Lesson 1: Incomplete Obedience

Teaching Outline — A foothold for compromise
Passage: Judges 1; Judges 2:1-5 | **Suggested teaching time:** 45 minutes

Lesson objective

- Class will understand:
  - Partial obedience to God's revealed Word plants compromise
- Class will identify:
  - One area in which they need to obey God wholly

Opening and background (0:00-0:04)

Where Judges begins

- Opens after the death of Joshua
  - The Lord brought Israel into the land
  - The tribes must now continue possessing what God gave
- Not merely a record of ancient battles
  - A sober account of covenant people:
    - Living beside a clear command of God
    - Receiving help from God
    - Yet settling for less than obedience

A leadership transition, not a vacancy in God's rule

- Joshua led the initial conquest, but was never the source of Israel's safety or inheritance
- The question is larger than "Who will lead now?"
  - Will Israel seek the Lord after the visible leader is gone?
- An enduring question
  - A congregation helped by a gifted pastor
  - A family helped by a faithful parent
  - A class helped by an experienced teacher

- None of those gifts replaces a living dependence on God and His Word

The land was not a blank territory

- Canaan had cities, kings, established worship, military strength, trade, and customs built over generations
- Genuine pressure to accommodate
  - Compromise can seem more sensible than costly obedience that disrupts established arrangements
- Scripture doesn't deny the pressure
  - God's command must govern His people's response to it
  - Difficulty explains why faith is needed; it does not rewrite the assignment

The command was plain

- "Then ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down all their high places." (Num 33:52)
- Israel didn't invent a difficult rule — God revealed His will
- God knew the danger of idolatry; commanded His people not to make room for it

Read it in its covenant setting

- Israel's commands are not a pattern for the church or modern nations
  - The church does not advance Christ's kingdom by the sword
  - Our warfare is spiritual; our Lord commands us to love our enemies
- The spiritual principle remains searching
  - When God has spoken, partial obedience is not mature discretion — it is disobedience
  - God had given a clear [BLANK: revealed Word]

Question before reading

- Ask: "Where are we most tempted to rename compromise?"
  - Moderation, personality, privacy, necessity
  - Judges calls it by its true name

> **Teacher note — reading:** Read the assigned sections aloud rather than every verse during exposition.
>
> - Ask listeners to notice two threads:
>   - The repeated statements of the Lord's help
>   - The repeated phrase "did not drive out"
> - Hear them together: God was faithful, and Israel was responsible

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Read Judges 1:1-20 (0:04-0:08)

- **Read aloud**

Exposition of Judges 1:1-20 (0:08-0:16)

Asking the right question (1:1-2)

Israel begins with dependence

- "Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them?" (1:1)
- Israel begins well — asks the LORD rather than following preference, habit, or tribal rivalry

Notice the order

- "Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand" (1:2)
- God assigns the work and promises the outcome
  - Judah doesn't manufacture victory
  - Judah receives a charge under a promise
- Right starting point for obedience
  - Not "What feels manageable?"
  - "What has God said?"

A guard against distorting faith

- Judah isn't told to stay still because God promised the land — Judah must go up
- Judah isn't told to go up to persuade God to give the land — promise first, action in response

- Biblical faith:
  - Does not make us passive
  - Does not make us self-reliant
  - Receives God's Word as true, then takes the step that Word requires
- The pattern throughout Scripture
  - Noah built because God warned him
  - Abraham went out because God called him
  - Peter stepped from the boat at Christ's command
  - Obedience: neither a bid for control nor an attempt to earn favor — trust expressed in action
- Facing a clear command today
  - May not have every detail of the road ahead
  - Do have the character and promise of the God who speaks

The source of every victory

- Judah invites Simeon; Simeon receives reciprocal help
  - Their cooperation isn't presented as the problem
- The chapter repeatedly shows the Lord giving success
  - "And the LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand" (v. 4)
  - "And the LORD was with Judah" (v. 19)
  - Of the house of Joseph: "the LORD was with them" (v. 22)
- Real victories, but their source is the Lord
  - Israel began by asking the LORD, showing [BLANK: dependence]
- Protects us from two errors
  1. Obedience is unnecessary because grace is free
  2. We can obey without continual reliance upon God
- Scripture: God commands; God supplies; His people obey in faith

Seeking guidance

- Israel asks a specific question because God already gave a specific mission
- Seeking the Lord is not a way to avoid obedience already plain in Scripture
- We need wisdom for circumstances, timing, relationships, methods
- We don't need new revelation before:
  - Telling the truth
  - Fleeing sexual sin
  - Forgiving a brother

    - Worshiping with God's people
- Prayerfully seeking wisdom should make us more ready to obey, never less

Caution vs. compromise

- **Caution:** "How can I obey wisely and faithfully in this situation?"
    - May seek counsel and proceed carefully
- **Compromise:** "How can I preserve what I want while appearing to respect God's command?"
    - Searches for an exception before seeking obedience
- God isn't honored by reckless decisions made in His name
- Nor by delay that has become a respectable form of refusal

Start with the next faithful act

- Can't resolve every consequence of a confession in one day — but can stop speaking falsely today
- May need time and help to repair a relationship — but can abandon revenge and ask God for a willing heart
- Wholehearted obedience ≠ controlling every result
    - It means we stop making peace with disobedience and entrust the result to God

Encouraging beginnings (1:3-20)

Genuine victories

- Judah and Simeon strike Bezek
- Judah takes Jerusalem, the mountain, the south, and the valley
- Caleb's family account recalls earlier faithfulness
- Othniel takes Kirjath-sepher
- Achsah wisely asks her father for springs of water
- Judges 1 is not a chapter of unbroken defeat — God gave victories; faith produced action

Caleb, Othniel, and Achsah

- Caleb: of the generation that trusted God's promise when many feared the land
    - Connects present obedience with a long history of trust
- Faith is not vague optimism
    - Wise, concrete action in relation to God's inheritance
- Achsah sees land in the south needs water — asks, receives the upper and nether springs
    - Godliness isn't indifference to practical needs

- People acting within God's provision rather than abandoning it

The danger of early victories

- Spiritually dangerous if we credit ourselves
- Victory over a public temptation, years of faithful service, a difficult right choice
  - Reasons for gratitude
  - Not permission to relax vigilance
- Victories should have strengthened confidence in the Lord for the next command
  - Instead, a people willing to stop short
- **Yesterday's obedience cannot substitute for today's obedience**

Iron chariots (v. 19)

- "And the LORD was with Judah; and he drave out the inhabitants of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron."
- Read carefully
  - It says the Lord was with Judah
  - It doesn't say iron chariots were stronger than the Lord
  - It reports Judah's failure
- Don't build an explanation that contradicts the chapter — the Lord's presence was not insufficient
- Corrects the language of our hearts — we talk as if the obstacle excuses us
  - "Too established," "too complicated," "too long-standing"
- Difficulties are real; iron chariots were real
  - The LORD was with Judah despite the [BLANK: iron chariots]
  - Difficulty doesn't cancel God's authority or make disobedience harmless

Say it with pastoral care

- Addiction, entrenched anger, a dishonest work pattern, a destructive relationship
  - May need wise counsel, patient help, careful planning, the church's support
  - The answer isn't a glib command to end it by sheer effort
- But compassionate care must not become a vocabulary for surrender
- God meets His people in hard obedience
  - Means of grace, fellow believers, wise correction, strength for the next faithful step
- An iron chariot may change the way we proceed; it never gives sin the right to remain

Christian application, stated carefully

- Not told to conquer geographic land or destroy people
- Commanded to put away sin and refuse its rule
  - “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.” (Rom 6:12)
- Secret sin is never a neutral tenant — it seeks a throne

Read Judges 1:21-36 and 2:1-5 (0:16-0:20)

- **Read aloud**

Exposition of Judges 1:21-36 and 2:1-5 (0:20-0:31)

The repeated sentence (1:21-36)

“Did not drive out”

- Beginning at v. 21, the sad sentence falls again and again
  - Benjamin — the Jebusites
  - Manasseh — Beth-shean and other towns
  - Ephraim — the Canaanites in Gezer
  - Zebulun, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan — a record of incomplete possession

Why the repetition matters

- Slows the reader down — easy to skim place names as an ancient map
- The repeated negative is the theological refrain
  - Tribe after tribe, the same question: will Israel live under God’s command?
- Shows how a national pattern forms
  - Collapse rarely starts with a public announcement that God’s Word no longer matters
  - More often it grows through a series of tolerated exceptions

Different failures, same result

- Some leave inhabitants in key cities
- Some dwell among the Canaanites

- Dan is pressed back into the mountain
- Same result: God has not been obeyed fully
- Keeps us from comparing ourselves complacently
    - Unguarded speech, hidden bitterness, pursuit of money at any cost
    - Each measured by the Word, not by a neighbor's failures

Usefulness is not faithfulness

- The chapter isn't cataloguing military inconvenience — it documents disobedience to a revealed command
- "when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute, and did not utterly drive them out" (1:28)
    - Looked useful — no immediate threat, could be exploited
    - Usefulness is not the measure of faithfulness
- Compromise offers a practical argument
    - Keep the profitable arrangement
    - Tolerate the small exception
    - Make peace with the forbidden, provided it seems controlled
- An idol isn't made safe by being taxed, managed, or kept at a distance
- Israel repeatedly chose [BLANK: compromise] rather than full obedience

Compromise reverses the relationship (v. 32)

- "But the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: for they did not drive them out."
- Israel was to possess the land — now Asher lives among those it was commanded to remove
- What we imagine we can contain begins to shape the conditions in which we live

Sin is not a private hobby

- A tolerated pattern changes what feels normal
    - What we watch without shame
    - What we laugh at
    - What conversations we avoid
    - What we spend
    - What counsel we accept
- "Only a small exception" may come to determine the boundaries of life

- Scripture's warnings aren't meant to make tender consciences hopeless
  - They call us into the light before a foothold becomes a controlling influence

How it works in ordinary discipleship

- Dishonesty: begins by avoiding embarrassment → default response when truth is costly
- Resentment: begins with a real wound → lens for every relationship
- Neglecting prayer or corporate worship: begins with fatigue → unable to recognize spiritual hunger
- Not every struggle is identical
  - But God calls us to address sin while it still claims to be small

Thorns and snares

- A thorn irritates and wounds over time
- A snare catches an animal that didn't expect it
- Sin works both ways
  - Troubles the conscience while promising tomorrow will be different
  - Tightens around the one who thought it manageable
- Wise response: don't study how close you can live to a snare — obey promptly

New Testament warning

- "lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us" (Heb 12:1)
- A weight may not be openly celebrated as sin, but it entangles and impedes obedience
- Don't negotiate with what God calls us to [BLANK: lay aside]

The Lord's covenant rebuke (2:1-5)

The Lord starts with His grace

- "And an angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I sware unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you" (2:1)
- These verses interpret chapter 1
- He delivered them, brought them in, kept covenant

The command and the piercing question

- "And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars" (v. 2)
- "but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this?"

- God doesn't accept a partial record because it included impressive victories
- His question reaches beneath excuses

The consequence

- "Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you" (v. 3)
- They become exactly what God's command warned against
- The remaining nations and their gods became a [BLANK: snare]
  - Doesn't announce itself — it waits, catches, holds

Tears at Bochim

- The people weep and sacrifice — God's rebuke is serious
- Tears alone ≠ enduring repentance
  - The book will show sorrow over consequences must become a changed direction under God's Word
  - A moving moment must not replace obedient faith
- Don't despise tears
  - The Lord's rebuke ought to affect us
  - A heart unmoved by God's Word is in danger
- Don't assure someone merely because of an emotional response
  - Repentance: a change of mind about sin that issues in a changed direction
  - Zacchaeus — his response touched his money and his wrongs
  - Confessing dishonesty → truth; confessing bitterness → forgiveness
- Bochim means "weepers"
  - Memorializes a solemn encounter with God
  - A memorial to conviction ≠ a life of obedience
  - We can remember a sermon, altar call, retreat, or hard conversation and still avoid the change
- The question: not only "Was I moved?" but "What has my obedience looked like since God spoke?"

Application: Obedience is not a bargaining process (0:31-0:38; with Christ and the gospel)

1. **Submit our definitions to Scripture**
   - If God calls it sinful, don't call it a harmless habit

- If He commands forgiveness, purity, truthfulness, generosity, gathering, or witness, don't lower the standard
- God's Word, not the convenience of the moment, is our [BLANK: authority]

2. **Identify the practical rationale behind compromise**
   - Israel's reasons: formidable opponents, established cities, economic advantage, perhaps fatigue
   - Ours: "I need this income." "Everyone does this." "It has been part of my life for years." "I can handle it."
   - These may describe pressure; they don't turn disobedience into wisdom
   - Bring those rationales before a mature believer
     - Secrecy gives compromise persuasive power — we hear only our own arguments
     - A pastor, parent, mentor, or church member can separate a real limitation from an excuse
     - Accountability isn't a replacement for repentance or policing a conscience
     - It's one of God's ordinary provisions for walking honestly in the light
3. **Deal with footholds early**
   - "Neither give place to the devil." (Eph 4:27)
   - A foothold is not full possession, but it is a place granted
   - What has a place in our schedules, screens, speech, thought life, spending, or affections?
   - Don't admire the strength of the iron chariot
     - Bring it into the light
     - Seek accountability where needed
     - Take the concrete step obedience requires
   - Do not give sin a [BLANK: foothold] in your life
4. **Distinguish obedience to God from obedience for God**
   - We obey **to** receive and rest in our Lord's instruction
   - We do not obey **for** acceptance with God
   - A believer is accepted in Christ, not hired by good performance
   - Eph 2:8-10 — "not of works," yet "created in Christ Jesus unto good works"
   - We are saved for, not by, [BLANK: good works] — fruit, not the price of adoption
   - The TO/FOR distinction guards the conscience
     - We don't try to purchase grace
     - We don't use grace as permission to make peace with sin
   - Especially important after failure — two wrong conclusions:
     - "God must be finished with me"
     - "My choices can't matter very much"

    - Both miss the gospel
        - Christ receives sinners with no claim on Him
        - He receives them to free them from sin's rule
    - When we fail, we don't hide or try to repay with frantic effort
        - Confess, trust His mercy, accept His correction, take the obedient step before us

Make it quiet and concrete

- Invite each learner to ask God for honesty about one area where a practical argument has covered disobedience
- The aim:
    - Not public disclosure of private matters
    - Not a moment of pressure
    - A real response to God's Word
- A confession, conversation, boundary, restitution, or request for help may be required
    - The time to begin is not after we feel stronger, but when the Lord has made the matter plain

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Christ and the gospel (0:31-0:38; with application)

Judges leaves us wanting a faithful covenant keeper

- Israel receives promises, witnesses power, still fails to obey fully
- The answer isn't merely to try harder than Israel
- The answer is Jesus Christ

Where Israel failed, Christ obeyed

- "I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29)
- He died not for His own sin, but for sinners
    - "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." (1 Pet 3:18)
- He rose again
- All who repent and trust Him are forgiven, counted righteous in Him, and given the Holy Spirit

Both pardon and power

- We don't overcome compromise to make Jesus receive us

- We come as guilty people who need [BLANK: mercy]
  - Then, because He received us, we obey from a new standing and by His strength
- “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15)
- Love does not earn His love; it answers it

Hope for growth

- Obedience isn’t an impossible ideal left hanging over us
- By His Spirit, He forms a new pattern of life
  - Growth may be gradual; daily repentance remains; but the direction changes
  - Instead of making peace with sin, we wage war against it
  - Instead of defending compromises, we bring them to the Savior
- The One who perfectly obeyed for us now helps us obey Him

Discussion (0:38-0:43)

Discussion questions

1. What does the repetition of “did not drive out” teach us about partial obedience?
2. Why is it dangerous to measure faithfulness by usefulness or visible success?
3. What modern forms can a spiritual “snare” take?
4. How does the TO/FOR distinction keep both legalism and carelessness from ruling us?
5. What specific step of obedience should follow this lesson?

Closing prayer (0:43-0:45)

> **Closing prayer:** “Father, Thou hast spoken clearly in Thy Word, and we confess that we often excuse what Thou dost forbid. Forgive our partial obedience and hidden bargains with sin. Thank Thee for the perfect obedience and atoning mercy of Jesus Christ. By Thy Spirit, give us faith to obey Thee wholly, not to earn Thy acceptance, but because we are accepted in Thy beloved Son. Make Thy Word our authority and keep us from every snare. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”