

Possess, Plunder and Prosper

Part 4: Testing, Training and Triumph

Opening scripture: Judges 3:1-4

The book of Judges describes a period of time after Joshua's death and after all the great conquests in Canaan. Despite those conquests, large areas remained yet to be possessed by the individual tribes.

There was a new generation now settling in the land and most of them had never even fought in the battlefield. Spiritually, they were also different from the previous generation. The Joshua generation was faithful to God, zealous and they had experienced God in miraculous ways. However, this new generation had only heard about the miracles but had not experienced God for themselves.

There was yet much land to possess and God wanted to position them for more conquests ahead. God wanted to fulfil His covenant and give them the fullness of their inheritance.

Today I want to talk to you about 'testing, training and triumph'. I want to talk about God's process for your progress.

1. Testing

V. 1a *"Now these are the nations which the Lord left, that He might test Israel by them," ...*

V.4: *"And they were left, that He might test Israel by them, to know whether they would obey the commandments of the Lord, which He had commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses".*

Nothing positions you for triumph like a willing and obedient heart.

Isaiah 1:19 – *"If you are willing and obedient you shall eat the good of the land".*

In this passage, God allowed some nations to be left in the land with all kinds of gods and a completely different culture to see if they would obey Him or the gods of these nations. Were they going to be loyal to God and keep His ways or were they going to merge with these other religions and be unfaithful to God?

That is why God kept those nations there. Israel needed to choose. Decision is very important to God. He made us free will agents, not puppets. He respects our decisions.

They needed to choose between God and the gods of those nations; they needed to choose between God's ways and the ways of those nations.

- Have you ever wondered why there was a tree in the garden that they were not supposed to eat its fruit? So that Adam and Eve's obedience to God was the result of

a conscious decision. In the absence of options there is no authentic decision. God wants people to follow Him out of an authentic decision to do so.

- In the story of Job, the devil accused God of receiving loyalty simply because Job knew nothing but His favour. He basically said, 'give him an option, give him something else other than blessing and he will deny You'. Job stood firm in his allegiance to God, despite what he went through. His decision to follow God was final and real.

The way to the land of our promises is made open by passing the obedience test, by a firm decision to follow God. The steps of the person absolutely surrendered to Jesus are steps ordered by the Lord, are steps towards triumph and towards every promise of God.

God's tests are not even hard: they are open-Book tests.

Unfortunately, verses 5-7 says that they failed the test. However, when they cried out to the Lord, He provided a deliverer (verse 9).

Our failures are not fatal if we readily repent and turn to God. He has already provided a deliverer in Jesus!

One last thought: God doesn't test us with sickness or disease, but He does test our hearts:

Proverbs 17:3 - *The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests the hearts.*

2. Training

Verses 1-2: *"Now these are the nations which the Lord left, that He might test Israel by them, that is, all who had not known any of the wars in Canaan ² (this was only so that the generations of the children of Israel might be taught to know war, at least those who had not formerly known it),*

This was only so that they might be '*taught to know war*'. There were lessons they needed to learn so that they could maintain what they had inherited and attain to what was still ahead left to conquer. There was yet much land to possess. There was more in God for them ahead.

They knew what their fathers conquered, they were standing on it, but they lacked skills to conquer more and defend what they had.

God wanted them to learn war. The lessons of war are crucial. The lessons of a classroom are useful but they're not to compare with those from the battlefield – acquired by experience.

Luke 6:40 *A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher.*

Our Teacher, Jesus, was a master over the storms of life, over nature and over the demonic. This means that if we are perfectly trained, we will walk like Jesus walked.

V.2 *"this was only so that the generations of the children of Israel might be taught to know war"*

Paul encouraged Timothy (in **1 Timothy 1:18**) to "*wage the good warfare*"

Here's a few lessons of warfare I have learned:

- a. There is a war. There is an enemy sitting in the land of your promise, and he won't let go of it without a fight. There is a warfare. Ephesians 6 speaks of that reality. That is why training cannot be "optional" if you want to live the victorious Christian life.

Training is crucial for reigning – we are called to reign in life through Jesus!

Romans 5:17b - ... *those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.*

- b. You have to stay focused on being a soldier rather than seeing yourself as a civilian.

2 Timothy 2:4 *No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.*

- c. The presence of those nations was only so that the generations of the people of Israel might be taught to know war. These enemies were left there for target purposes only! In reality, they posed no real threat to Israel (if they stayed faithful to God).

To the trained soldier of God, to the believer wholly committed to Christ the devil may put up resistance or opposition, but he can never prevail.

Luke 10:19 - *Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.*

- Learn to see every battle as training you need in order to advance to the next level. The lessons of today's battles are crucial foundations for every future success.
 - Learn to see every battle as target practice for the 'real deal', for the 'big time', for the greater triumphs God has ahead.
 - Learn to see every battle as one more page in the book of your history with God.
- d. The apostle Paul had been through some battles. Here's what he learned:

Philippians 4:11-13 - ¹¹*Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: ¹²I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things, I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. ¹³I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*

3. Triumph

Testing, training and finally triumph!

2 Corinthians 2:14 – *“now thanks be to God who always leads into triumph in Christ”*

Triumph is the outcome we go for and triumph is God's plan. However, it is part of a process that involves all the other aspects we talked about today.

So, let us ...

- welcome God's process
- pass the tests before us
- learn the lessons we need to learn
- understand and engage in warfare. We are soldiers.
- Let us go deeper