

Judges 20:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the children of Israel arose, and went up to the house of God, and asked counsel of God, and said, Which of us shall go up first to the battle against the children of Benjamin? And the LORD said, Judah shall go up first.

Analysis

The children of Israel arose, and went up to the house of God (בֵּית־אֱלֹהִים, beit-el, 'Bethel')—finally, consultation with God! **And asked counsel of God** (וְשָׁאַלְוּ, vayish'alu be'elohim)—the verb 'to ask' (שָׁאַל, sha'al) suggests inquiry, but their question reveals shallow consultation: **Which of us shall go up first to the battle against the children of Benjamin? And the LORD said, Judah shall go up first** (וְהַיָּה בְּתַחְלַת, yehudah batechillah).

Israel's inquiry is revealing in what it asks and what it omits. They ask 'which tribe first?' but never 'should we attack at all?' They assume war is the right course, seeking only tactical guidance about implementation. God answers their narrow question—'Judah first'—but His response doesn't constitute blanket approval of their strategy. The following two defeats demonstrate that God's designation of Judah as vanguard doesn't equal blessing on their battle plan. This illustrates how we can receive answers to limited questions while missing God's fuller counsel. Israel's consultation is real but insufficient—they seek God's input without truly submitting their approach for evaluation. When we predetermine our course and ask God only about details, we receive technical answers that may not prevent strategic disaster. Divine guidance requires surrendering the whole plan, not merely requesting rubber-stamp approval.

Historical Context

Bethel ('house of God'), located about 12 miles north of Jerusalem, was an important worship site in this period. The ark of the covenant was there (v. 27), making it a legitimate place for inquiry. However, the tabernacle remained at Shiloh (Joshua 18:1), suggesting the ark had been relocated—possibly for this very occasion. That Judah was designated first recalls their primacy in earlier battles (1:1-2) and anticipates their later preeminence under David and in Christ.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. When do you ask God about 'how' without submitting your entire plan for His evaluation?
2. How do you seek divine rubber-stamp approval rather than surrendering to potential redirection?
3. What would it mean to truly ask 'Should I do this?' rather than 'How should I implement what I've already decided?'

Interlinear Text

בתחילה:

first

H8462

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 27:21 (References Lord): And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of Urim before the LORD: at his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he, and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation.

Judges 20:23 (References Lord): (And the children of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until even, and asked counsel of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up again to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother? And the LORD said, Go up against him.)

Joel 1:14 (References God): Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God, and cry unto the LORD,

Joshua 18:1 (References Israel): And the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of the congregation there. And the land was subdued before them.

Joshua 9:14 (References Lord): And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD.

Numbers 27:5 (References Lord): And Moses brought their cause before the LORD.

Judges 19:18 (References Lord): And he said unto him, We are passing from Beth-lehem-judah toward the side of mount Ephraim; from thence am I: and I went to Beth-lehem-judah, but I am now going to the house of the LORD; and there is no man that receiveth me to house.

Judges 18:31 (References God): And they set them up Micah's graven image, which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh.

Judges 20:7 (References Israel): Behold, ye are all children of Israel; give here your advice and counsel.