

## 126 Doing right in our own eyes

"We've made it!" would have been the joyful cry of the Israelites after the destruction of Jericho (Joshua 6). The Lord had brought them out of Egypt. He had protected and provided for them in the wilderness. He had given them the Law, explaining to them who He was, who they were, and how they, as His covenant people, were to behave towards Him, and each other, and the surrounding nations. Now, under Joshua's leadership, He had led them across the Jordan into Canaan, the land He had promised to Abram and his offspring all those years before (eg., Genesis 12.1-3 / 13.14-17). The great victory over Jericho was confirmation of God's faithful and powerful presence: life was looking pretty good!

As the Israelites looked ahead, they could be sure that as they followed the Lord so He would drive out their enemies - those sinful peoples who were first and foremost God's enemies because of their abominable idolatrous practices. Sure enough, the victories began, and the land was duly divided up by lot between the Twelve Tribes.

But then we come to the times of the judges. The various ties which had kept the people together from the start began to be weakened. The emphasis slowly shifted away from their being clearly a single people, the unique people of the covenant with the one true God, on a shared pilgrimage, to a common home. Each tribe now had its own land, and many of the tribes found themselves living cheek by jowl with what was left of neighbouring peoples whose beliefs and practices were deeply sinful. The rot began to set in, via trading, intermarriage and idolatry.

In the Book of Judges we have a repeating cycle for the Israelites: their sinfulness, leading to defeat, followed by their repentance, followed by the Lord's rescue and restoration. Time and again they forgot the Lord and His covenant; time and again they paid the price for their disobedience; and time and again the Lord faithfully baled them out.

At the heart of all their folly is a telling little phrase which the Lord gives us four times in Judges: "In those days there was no king in the land ...." (Judges 17.6 / 18.1 / 19.1 and 21.25); and in the first and last of these quotations is added the words, ".... every man did that which was right in his own eyes".

Things went wrong for God's people when they no longer looked to a central authority. Instead, they all started "doing their own thing", doing what suited them, and ignoring any Boss or any rules imposed from above. "I know best" became the motto - and disaster became the norm.

Until then the Israelites had always had a God-appointed leader, such as Moses or Joshua, and later on the Lord reluctantly allowed them to have a king (1 Samuel 8). But throughout, the Ultimate Authority over the covenant people - the Lord God Himself - was as much in charge as ever.

And so we come to today, and to people like us, who, by God's grace and our faith in His Son Jesus Christ, are the people of His New Covenant. Depending on our particular denomination within the Church of Christ there will be different forms of human authority, such as elders, pastors, ministers or bishops. But set over all these there reigns of course the Lord Jesus Himself, the Head of the Church (eg., Ephesians 1.15-23). Christ alone is the Person and the Holder of central, ultimate authority, who has been placed there by Almighty God the Father, to whom Jesus will eventually hand everything over (eg., 1 Corinthians 15.27-28).

To help us in this task of looking to the Christ-Centre for His leading and guidance, we have one another. While the Christian path is certainly individual and personal, we remember it is also corporate and shared, for how we need each other, to guide, correct and encourage (eg., Colossians 3.12-17)!

Singly and together, a simple prayer such as this, in whatever choices and situations we may be involved, can help to keep us on the right track: "Lord, in this situation please grant us understanding of your wishes, that we may truly carry out what is right in your eyes".

The Israelites kept getting it wrong; their example is there to stop us making the same mistakes!