

• *Historical background*

The Book of Judges tells what happened from the third generation onwards, after Israel's deliverance from bondage in Egypt. The great act of God in which He saved Israel by the blood of a lamb took place probably between 1290 and 1260 BC (let us say 1275 BC). The Book of Judges deals with a period of Israel's history that runs from about 1195 to 1050 BC.

• *No living memory by the third generation*

Imagine a great event in the story of a nation. It might be a great victory after a time of war; it might be a day of independence or freedom. The generation that went through those events are constantly gripped with the memory of what happened. The next generation grows up with parents who are constantly talking of 'the war' or 'the day we got our freedom' – or whatever. Then there grows up a third generation. By the time they are born, the events of two generations before are dim. Their parents sometimes talk about what **their** parents used to talk about, but the events are no longer in **living** memory and do not arouse the excitement that they aroused in their grandparents.

• *Unforgettable experience of deliverance from Egypt*

Something like this happened in Israel. God had saved Israel by the blood of a lamb. Pharaoh had been punished by ten mighty judgements. The Sea of Reeds had been dramatically divided and the people had walked across dry land before the sea came flooding back again. The generation who experienced those events could never completely forget what had happened.

• *Forty years later – few alive who remembered*

Then there was the persistent disobedience of Israel while they were in the wilderness between Egypt and Canaan. Eventually God left that generation in the wilderness for forty years. The time came when all the adults who had experienced the crossing of the Sea of Reeds had died. Only a few who had been children or teenagers at the time were alive to remember what had happened.

• *Eighty years later no one alive who remembered*

Then during another forty-year generation Joshua and his soldiers conquered the main highways of Israel and devastated the greatest of the Canaanite cities. At the time when Joshua died it was eighty years after Israel's salvation through the blood of the lamb. There was no one alive who remembered exactly what that day had been like in experience. Judges tells of what happened next. In Judges 1:1–3:6 (which itself divides into two, 1:1–2:5; 2:6–3:6) we are told of the decline of Israel.

• *Judges 3-7 The twelve judges*

In Judges 3:7–16:31 we have the story of twelve judges plus the story of Abimelech's experiment with kingship.

• *Judges 17-21 Chaos in Israel*

In Judges 17:1–21:25 we have (again in two units, 17:1– 18:3 1; 19:1–21:25) a description of the chaos in Israel at the end of this period.

There are two main things we ought to note at this point.

1. Partial Victories

1. **For a while Israel continued to live for God but its victories were only partial.** These people were 'third generation believers'. They were people for whom salvation was not as real as it had been for believers of an earlier time. Israel had partially but not entirely conquered the promised land.

• *Judah's partial success – four ingredients*

Judah was the tribe most notable for its victories ^{□1}. There are four ingredients in its partial success.

□1 Judges 1:1–20

• *Victory came by seeking God*

Judah's victory came by seeking God. The people inquire which tribe shall attack Canaan first^{□1} and they get the answer: Judah ^{□2}. Presumably they consulted the 'Urim and Thummim', the stones kept in the high priests coat that could be thrown like dice. The way they landed could reveal the will of God. They could say 'yes', 'no' or give no answer. The Lord guided them to send Judah first to attack the 'Canaanites' (which here means the inhabitants of the valleys and coastal plains). Victory comes by God's guidance!

□1 1:1

□2 1:2

• *Victory came by co-operation*

Judah's victory came by co-operation. Judah asked for the help of their brother-tribe, the tribe of Simeon 1:3; together they got victory ^{□2}.

□1 1:3

□2 1:4

• *Victory led to justice being executed*

• *Victory is the attaining of inheritance*

• *Inheriting as a result of persistent God – guided conflict.*

• *Entering into rest*

2. Failure to follow through with what God had called them to do

• *The second generation – the best*

• *The third generation content with the status quo*

• *Every Christian needs to be in touch with God personally*

Judah's victory led to justice being executed. Azoni-bezek, a pagan king, is captured 1:6 and mutilated ¹. He dies confessing the justice of his punishment ². He was receiving the treatment he had given out to others.

Judah's victory is the attaining of inheritance. Jerusalem is attacked ¹ and so are the three major geographical divisions of southern Israel ². Caleb led an attack on Hebron and three other towns ³. Othniel won Caleb's daughter in marriage by capturing Kiriath-sepher ⁴. His newly acquired bride asked for water-springs to be added to her inheritance ⁵. Inheritance is one of the great themes of the Bible. The Christian is saved in order to 'inherit'. Israel was rescued from Egypt in order to 'inherit'.

Allied to Judah were the Kenites, a people friendly to Israel who became part of the nation. The narrator tells us of the area inhabited by them ¹. Judah assisted Simeon in conquering Zephath ², and he took Gaza and Ashkelon and Ekron ³, three Philistine cities. All these are examples of God's people 'inheriting' as a result of persistent God - guided conflict against the enemies of God. The Christian also has his 'inheritance'. It includes areas of life which God gives us to 'conquer' for him. It consists of the joy of entering into rest in that realm which God gives us to 'conquer' for him.

2. There was one great failure in this 'third generation': they failed to follow through with what God was calling them to do. They conquered Jerusalem ¹ but obviously neglected to totally occupy it (as the later story makes clear). It is clear that Israel's victories were limited. The Kenites lived **among** the Amorite people of the wilderness of Judea ². Although some cities were destroyed ³, yet Judges 1:19 tells us some people could not be driven out of the plains. Although Caleb drove out three sons of Anak ⁴, yet the Jebusites could not be totally dislodged from Jerusalem ⁵.

The best generation in Israel's history was the second generation, the people who followed God in the wilderness (see Jeremiah 2:2–3, and the rebuke of Jeremiah 2:4–13). The people of Judges 1:1–3:6 were a more complacent people, lacking the faith of the previous generation.

'Third generation' believers fail to carry forward the work of God to an advanced state of victory. They carry things forward a little but are more or less content with what they had been left by their parents.

'Third generation' believers get used to the 'status quo' – the state things have been in within the memory of their times. They think of the great events of days gone by as just that – events of days gone by. They do not imagine that God can do something as wonderful in their day as God did for others in previous days. In reality God can do something different but equally great!

Every Christian needs to be in touch with God for himself. His parents may well have been truly saved. Yet the son or daughter needs to experience God for themselves, and follow God fully, not living on previous achievements but building on them and achieving for God more than was done before.

¹ 1:5
² 1:6
³ 1:7

¹ 1:8
² 1:9
³ 1:10–11
⁴ 1:12–13
⁵ 1:14–15

¹ 1:16
² 1:17
³ 1:18

¹ 1:8
² 1:16
³ see 1:17–18
⁴ 1:20
⁵ 1:21



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