

## Judges 1 • Chapter Study

### INTRO

The Book of Judges is both **exciting & depressing**.

**Exciting** because of its wild stories & examples of amazing faith.

**Depressing** in its chronicle of the absolute insanity of the people of Israel.

It was most likely Samuel, the last Judge, who wrote the book.

The **Talmud**, a collection Jewish commentaries on the scripture, attributes it to him.

The theme of Judges is found in 21:25 –

In those days *there was* no king in Israel: every man did *that which was* right in his own eyes.

This is repeated 3Xs; In chs 17, 18 & 19.

It *implies* at the time it was written, there **was a king**.

1:21 says that at the time of writing, the Jebusites controlled Jrz. So David hadn't conquered it yet.

So Sam probably wrote Judges during reign Saul, Isrl's 1<sup>st</sup> King, drawing on records & chronicles kept by others as his source material.

Judges begins w/the death of Joshua & ends with the coronation of Saul; a span of abt 300 yrs; 1350-1050 B.C.

Keep the historical setting of Judges in mind.

Under the leadership of Joshua, Isrl broke the back of Canaanite dominance of the land.

Once the main cities were taken, the individual tribes were responsible for taking possession of ALL their territories.

That's when things began to come apart.

For the most part, the tribes **failed** to finish the task of eradicating the native Canaanites.

They instead allowed lil pockets of Canaanite occupation.

It didn't take long before the abominable practices of the Canaanites seduced the Israelites with their gross sensuality.

The period of the Judges saw a cyclical pattern that repeated itself time & again.

The cycle went like this:

- Devotion Blessing Prosperity
- Apathy Decadence Perversion
- Judgment Oppression Repentance
- Deliverance
- Repeat

During this period, Isrl was a patchwork of territories where the ind tribes were at different places in the cycle.

Issachar might be in the blessing phase while Naphtali was in Decadence leaning toward Perversion, while Reuben was being oppressed by the Midianites.

So the stories in Judges **overlap**.

The cycles we see in Judges tend to be repeated in the history of other nations as well.

A nation ascends to power & prosperity because of the virtues that hold its society together; things like loyalty, courage, sacrifice.

People grow up in a culture that puts greater value in what they can accomplish **together** than in selfish, individual pursuits.

This mindset gives birth to a solid social structure that allows incredible prosperity in which many participate.

But prosperity means the **need** for less work and more leisure.

Leisure, coupled to wealth, not tempered by moral caution, leads to vice. Vice leads to crime.

And left unchecked, crime leads to social upheaval, chaos, & often; the rise of a dictator the people **welcome** because he restores order.

One last thing before we get into the text –

When we use the word “judge” we tend to think of some man or woman sitting behind a high desk with a gavel in his hand, adjudicating the law.

That's not the idea here.

The Hebrew word is **shaphat** /shaw·fat.

It refers to anyone who rules, by not only **passing** sentence, but by **carrying it out**, personally.

Our judges don't pass sentence on criminals, then rise from their seat and come down to actually **physically** punish them.

The Jewish shaphat does just that.

So the Judges were people who brought deliverance to Israel by leading them against their enemies, then, once deliverance was accomplished, they settled in to rule.

Judah & Simeon Settle In • 1:1-20

<sup>1</sup> Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass that the children of Israel asked the Lord, saying, "Who shall be first to go up for us against the Canaanites to fight against them?" <sup>2</sup> And the Lord said, "Judah shall go up. Indeed I have delivered the land into his hand."

In Joshua we read that once the main campaign to conquer Canaan was complete, Joshua laid out the boundaries for each of the tribes.

He then sent them to take possession of what God had given them.

The people asked God who was to be 1<sup>st</sup> in striking out against the last holdouts of resistance in their territories.

The idea was that as 1 tribe went to battle to complete the conquest in their region, the other tribes would settle in & supply that tribe as it busied itself with battle.

Once it had secured **its** borders, then it would settle in & supply the **next territory** that would strike out against **its** remaining enemies.

This pattern of battle & supply would go on until all the tribes had completed their conquest.

The order of battle they left to the Lord. The 1<sup>st</sup> territory to fight was Judah.

<sup>3</sup> So Judah said to Simeon his brother, "Come up with me to my allotted territory, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I will likewise go with you to your allotted territory." And Simeon went with him.

Simeon & Judah were brothers, sons of the same mother, Leah – so the tribes were close.

In fact, while Joshua set specific borders for Judah, Simeon's inheritance was scattered around **inside** Judah. [Joshua 19:9]

<sup>4</sup> Then Judah went up, and the Lord delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand; and they killed ten thousand men at Bezek. <sup>5</sup> And they found Adoni-Bezek in Bezek, and fought against him; and they defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites. <sup>6</sup> Then Adoni-Bezek fled, and they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and big toes. <sup>7</sup> And Adoni-Bezek said, "Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off used to gather *scraps* under my table; as I have done, so God has repaid me." Then they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died.

Where Bezek was isn't clear, but it was the home of a notable tyrant.

"Adoni" means "lord" as in "ruler."

Adoni-Bezek guy was king of Bezek who'd spread his influence over a region of 70 cities.

In the ancient world, **the city** was a primary focus & center of power.

It exerted its dominance over the surrounding area by controlling the roads & passes.

Once a city grew strong enough, it would send out troops to conquer other cities in its vicinity.

Each of these city-states was governed by a king.

Adoni-Bezek extended his control over 70 cities around Bezek.

He affirmed his dominance by cutting off the thumbs & big toes of the kings he conquered.

Since these ancient rulers were mainly **military** leaders, if they couldn't hold a spear or sword or keep their feet in battle, they couldn't lead.

Adoni-Bezek brought these disabled kings to his palace where he kept them as trophies.

It was fitting for the Israelites to afflict the same punishment on him he'd inflicted on so many others.

<sup>8</sup> Now the children of Judah fought against Jerusalem and took it; they struck it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire.

Jrj occupied a strategic position along the central highlands.

Whoever controlled it held sway over some of the most important roads through the region.

And whoever controlled the roads, controlled the commerce and that meant \$.

Though Jrz wasn't in the territory assigned Judah, it provided a strategic position to attack her northern border, so it had to be defeated before Judah would be considered secure.

After they defeated the city, they set it to the torch & moved on.

It's too bad they didn't leave some troops there to occupy the city.

The Jebusites moved back in, reinforced it & made it a problem for them later.

<sup>9</sup> And afterward the children of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites who dwelt in the mountains, in the South, and in the lowland. <sup>10</sup> Then Judah went against the Canaanites who dwelt in Hebron. (Now the name of Hebron *was* formerly Kirjath Arba.) And they killed Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmi.

These were 3 huge guys, descendants of the well-known giant Anak.

<sup>11</sup> From there they went against the inhabitants of Debir. (The name of Debir *was* formerly Kirjath Sepher.) <sup>12</sup> Then Caleb said, "Whoever attacks Kirjath Sepher and takes it, to him I will give my daughter Achsah as wife."

<sup>13</sup> And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it; so he gave him his daughter Achsah as wife. Achsah & Othniel were cousins.

Caleb & Joshua were the 2 spies who yrs before returned from scouting out Canaan with a good report of how the land was ripe for the taking.

As a reward for his faithfulness, Moses promised to give Caleb his choice of where ever he wanted to settle in Canaan.

Caleb chose the most challenging piece of real estate in all the land – Hebron.

It was the headquarters of the giants.

Even as an old man, Caleb believed God would give him victory.

He led the attack on the city & prevailed.

Now he leads in carrying on the conquest over the surrounding towns.

As an incentive, he promised to give his daughter as a wife to the man who could conquer the city of Debir. His nephew Othniel, was the winner.

<sup>14</sup> Now it happened, when she came *to him*, that she urged him to ask her father for a field. And she dismounted from *her* donkey, and Caleb said to her, "What do you wish?" <sup>15</sup> So she said to him, "Give me a blessing; since you have given me land in the South, give me also springs of water." And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs.

Othniel's conquest at Debir was the bride price for Achsah.

She convinced her new husband to request that Caleb give a certain field as a wedding present.

Then she asked her father for a further blessing of some nearby springs to irrigate it.

The reason the writer put all this in the record was to root the story in history.

The cities of Hebron, Debir, Othniel's field & Achsah's springs were all well-known locations to the people of that day.

The **record** of how they came to be possessed by the descendants of these people 300 yrs later anchored these stories in **real** historical events.

Our faith isn't just a philosophy arising out of some sage's smarts.

It isn't the result of a vision in cave.

It's not a theory to be bandied about in college classrooms as just one more ideology among many.

Our Faith rests in a God Who works **IN** History, a God Who's done **specific things** that form a chronicle of actual events.

What saves us isn't spiritual enlightenment gleaned from deep meditation & apprehension of cosmic mysteries.

What saves us is something a Man named Jesus did 2K yrs ago on a cross at hill called Calvary.

<sup>16</sup> Now the children of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up from the City of Palms [**Jericho**] with the children of Judah into the Wilderness of Judah, which *lies* in the South *near* Arad; and they went and dwelt among the people.

Moses' father-in-law Jethro was a Kenite, 1 of a nomadic people who lived in Midian, SE of Israel.

Jethro's clan settled in the region of Judah, eventually being absorbed by them.

<sup>17</sup> And Judah went with his brother Simeon, and they attacked the Canaanites who inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. So the name of the city was called Hormah. [**Destruction**]

First the Simeonites helped Judah, now Judah helps Simeon in conquering the places they'd been allotted.

Instead of taking possession of Hormah, they leveled it.

Simeon was a small tribe & couldn't possess all the cities they'd been allotted; they'd be stretched too thin, so they had to shrink their holdings.

Hormah was leveled because they couldn't leave it as a refuge their enemies could flee to & reinforce.

<sup>18</sup> Also Judah took Gaza with its territory, Ashkelon with its territory, and Ekron with its territory.

This was the coastal region that would in a short time become home to the Philistines who arrived from the sea after being driven out of temporary homes they'd set up along the shores of N Egypt.

<sup>19</sup> So the Lord was with Judah. And they drove out the mountaineers, but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the lowland, because they had chariots of iron.

After telling us in v18 Judah conquered the coast, we read they weren't able to take the **lowland**.

The word "lowland" here refers to a **plain**, a region between the coast & hills called the **Shephelah**.

It's a gently sloping plateau cut by deep valleys that carry the streams off the eastern hills toward the western sea.

It was also the region of some of the more formidable Canaanite cities.

In about 1200 BC, the Philistines introduced iron chariots to this area.

This is the first mention of **failure** on the part of Israel to take possession of the land.

The reason given was a superior technology.

**Question:** Were superior weapons or forces ever a problem for Israel when they trusted God?

No. And it would not have been a problem now.

The writer is marking a turn in Israel's spiritual posture; letting us know the great victories of the past are just that – The Past.

Israel's days of dependence on God are coming to an end.

And because of that, so is her unbroken string of victories.

<sup>20</sup> And they gave Hebron to Caleb, as Moses had said. Then he expelled from there the 3 sons of Anak.

Benjamin fails at Jerusalem • 1:21

<sup>21</sup> But the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who inhabited Jerusalem; so the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.

After Judah's conquest of Jerusalem, the Jebusites moved in & took over, reinforcing it & making it their HQs.

The tribe of Benjamin, skilled warriors, weren't able to dislodge them.

The writer tells us that was the sitch at the time of his writing, so he had to have written **prior** to David's reign because David took Jrz & made it his capital.

Joseph's victory at Bethel 1:22-26

<sup>22</sup> And the house of Joseph also went up against Bethel, and the Lord *was* with them.

The house of Joseph included the tribes of **both** Ephraim & Manasseh.

<sup>23</sup> So the house of Joseph sent men to spy out Bethel. (The name of the city *was* formerly Luz.) <sup>24</sup> And when the spies saw a man coming out of the city, they said to him, "Please show us the entrance to the city, and we will show you mercy." <sup>25</sup> So he showed them the entrance to the city, and they struck the city with the edge of the

sword; but they let the man and all his family go. <sup>26</sup> And the man went to the land of the Hittites, built a city, and called its name Luz, which *is* its name to this day.

Bethel was located on the border btwn Ephraim & Benjamin.

It lay at an important crossroads of N/S & E/W trade routes.

The city was too well fortified for a frontal attack & too well prepared for a siege.

So scouts snagged a resident & promised him protection if he would divulge where the secret entrance to the city lay.

When they took the city, they made good on their promise & the guy left, moving to a distant land where he started a new city.

Failures 1:27-36

After these few successful campaigns, the record goes sour & is marked by one failure after another.

<sup>27</sup> However, Manasseh did not drive out *the inhabitants of* Beth Shean and its villages, or Taanach and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Ibleam and its villages, or the inhabitants

of Megiddo and its villages; for the Canaanites were determined to dwell in that land.

Were they somehow **more determined** than the Canaanites of Bezek, or Jz, or the Anakim of Hebron?

When you're fighting for your life, you're pretty determined.

These Canaanites who resisted Manasseh were no more capable or determined than those defeated by Judah.

The difference was in the **determination of Manasseh!**

The just didn't want to fight anymore.

And **they didn't want to fight because they were content with what they had rather than what God wanted them to have.**

This is such an important lesson this passage and what it teaches is what we'll look at Sunday.

So let's jump on down to ch2.

A Warning from God 2:1-6

<sup>1</sup> Then the Angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said: "I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers; and I said, 'I will never break My covenant with you.' <sup>2</sup> And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this?"

This "angel of the Lord" must be the Lord Himself because He speaks in the 1<sup>st</sup> person as the one who led them out of bondage & into the Promised Land.

It was **His** commands they broke by putting the Canaanites under tribute rather than removing them.

They weren't just allowed to **live** in Israel; they were allowed to continue their debauched lifestyle.

God told Israel to wipe out the Canaanites because if they didn't, the Canaanites would be **their** undoing.

And – they were.

<sup>3</sup> Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be *thorns* in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you.' " <sup>4</sup> So it was, when the Angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voices and wept. <sup>5</sup> Then they called the name of that place Bochim; and they sacrificed there to the Lord. <sup>6</sup> And when Joshua had dismissed the people, the children of Israel went each to his own inheritance to possess the land.

This takes place **before** Joshua's death.

He'd sent the tribes to possess their territories but they hadn't.

So he called their elders together at Bochim to troubleshoot and find out why they'd not followed thru on the Conquest.

At God's rebuke, most likely delivered thru Joshua, they repented & renewed their covenant with God.

God gives an important warning in v3.

If they won't wholly follow Him, making no compromise with the enemy, He'll withhold victory.

Here's the pt –

- When Isrl prevailed, it was evidence of God's blessing on their devotion.
- When Isrl was defeated, it was a lack of blessing because of her divided affection for God.

Joshua's Generation Passes 2:7-10

<sup>7</sup> So the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord which He had done for Israel. <sup>8</sup> Now Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died *when he was* 110 yrs old. <sup>9</sup> And they buried him within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Heres, in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash.

When the conquest was complete & Joshua finally settled down, he made his home in Timnath Heres, close to Shiloh where the tabernacle was.

That's where we'd expect to find Joshua, living close to the tabernacle because his all-consuming passion was to know & serve God.

Unlike Moses, when Joshua died, he didn't appoint a successor.

The tribes had been dispersed to their regions & leadership fell to the tribal **elders**.

The religious leadership was resident in the high priest who served at the tabernacle in Shiloh. Any time the nation needed to hear from God on what they ought to do, they went to the high priest who had the Urim & Thummim, the means God gave to discover His will.

The renewal of the covenant with God and one another was done 3 times a yr when they attended the feasts there at Shiloh.

At least, this is what was supposed to happen. The problem is, it didn't.

For the most part, the people didn't attend the feasts, and the nation fragmented into regional disputes.

<sup>10</sup> When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel.

When Joshua's gen died off, another gen rose without a commitment to Yahweh.

Whose fault was that? The parents.

They'd embraced the blessing of the land God gave them but weren't diligent to pass on their faith to their kids.

They didn't take them to Shiloh to worship God.

So He became **unimportant** to the new gen.

But there were plenty of Canaanites around willing to share **their** religion ways with the youth of Israel.

[Talk to parents]

Let's read v10 again –

<sup>10</sup> When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel.

They didn't know it because they weren't taught it. Are we teaching our children?

The answer to that is - **YES!** The **real** question is – **WHAT** are we teaching them?

<sup>11</sup> Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals; <sup>12</sup> and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from *among* the gods of the people who *were* all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the Lord to anger. <sup>13</sup> They forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.

Baal is spoken of in the plural because each region had its own version.

There was Baal Peor, Baal Gad, Baal-Berith, Baal-Zebub

The word "baal" was Canaanite for "**lord**" & "**husband**."

It's fitting that the word is a synonym for both because God likens idolatry to spiritual adultery.

When Isrl worshipped Baal, she not only committed **idolatry**, she was committing **spiritual adultery** by forsaking her covenant with Yahweh to attach herself to another lover.

**Ashtoreth**, or **Asherah** as she is sometimes called, was the Canaanite version of the Babylonian goddess, Ishtar, the deity of fertility & sexuality

She was the **consort** of Baal.

<sup>14</sup> And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel. So He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. <sup>15</sup> Wherever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for calamity, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn to them. And they were greatly distressed. <sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, the Lord raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them.

When the people turned from God, He disciplined them by sending trouble.

Hammered by oppression, they then cried out for help & God sent a deliverer.

<sup>17</sup> Yet they would not listen to their judges, but they played the harlot with other gods, and bowed down to them. They turned quickly from the way in which their fathers walked, in obeying the commandments of the Lord; they did not do so.

After a judge had brought relief from oppression, the people quickly returned to the errors that had led to their oppression and trouble – proving the well-worn adage –

Those who do not learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them.

<sup>18</sup> And when the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who

oppressed them and harassed them.<sup>19</sup> And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn way.

So, as long as a judge lived, the people followed his/her legacy of faith.

But as soon as the judge passed, they reverted to form and fell away.

There's something to be said here about the importance of a godly leader.

It seems that **even one** person is capable of bringing God's will & blessing to bear for an entire nation or enterprise.

How important it is that we pray for our leaders. 1 Tim 2:1-2

I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.

The nations left in Canaan 2:20-3:6

<sup>20</sup> Then the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel; and He said, "Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and has not heeded My voice,<sup>21</sup> I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died,<sup>22</sup> so that through them I may test Israel, whether they will keep the ways of the Lord, to walk in them as their fathers kept *them*, or not."<sup>23</sup> Therefore the Lord left those nations, without driving them out immediately; nor did He deliver them into the hand of Joshua.

God left these peoples because really, Israel **wanted** them.

They got a little taste of the Canaanites sensual practices & were enticed.

God said, "Okay, you don't want to expel them as I commanded, then I'll give you what you want."

The presence of the Canaanites **proved** where the heart of Israel was.

They ended up staying in Israel until the time of David.

Then, when David led the nation in revival & renewal of the covenant with God, the army of Israel was able to finally expel the Canaanites altogether.