

## **Teaching and Testing**

*Judges 3:1-4*

The book of Joshua is the story of the Israelites entering and conquering the Promised Land, the land they had been looking forward to for forty long years in the desert. The following book (Judges) opens with the immediate aftermath of Joshua's death, and begins the next era in Israel's history by explaining that the Lord did not completely eradicate the enemies of Israel from the Promised Land during the lifetime of Joshua. In fact, Judges 3:1 says, *"These are the nations that the Lord left in the land..."*

We might wonder why the Lord would deliberately allow certain enemies to remain, after promising His people that He would give them victory over all the inhabitants of the land. We are not left to wonder for long, however, as the following verses give us the answer:

### **1. To Teach**

*"He did this to teach warfare to generations of Israelites who had no experience in battle". (Judges 3:2)*

Most of the men who had wandered in the desert for 40 years were inexperienced soldiers, untrained in battle. They had to learn the principles of warfare in order to be able to effectively conquer the land and then to protect and defend it. God provided opportunities for them to learn these lessons, through the difficult experience of facing a stubborn enemy.

### **2. To Test**

*"These people were left to test the Israelites—to see whether they would obey the commands the Lord had given to their ancestors through Moses. (Judges 3:4)*

The people of God had led a somewhat sheltered life as they wandered in the harsh wilderness, completely dependent on the mercies of God to sustain them and surrounded by a community of like-minded believers. Now living at last in the Promised Land, they faced a test from God: when they encountered different people, different cultures, and different beliefs, would they stay committed to the One True God?

We know from history that the Israelites failed to learn the lessons being taught, and thus ultimately did not pass the test. Judges 2:7-10 gives the sad summary of that period of time: *"And the Israelites served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and the leaders who outlived him—those who had seen all the great things the Lord had done for Israel...After that generation died, another generation grew up who did not acknowledge the Lord or remember the mighty things He had done for Israel".*

What "enemies" has God left in your "Promised Land"? Regardless of the source of the enemy attacks, God may have allowed them for the same two reasons: to teach you, and to test you. Are you learning the lesson? Will you pass the test?

*--Shari McRae, 11/3/08*