

Introduction

Opening Scripture: [Deut 8:11-20](#).

Background

The book of Judges does not specify who wrote it or when it was written. Many scholars think the book was written during Solomon or David's reign over Israel. First, four times near the end of the book ([Judg 17:6](#); [18:1](#); [19:1](#); [21:25](#)), the writer says "In those days there was no king in Israel." This suggests that it was written from the perspective of a time when there was a king. Second, [Judges 1:29](#) states that the Canaanites lived in Gezer. Later, [1 Kings 9:15-17](#) explains that an Egyptian Pharaoh captured Gezer from the Canaanites and gave it to his daughter, who was married to Solomon. Solomon then rebuilt Gezer (Pharaoh had burned the city). It is still possible that this detail just wasn't included; however, it may not have been included because it had not happened yet. Third, [Judges 1:21](#) (cf. [Josh 15:63](#)) states that the Jebusites lived in Jerusalem "to this day" (until the time period when Judges was written). In [2 Samuel 5:6-10](#), David took Jerusalem from the Jebusites, which suggests Judges was written before this.

Purpose

Why was Judges written? The book ends [Judges 21:25](#) "25 In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (cf. [Judg 17:6](#); [18:1](#); [19:1](#)). This ending gives insight into the purpose of the book. First, "everyone did what was right in their own eyes." The book of Judges is a downward spiral. It begins with faithfulness under Joshua's leadership, then quickly spirals toward unfaithfulness. We can see this in two ways: the sin and the judges. As we read through Judges, sin becomes more extreme. The final chapters of Judges are not rated G. Also, as we read through Judges, the people who act as judges become less and less godly (until Samuel).

Second, "there was no king in Israel." Judges prepares for the need of a king. Israel is led by elders and clan leaders, but they lack a single leader. Israel finally gets a king in 1 Samuel, but even that reflects their misunderstanding. Israel demanded a king ([1 Sam 8:4-5](#)). God said they had rejected Him as king over them ([1 Sam 8:7](#)). God gave them Saul, the king they wanted, but the Lord was the King they needed.

The purpose of the book of Judges is to point us to our need for God to be our King. When we do not submit under the authority of God, our life is a downward spiral away from God and toward sin. The New Testament is clear that Jesus sits on God's throne, rules over His kingdom, and will judge all of His enemies.

Judah's leadership

Overview

[Judges 1:1-2:15](#) foreshadows the rest of the book. It begins with faithfulness. The Lord sends Judah to lead the fight against the land's remaining inhabitants. Judah is mostly successful. However, as the writer describes the other tribes, the description is a downward spiral from Judah's success to Dan's complete failure. Chapter 2 describes Israel's spiritual downfall. They spiraled from faithfulness to idolatry.

Judah's battles

[Judges 1:1-3](#) "1 After the death of Joshua, the people of Israel inquired of the Lord, "Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?"
2 The Lord said, "Judah shall go up; behold, I have given the land into his hand."
3 And Judah said to Simeon his brother, "Come up with me into the territory allotted to me, that we may fight against the Canaanites. And I likewise will go with you into the territory allotted to you." So Simeon went with him."

Why did God choose Judah to lead the fight against the Canaanites? First, it was God's plan for Judah to rule over the other tribes. Jacob blessed Jacob in [Genesis 49:8-10](#) "8 "Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall **bow** down before you. 9 Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him? 10 The **scepter** shall not depart from Judah, nor the **ruler's staff** from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples." Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin; David was from the tribe of Judah.

Second, it was God's plan that the Messiah, the ruler of God's kingdom, would come from the tribe of Judah. God promised this to David ([2 Sam 7:12-16](#)). Jesus, who descended from David was from the tribe of Judah ([Heb 7:14](#)).

[Judges 1:4-7](#) "4 Then Judah went up and the Lord gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand, and they defeated 10,000 of them at Bezek. 5 They found Adoni-bezek at Bezek and fought against him and defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites. 6 Adoni-bezek fled, but they pursued him and

caught him and cut off his thumbs and his big toes. 7 And Adoni-bezek said, “Seventy kings with their thumbs and their big toes cut off used to pick up scraps under my table. As I have done, so God has repaid me.” And they brought him to Jerusalem, and he died there.”

What did Israel do to Adoni-Bezek? When they defeated Adoni-Bezek, they cut off his thumbs and big toes. This was a common practice in this time period to ensure he would never fight again. Adoni-Bezek had done the same thing to other kings.

Caleb and Othniel

[Judges 1:8-10](#) “8 And the men of Judah fought against Jerusalem and captured it and struck it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire. 9 And afterward the men of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites who lived in the hill country, in the Negeb, and in the lowland. 10 And Judah went against the Canaanites who lived in Hebron (now the name of Hebron was formerly Kiriath-arba), and they defeated Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmi.”

Who was credited with defeating Hebron? [Judges 1:10](#) says that Judah defeated Hebron. [Joshua 14:6-15](#) says that Caleb defeated Hebron. This is not a contradiction; Caleb was counted as part of the tribe of Judah ([Num 13:6](#); [Josh 15:13](#)). Caleb was celebrated in Israel. God called Caleb “my servant” ([Num 14:24](#)) a title He had only used of Moses at that point. The Bible says that Caleb “followed the Lord fully” ([Num 14:24](#); [32:12](#); [Deut 1:36](#); [Josh 14:14](#)). The Bible only says that about Caleb, Joshua, and David.

[Judges 1:11-15](#) “11 From there they went against the inhabitants of Debir. The name of Debir was formerly Kiriath-sepher. 12 And Caleb said, “He who attacks Kiriath-sepher and captures it, I will give him Achsah my daughter as wife.” 13 And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother, captured it. And he gave him Achsah his daughter as wife. 14 When she came to him, she urged him to ask her father for a field. And she dismounted from her donkey, and Caleb said to her, “What do you want?” 15 She said to him, “Give me a blessing. Since you have given me the land of the Negeb, give me also springs of water.” And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs.”

Who defeated Debir? Othniel defeated Debir. This is described in [Joshua 15:15-19](#) and is repeated here because Othniel is an important character in [Judges 2](#). From his victory, Othniel marries Caleb’s daughter. This may seem strange to modern readers because Caleb was related to Othniel ([Judg 1:13](#)). However, we should be careful to not read our culture into Scripture. Abraham insisted that Isaac marry a relative rather than a Canaanite wife ([Gen 24:1-4](#)). Isaac insisted

that Jacob marry a relative rather than a Canaanite wife ([Gen 28:1-2](#)), unlike Esau, who married Hittite wives ([Gen 26:34](#); [27:46](#); [28:8](#)). If we read this within the culture in which it happened, this is a matter of praise for Othniel. He married within his own clan rather than marrying someone from Canaan.

Judah and Benjamin

[Judges 1:16-21](#) “16 And the descendants of the Kenite, Moses’ father-in-law, went up with the people of Judah from the city of palms into the wilderness of Judah, which lies in the Negeb near Arad, and they went and settled with the people. 17 And Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they defeated the Canaanites who inhabited Zephath and devoted it to destruction. So the name of the city was called Hormah. 18 Judah also captured Gaza with its territory, and Ashkelon with its territory, and Ekron with its territory. 19 And the Lord was with Judah, and he took possession of the hill country, but he could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain because they had chariots of iron. 20 And Hebron was given to Caleb, as Moses had said. And he drove out from it the three sons of Anak. 21 But the people of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem, so the Jebusites have lived with the people of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.”

*Although Judah had a lot of success, who did they fail to defeat? They did not defeat those who lived in the plain who had iron chariots. As we saw throughout Joshua, chariots would not prevent them from success. Therefore, it is likely that they were **unwilling** to fight against chariots. Benjamin also failed to drive the Jebusites out of Jerusalem.*

Joseph

[Judges 1:22-26](#) “22 The house of Joseph also went up against Bethel, and the Lord was with them. 23 And the house of Joseph scouted out Bethel. (Now the name of the city was formerly Luz.) 24 And the spies saw a man coming out of the city, and they said to him, “Please show us the way into the city, and we will deal kindly with you.” 25 And he showed them the way into the city. And they struck the city with the edge of the sword, but they let the man and all his family go. 26 And the man went to the land of the Hittites and built a city and called its name Luz. That is its name to this day.”

What city did Joseph’s descendants fight against? They defeated Bethel. When Abraham came to Canaan, he set up an altar between Bethel and Ai. Bethel was the place where Jacob had a dream of a ladder (stairway) into heaven with angels ascending and descending on it ([Gen 28:10-19](#)). It is also the place where God changed his name to Israel ([Gen 35:6-10](#)). When the nation split under the

leadership of Jeroboam and Rehoboam, Jeroboam set up a sanctuary at Bethel (another at Dan) so people in the northern kingdoms would not return to Jerusalem.

Summary

[Judges 1:1-26](#) portrays mixed success. Judah led the nation in fighting the inhabitants. Even they had mixed success. The following sections begin the downward spiral.

Living among Canaanites

Failure to drive out

[Judges 1:27-36](#) “27 **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 persisted in dwelling in that land. 28 When Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to **forced labor**, but did not drive them out completely. 29 And **Ephraim** did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer, so the Canaanites lived in Gezer **among them**. 30 **Zebulun** did not drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, or the inhabitants of Nahalol, so the Canaanites lived **among them**, but became subject to **forced labor**. 31 **Asher** did not drive out the inhabitants of Acco, or the inhabitants of Sidon or of Ahlab or of Achzib or of Helbah or of Aphik or of Rehob, 32 so the Asherites lived **among** the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land, for they did not drive them out. 33 **Naphtali** did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh, or the inhabitants of Beth-anath, so they lived **among** the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land. Nevertheless, the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and of Beth-anath became subject to **forced labor** for them. 34 The Amorites pressed the people of **Dan** back into the hill country, for they did not allow them to come down to the plain. 35 The Amorites persisted in dwelling in Mount Heres, in Aijalon, and in Shaalvim, but the hand of the house of **Joseph** rested heavily on them, and they became subject to **forced labor**. 36 And the border of the Amorites ran from the ascent of Akrabbim, from Sela and upward.”

What did the tribes in these verses fail to accomplish? They failed to drive out the inhabitants of the land. What did they force them to do instead? They enslaved the inhabitants. This is an important detail. This shows that Israel's failure was not a lack of power; it was a lack of faithfulness. They defeated the inhabitants, but did not drive them out.

Where did the inhabitants live once they became slaves? They lived **among** the Israelites. This was God's warning all throughout Deuteronomy and Joshua. He warned Israel to make no covenants and leave no one alive. If they lived among the Canaanites, they would be tempted to follow their idolatry.

God's Rebuke

[Judges 2:1-5](#) "1 Now the angel of the Lord went up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, "I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you, 2 and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.' But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done? 3 So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you." 4 As soon as the angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the people of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept. 5 And they called the name of that place Bochim. And they sacrificed there to the Lord."

According to verse 3, what was the consequence of Israel compromising with the local inhabitants? First, the Lord would not drive them out. God's promise to drive out the inhabitants was conditional upon their obedience. Second, God would allow the inhabitants to become a snare to Israel. The people wept, but there is no evidence they repented.

Summary

This section already previews the rest of Judges. Israel had mixed success driving out the inhabitants, but ultimately they chose to try to live with them. They compromised. Now they are in danger of idolatry because they have allowed the Canaanites to live among them.

New Generation

Joshua's Death

[Judges 2:6-10](#) "6 When Joshua dismissed the people, the people of Israel went each to his inheritance to take possession of the land. 7 And 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 work that the Lord had done for Israel. 8 And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of 110 years. 9 And they buried him within the boundaries of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash. 10 And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another

generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel.”

This repeats some of the information at the end of Joshua. *According to verse 7, how long was Israel faithful to the Lord?* They served the Lord throughout the days of Joshua and his elders. They had seen what God had done for Israel in the wilderness and in the conquest of Canaan. Some had even crossed the Red Sea.

What did the next generation not know? They did not know the Lord and they did not know His work. This verse should convict every parent and every church. Moses had faithfully disciplined Joshua, but who had Joshua disciplined? Joshua led his generation well, but he did not lead the next generation well. A parent’s job is not just to raise disciples of Jesus; it is to raise disciple-makers. A church’s job is not just to make disciples of Jesus; it is to make disciple-makers. A church that is not always looking to the next generation is one generation away from dying.

Israel’s unfaithfulness

[Judges 2:11-15](#) “11 And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals. 12 And they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the Lord to anger. 13 They abandoned the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtaroath. 14 So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them. And he sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. 15 Whenever they marched out, the hand of the Lord was against them for harm, as the Lord had warned, and as the Lord had sworn to them. And they were in terrible distress.”

How did living among the Canaanites affect the next generation? They began to serve Baals. Baal means master or lord. It is a broad term that refers to various gods. Ashtaroath is a broad term that refers to various goddesses. The names of these gods and goddesses varied slightly because they were worshipped in different regions and among different dialects.

Notice that verses 12 and 13 state that “they abandoned the Lord.” One thing we read throughout the Old Testament is that Israel frequently attempted to worship the Lord **and** the idols around them. This blending of worship is called syncretism. It is still prevalent in missions. People accept Jesus, but do not reject their current idols. This is also prevalent in the US. We don’t call our idols “gods,”

but we still attempt to worship material idols **and** the Lord. In reality, whenever anyone worships an idol, they have “abandoned the Lord.”

Conclusion

[Judges 1:1-2:15](#) begins with success. Judah takes the lead and drives out the Canaanites. However, as the chapter continues, Israel begins to enslave the Canaanites rather than drive them out. Therefore, the Canaanites live among them.

When Joshua and his elders die, the next generation does not know the Lord. But they do know the idols of the Canaanites that live among them. So they reject the Lord and worship the gods of the Canaanites.

This section ends with “they were in terrible distress” ([Judg 2:15](#)). [Judges 1:1-2:15](#) is a downward spiral. In the following section, the Lord sends judges to deliver them. The Lord saves them and they return to Him. Then they spiral down further than they were before. And the subsequent judges become worse than the ones before them.

“There was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” ([Judg 21:25](#)). We do not need freedom. We do not need fit in with the world. We need a King. We need to live under Christ’s reign. Only in Christ do we have true freedom.