Israel Fights the Remaining Canaanites

Judges 1:1-36

Dr. David Phillips
Israel Fights the Remaining Canaanites

Dr. David Phillips

Text:

Judges 1:1-36,

1. Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them?
2. And the LORD said, Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand.
3. And Judah said unto Simeon his brother, Come up with me into my lot, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I likewise will go with thee into thy lot. So Simeon went with him.
4. And Judah went up; and the LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand: and they slew of them in Bezek ten thousand men.
5. And they found Adonibezek in Bezek: and they fought against him, and they slew the Canaanites and the Perizzites.
6. But Adonibezek fled; and they pursued after him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes.
7. And Adonibezek said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me. And they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died.
8. Now the children of Judah had fought against Jerusalem, and had taken it, and smitten it with the edge of the sword, and set the city on fire.
9. And afterward the children of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites, that dwelt in the mountain, and in the south, and in the valley.
10. And Judah went against the Canaanites that dwelt in Hebron: (now the name of Hebron before was Kirjatharba:) and they slew Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmai.
11. And from thence he went against the inhabitants of Debir: and the name of Debir before was Kirjathsepher:
12. And Caleb said, He that smiteth Kirjathsepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife.
13. And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it: and he gave him Achsah his daughter to wife.
14. And it came to pass, when she came to him, that she moved him to ask of her father a field: and she lighted from off her ass; and Caleb said unto her, What wilt thou?
15. And she said unto him, Give me a blessing: for thou hast given me a south land; give me also springs of water. And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the nether springs.
16. And the children of the Kenite, Moses' father in law, went up out of the city of palm trees with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which lieth in the south of Arad; and they went and dwelt among the people.
17. And Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they slew the Canaanites that inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. And the name of the city was called Hormah.
18. Also Judah took Gaza with the coast thereof, and Askelon with the coast thereof, and Ekron with the coast thereof.
19. And the LORD was with Judah; and he drave out the inhabitants of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron.
20. And they gave Hebron unto Caleb, as Moses said: and he expelled thence the three sons of Anak.
21. And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem unto this day.
22. And the house of Joseph, they also went up against Bethel: and the LORD was with them.
23. And the house of Joseph sent to descry Bethel. (Now the name of the city before was Luz.)
24. And the spies saw a man come forth out of the city, and they said unto him, Shew us, we pray thee, the entrance into the city, and we will shew thee mercy.
25. And when he shewed them the entrance into the city, they smote the city with the edge of the sword; but they let go the man and all his family.
26. And the man went into the land of the Hittites, and built a city, and called the name thereof Luz: which is the name thereof unto this day.
27. Neither did Manasseh drive out the inhabitants of Bethshean and her towns, nor Taanach and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Dor and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Ibleam and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Megiddo and her towns: but the Canaanites would dwell in that land.
28. And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute, and did not utterly drive them out.
29. Neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer; but the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them.
30. Neither did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, nor the inhabitants of Nahalol; but the Canaanites dwelt among them, and became tributaries.
31. Neither did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Accho, nor the inhabitants of Zidon, nor of Ahlab, nor of Achzib, nor of Helbah, nor of Aphik, nor of Rehob:
32. But the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: for they did not drive them out.
33. Neither did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Bethshemesh, nor the inhabitants of Bethanath; but he dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: nevertheless the inhabitants of Bethshemesh and of Bethanath became tributaries unto them.
34. And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain: for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley:
35. But the Amorites would dwell in mount Heres in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim: yet the hand of the house of Joseph prevailed, so that they became tributaries.
36. And the coast of the Amorites was from the going up to Akrabbim, from the rock, and upward.

Introduction:

I. As we come to the first chapter Judges, we will begin to realize that a recurring theme for the book is that of the cycle of sin.

   A. We see the downward slide that leads the nation of Israel into compromise, sin and finally bondage to their enemies.

   B. So the big question becomes: How did this happen?

   C. How did the Israelites go from all the victories presented in the book of Joshua to the defeat that is found in the book of Judges?

II. We can bring this lesson home by asking how Christians get drawn back into the cycle of sin and defeat just when things seem to be going well for them.

   A. This first chapter pinpoints the heart of the problem.

   B. If we will only learn from the Israelites, we will then be able to avoid making the same mistakes that they made.

Commentary:

The Acts of Judah and Simeon
Judges 1:1, Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them?

I. It is important at this point to understand the symbolic message that Judges presents to us.

   A. The book is about taking our full inheritance.

   B. Each of the twelve tribes was allotted a portion of the land as their inheritance, and under Joshua, many of the enemies that lived in the land were defeated and victory was achieved.

      1. Joshua 11:23 says that Joshua took the entire land and gave it as an inheritance to the tribes of Israel.

      2. Yet it was still necessary for each tribe to move into its appointed area and to dwell there.

   C. Therefore, we read in the very first verse of Judges that Israel inquired of the Lord as to who should move into the territory allotted to them first.

II. Here is the symbolism: As Christians, we may not have a specific land that has been given to us, but we do have an inheritance in Jesus Christ that is to be possessed by faith.

   A. The book of Judges is a sad book in a way because it shows not only the failure of God’s people to press into the inheritance that God has for them, but, even worse, it shows the failure to retain even that which has already been conquered.
B. Consequently, Judges becomes a warning to us all: a warning of what can happen if we fail, stop short of our goal in God. Remember, we have our inheritance “in Christ”.

C. The efforts of Judah to conquer the territory allotted to them are recorded in this first chapter.

D. Judah solicited the help of Simeon with a promise to help Simeon with his conquests at the proper time.

*Judges 1:2, 3, And the LORD said, Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand. And Judah said unto Simeon his brother, Come up with me into my lot, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I likewise will go with thee into thy lot. So Simeon went with him.*

I. Notice that God says: “I have delivered the land into his hand.”

A. When God is at work in Judah’s goal, He has already won the battle, just like He did with Joshua in the initial conquest.

II. There is a lesson here for us as Christians. God always goes before us and wins the battle for us.

A. We don’t do it on our own strength, but in the strength of God Himself.

B. He is sovereign and His viewpoint is what counts.

C. If we try not to rush ahead of Him we will be better off in the long run in our walk with Him.

D. Judah naturally invited Simeon to join in this battle.
E. After all, the Simeonites lived within the territory of Judah and enjoyed an unusually close relationship with the people of Judah.

**Judges 1:4**, *And Judah went up; and the LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand: and they slew of them in Bezek ten thousand men.*

I. Bezek was a stronghold of the Canaanites and Perizzites at this time since the Israelite forces were able to smite them near this town.

A. The word translated “thousand” can also mean “military unit.”

1. In Judges 20:10 it refers to a unit of 10 men.

   a. **Judges 20:10**, *And we will take ten men of an hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel, and an hundred of a thousand, and a thousand out of ten thousand, to fetch victual for the people, that they may do, when they come to Gibeah of Benjamin, according to all the folly that they have wrought in Israel.*

   2. Therefore, the meaning here may be 10 military units rather than 10 thousand soldiers. (Dr. Constable’s notes on Judges.)

**Judges 1:5-7**, *And they found Adonibezek in Bezek: and they fought against him, and they slew the Canaanites and the Perizzites. But Adonibezek fled; and they pursued after him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes. And Adonibezek said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under*
my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me. And they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died.

I. Adonibezek (Lord of Bezek) was the title of the king of that town rather than his proper name.

A. The Israelites probably cut off his thumbs so he could not use the sword, and they cut off his big toes so he could not run away, because the big toe gives a person his balance in standing and walking.

1. He for sure could not run away.

2. These were temporary measures until they could carry out God’s will and slay him.

3. The loss of these digits also made it impossible for him to serve as a priest as well as a warrior, a dual function among many ancient eastern kings. (Herbert Wolf, “Judges”, Vol. 3 of the Expositor’s Bible Commentary.)

Judges 1:8, Now the children of Judah had fought against Jerusalem, and had taken it, and smitten it with the edge of the sword, and set the city on fire.

I. Even though the soldiers of Judah and Simeon captured and burned Jerusalem, the Israelites were not able to keep the Jebusites from returning to control their ancient city.

A. The Jebusites were a people who descended from early colonies of Hittites and Amorites in Canaan.

B. Jerusalem became Israel’s permanent possession years later when David finally exterminated the Jebusites. (2
Samuel 5:6-9): And the king and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land: which spake unto David, saying, Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither: thinking, David cannot come in hither. Nevertheless David took the strong hold of Zion: the same is the city of David. And David said on that day, Whosoever getteth up to the gutter, and smiteth the Jebusites, and the lame and the blind, that are hated of David's soul, he shall be chief and captain. Wherefore they said, The blind and the lame shall not come into the house. So David dwelt in the fort, and called it the city of David. And David built round about from Millo and inward.

C. The Israelites’ unfaithfulness in subduing the land is one of the major emphases in the book of Judges, as has been previously mentioned.

1. We will see this emphasis all the more as we study the book further.

Judges 1:9, 10, And afterward the children of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites, that dwelt in the mountain, and in the south, and in the valley. And Judah went against the Canaanites that dwelt in Hebron: (now the name of Hebron before was Kirjatharba:) and they slew Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmai

I. Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai were the ruling lords of Hebron, the highest city in elevation in Judah at approximately 3,000 feet.

Judges 1:11-15, And from thence he went against the inhabitants of Debir: and the name of Debir before was Kirjathsepher: And Caleb said, He that smiteth Kirjathsepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my
daughter to wife. And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it: and he gave him Achsah his daughter to wife. And it came to pass, when she came to him, that she moved him to ask of her father a field: and she lighted from off her ass; and Caleb said unto her, What wilt thou? And she said unto him, Give me a blessing: for thou hast given me a south land; give me also springs of water. And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the nether springs.

I. Othniel was a bold warrior who followed in the train of his older brother Caleb.

   A. God later raised him up to be the first of the heroic judges listed in our book of Judges.

   B. The incident related here is also in Joshua and took place before Joshua died.

II. Caleb rewarded Othniel’s bravery by giving him his daughter’s hand in marriage.

   A. The blessing she asked was the springs of water over which Caleb had authority.

Judges 1:16, And the children of the Kenite, Moses' father in law, went up out of the city of palm trees with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which lieth in the south of Arad; and they went and dwelt among the people.

I. The descendants of the Kenite, Jethro (Reuel) were probably a branch of the Kenites mentioned in Genesis 15:19 along with the other tribes of Canaan, which had separated from the other members of its own tribe before the time of Moses.
A. Genesis 15:19, The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites,

B. These Kenites had accompanied the Israelites to Canaan at the request of Moses; and when the Israelites advanced into Canaan itself, they had probably remained as nomads in the neighborhood of the Jordan near Jericho, without taking part in the wars of Joshua. (Keil and Delitzsch, “Commentary on the Old Testament”.)

Judges 1:17-20, And Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they slew the Canaanites that inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. And the name of the city was called Hormah. Also Judah took Gaza with the coast thereof, and Askelon with the coast thereof, and Ekron with the coast thereof. And the LORD was with Judah; and he drive out the inhabitants of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron. And they gave Hebron unto Caleb, as Moses said: and he expelled thence the three sons of Anak.

The Acts of Benjamin

Judges 1:21, And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem unto this day.

I. The soldiers of Judah and Simeon also conquered Hormah, Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ekron.

A. But they could not drive out all the inhabitants which was due, of course, to their failure to trust and obey God.

B. The reference to iron chariots has caused problems for some commentators since the Iron Age has been dated as
beginning around 1200 B.C., about 150 years after the event recorded here took place.

1. However, the Hittites had mastered the production of iron by 1400 B.C.

2. The Iron Age is, after all, a general description of the period during which iron was the most important metal. (Jacquetta Hawkes, “The First Great Civilizations”).

II. Jerusalem was on the border of Judah and Benjamin but mainly within Benjamin’s territory.

A. The Hinnom Valley on the southern edge of the city was the boundary.

B. Even though the soldiers of Judah and Simeon captured Jerusalem, the Benjamites could not hold it.

C. This is probably why the writer referred to the Benjamites at this point.

D. This failure was another incident of inadequate trusting and obedience to Yahweh God.

Other Tribal Activity

Judges 1:22-36, And the house of Joseph, they also went up against Bethel: and the LORD was with them. And the house of Joseph sent to descry Bethel. (Now the name of the city before was Luz.) And the spies saw a man come forth out of the city, and they said unto him, Shew us, we pray thee, the entrance into the city, and we will shew thee mercy. And when he shewed them the entrance into the city, they smote the city with the edge of the sword; but they let go the man and all his
family. And the man went into the land of the Hittites, and built a city, and called the name thereof Luz: which is the name thereof unto this day. Neither did Manasseh drive out the inhabitants of Bethshean and her towns, nor Taanach and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Dor and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Ibleam and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Megiddo and her towns: but the Canaanites would dwell in that land. And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute, and did not utterly drive them out. Neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer; but the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them. Neither did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, nor the inhabitants of Nahalol; but the Canaanites dwelt among them, and became tributaries. Neither did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Accho, nor the inhabitants of Zidon, nor of Ahlab, nor of Achzib, nor of Helbah, nor of Aphik, nor of Rehob: But the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: for they did not drive them out. Neither did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Bethshemesh, nor the inhabitants of Bethanath; but he dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: nevertheless the inhabitants of Bethshemesh and of Bethanath became tributaries unto them. And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain: for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley: But the Amorites would dwell in mount Heres in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim: yet the hand of the house of Joseph prevailed, so that they became tributaries. And the coast of the Amorites was from the going up to Akrabbim, from the rock, and upward.

I. These last verses in chapter 1 show the gross disobedience and lack of trust the Israelites exhibited in their attempted conquests.

A. Ephraim and Manasseh failed to be strong in faith.
1. Rather than exterminate the Canaanites, the Israelites made them their servants, a direct violation of God’s command.

B. The tribes of Zebulun, Asher and Naphtali also failed to drive the Canaanites out of their territories but, instead, they compromised with their enemies.

C. The Amorites held off the Danites from the territory of their possession.

II. The writer of Judges’ primary purpose in this chapter is very obvious.

A. It was to tell his narrative of Israel’s victories and defeats to impress the reader with the failure of God’s people to drive out their enemies increasingly as the passage unfolds.

B. “The lesson of Judges 1 is very clear. The people of Israel chose deliberately to obey God only partly. Rather than following the Lord wholeheartedly, they compromised. They went part way, and that compromise meant inevitable catastrophe.” (Gary Inrig, “Hearts of Iron, Feet of Clay”).

C. Dr Constable says, “In the Pentateuch we saw God preparing the chosen people to live under His theocracy in the Promised Land. In Joshua we saw Him establishing them in the land so they could function as a theocracy. In Judges we see Israel for the first time in position to live under theocratic rule. From the very beginning of Judges we see that they failed to take advantage of their great privilege to be a unique nation in the world. They failed because they would not trust and obey God consistently but allowed the Canaanites to remain in the land God wanted the Israelites to occupy exclusively. Theocratic rule began to break down as
soon as Joshua’s generation died. Consequently God raised up judges to act as His spokesmen in the theocracy. Eventually He replaced them with the kings. The only time in Israel’s history when the theocracy functioned as God intended it to be was in the later years of Joshua and in the early years of the next generation.”(Dr. Constables’ notes on “Judges”).

**Conclusion:**

I. So now we see the end of chapter 1 of our exciting study of the book of Judges.

A. This chapter can best be summarized with the fact that it is extremely rewarding when we obey and trust God, but it can be extremely devastating when we disobey Him and put our trust in something or someone else.

B. Are we walking in obedience to God’s precepts or are we walking in our own inadequate strength?

C. We must ask that question of ourselves every day of our lives.
Bibliography


2. “Survey of Bible History” by Lester Hutson – Berean Press – Houston, TX, 1998

3. “Dr. Constables’ notes on Judges” by Dr. Thomas Constable – (class notes from Dallas Theological Seminary) – soniclight.com (1999-2007)

4. “Hearts of Iron, Feet of Clay” by Gary Inrig – Moody Bible Resources – Chicago, IL, 2005


Questions

Judges 1:1-36

1. What characterizes the history of Israel after the death of Joshua?

2. Why do you think that God picked Judah to go up first and recapture their land?

3. Whom did Judah enlist to help in the conquest?

4. Who was Adonibezek?

5. Which tribe does the “house of Joshua” include?
6. In what part of the country did Zebulun fail? ______________

7. Describe the ‘date’ conflict concerning the “chariots of iron.” __

8. Where did Benjamin fail? ________________________________

9. What lesson have you learned from Judges Chapter 1? _______
10. Obedience to God is so crucial in the Christian walk. What are you doing to ensure your obedience to God? __________________
______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________