in mind.

God's plan is never second best for you. God's plan is what is best for you. God's plan is always and forever to draw you closer to him and the likeness of Jesus.

No matter your situation or circumstance, no matter how you got there, or how long you have been there; it doesn't matter if it was your fault or not.

God wants to draw you closer to himself. He is always, constantly, and consistently here for you in the present.

The Bible's promise is true-God never leaves or forsakes his children.

And you may be here today, and you need to hear and be reminded that God is here for you. Not just to give you direction for your life, but to give you what you need for life.

He is here for guidance and wisdom, but also for love, grace, mercy, freedom, comfort, and salvation.

And like a loving Father, he adores when his children come to him and seek his advice.

But so often the only time we come to God is when we have our hand out. But, if we would have gone to him in the first place, we wouldn't need him to rescue us from the mess we got ourselves into.

Maybe you have a decision to make. You are deciding what college to go to, what major to go into, what job to take, or when to get married, or even if you should get married.

How are you trying to make your decision? What is influencing your decision making? Are you spending time in God's word and prayer? Are you seeking the Lord?

The best practice we can employ in our lives is to determine God's directions before we make a move.

But, so often we decide to go our own way.

PARTIAL OBEDIENCE LEADS TO COMPROMISE (1:19, 22-34; 2:1-2, 11)

From verses 4-19, Judges records the military campaign of Judah and Simeon. Over half of the coverage of the campaign of the tribes of Israel is devoted to the battles of Judah and Simeon.

As a summary, I have included just a few of those battles.

I want you to notice a theme, a theme that will become extremely important throughout this book.

Judah and Simeon followed God's directions!

This is vital! After they received God's directions, they obeyed them!

In the first battle, the tribes of Judah and Simeon killed 10,000 enemy warriors in Bezek.

And in Jerusalem, the Negev and Hebron they were victorious.

Notice, they didn't waste any time doing what God called them to do.

So often, we miss the blessing because we delay the obedience.

When the Word and the Spirit direct you to a particular action or response, let us be quick to obey.

When you know God's will for your life, when you know God's direction from his Word, do it.

Jesus is our perfect example here.

When sin entered into the world the Word of God tells us in **Gen. 3:15**,

"And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel."

That enmity was Jesus. The plan all along to conquer sin was Jesus.

And Jesus followed through with the plan as we see in **Luke 2:7**,

"And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

33 years later when he was ready to begin the ministry God gave him, he was tempted, just like we are, by the devil. **Mt. 4:1**,

"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."

And in the darkness of night, when the shadows of doubt and fear began to creep in, Jesus shows us how to lay our will aside and follow the direction

of the Father, *“Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done.”* (Lk. 22:42)

He completed his mission to crush the head of Satan and conquer sin on the cross of Calvary,

“And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last.” (Mk. 15:37)

Jesus provides us a perfect example of what it looks like to obey the directions of the Father.

Is there something in your life God is directing you to do?

Is there something he is calling you to begin?

Is there some sin, behavior, or attitude he is calling you to cut out?

You may be here, and God is calling you to a deeper relationship with himself and in order to do that he is calling you to follow Christ.

I want to call you, wherever you are in your life right now, whatever is going on, whatever you may be going through, to follow Christ today.

The first direction God gives us is to come to him through Christ and you may be here today, and you don't have a relationship with him, and he is calling you to one today.

Or you may be here, and you simply need to be reminded that Christ is here for you. He may be calling you to go deeper, to recommit or rededicate your life to him, or just draw closer to him.

Whatever you do today, you will do well to obey God's directions for your life.

Now, as we turn to verse 19 in Chapter 1, we see the will of Judah begin to slip which eventually leads to compromise and lack of devotion.

¹⁹ Now the Lord was with Judah, and they took possession of the hill country; but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley because they had iron chariots.

In this verse we see the reality of our walk with Christ.

In the first part of the verse, we see Judah was successful in their campaign to take the hill country.

God had given them victory and they walked in it. They conquered the Canaanites and Perrizites in the upper land of hills and mountains.

God supplied them power, might, and ability and they came out victorious.

But that same power, might, and ability did not result in victory in the valley.

The author notes that the people in the valley had iron chariots.

In light of Deut. 7:1-3 in which God promises to hand over the land and conquer the inhabitants of the land and with the miraculous victory over Jericho (Joshua 6), no one, no matter how technologically advanced should have been able to withstand Judah's attacks.

Why is God's presence enough in the hill country, but not the valley?

The same reason how we can have victory over temptation one day and fall to the same temptation the next.

The issue with the victory is never Jesus, it is us.

We choose not to walk in the victory Christ has secured for us.

We often fail to follow God's divine directions and not walk in victory because the road is longer than we thought it would be, or the valley is deeper than we thought it should be, or the mountain is higher than we hoped.

Pastor Chuck Swindoll shares this story.

"Four guys decided to go mountain climbing one weekend. In the middle of the climb, one fella slipped over a cliff, dropped about 60 feet and landed with a thud on the ledge below. The other three hoping to rescue him yelled, 'Joe, are you OK?'

'I'm alive, but I think I broke both my arms!'

'We'll toss a rope down to you and pull you up. Just lie still,' said the three.

'Fine,' Joe answered.

A couple of minutes after dropping the rope, they started tugging and grunting together, working feverishly to pull their wounded companion to safety. When they had him about three quarters of the way up, they suddenly remembered he said he had broken both arms.

'Joe, if you broke your arms, how in the world are you holding on?'

Joe responded, 'With my teeeeeeeeth.'"

When we walk in Christ and follow him, look to him, instead of being defeated by the iron chariots in our lives, we will experience the blessings of walking in victory.

One commentator said it this way, "Infinite power may be on our side, but we may be deprived by failure of faith from making full use of it."

See, Judah walked in the victory in the hill country, but they allowed the iron chariots of the valley to strike their nerve, steal their courage, and remove their victory.

What is your iron chariot? What is striking your nerve to walk in the victory Christ has secured for you? What is stealing your courage to stand for Jesus? What is removing your victory that Christ has given you?

Beloved, remember, Christ has already given you the victory and no iron chariot has the strength to take it from you.

The promise of victory over sin is complete and absolute to every one of us in Christ.

God is with you in the battle of life. We often forget this.

When God calls you to a task, he will empower you through it. Don't allow circumstances to cause you to give up.

Our victory is never taken from us, it is given away.

Don't give your victory away by not following the divine directions God has given you in your life.

HALF-HEARTED DEVOTION LEADS TO ABANDONING THE FAITH (2:10-15)

As we move to Chapter Two, we are given a second introduction that actually takes us back to the end of the life of Joshua.

In this introduction, the author provides for us a synopsis of just how the people of God began to slip away.

¹⁰ All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel.

¹¹ Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals, ¹² and they forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked the Lord to anger. ¹³ So they forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtaroth. ¹⁴ The anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies around them, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. ¹⁵ Wherever they went, the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, as the Lord had spoken and as the Lord had sworn to them, so that they were severely distressed.

In these verses we see the result of not following through and obeying God's divine directions.

Instead of driving out the people of the land, Israel allowed them to stay and as a result Israel began to slowly allow the false gods of the people to become their gods.

They began to worship them and serve them and finally they completely turned their back on the Lord.

As a result, God turned them over to consequences of those actions.

Let me give us an example of how this might look. This is just one particular example, but I chose this example of the rampant nature of pornography.

Starts with lust

Moves to mental fantasy

Then to pornography to explore and meet desires

Then you move to even more grievous types of pornography

Then there are frustrations in the marriage because of unmet, unrealistic desires

Then you begin looking for ways to satisfy those desires outside of marriage

Finally, you find yourself in a situation that you never imagined facing consequences you never dreamed.

And this type of process happens for all our sin, all of our disobedience. We have ample, ample opportunities to stop, to seek help, to reach out, but we refuse to do so until eventually we are not walking with Christ any longer.

What about you beloved? Are you trapped in sin today? There is hope and I want to close with this last point.

GOD RESCUES AND DISCIPLES THOSE WHO TURN BACK TO HIM (3:7-9)

⁷ The sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth. ⁸ Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, so that He sold them into the hands of Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia; and the sons of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years. ⁹ When the sons of Israel cried to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for the sons of Israel to deliver them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother.

Now, we are skipping into Chapter Three which we will cover next week, but this is important.

What do you do when you are trapped in sin?

Israel was facing consequences of their actions. They were under discipline and living a life opposite of what God desired for them.

When they got tired of living that life what did they do? They cried out to God.

What did God do? He rescued them!

What will God do for you if you call out to him? He will rescue you!

CONCLUSION

What directions is God trying to give to you today? Is he calling you to come to him in repentance? Is he calling you to follow him in baptism? Maybe he is calling you to start the process of joining our family here? Maybe he wants you to step up and serve in some area, to share the gospel, or disciple someone?

What is God calling you to do today?

We have looked at several aspects of God's divine directions for our lives, what happens when we listen to and obey those directions and what happens when we decide to ignore God and go our own way.

What about you this morning?

Are you listening to God's direction?