

Judges 1 Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Judges is *intensely interesting* because of its wild stories, & at the same, *depressing* in its record of the absolute insanity of the people of Israel.

The best evidence points to Samuel, the last Judge, as the author of the book.

The *Talmud*, a collection Jewish commentaries on the scripture, attributes the book to him. (Tractate *Baba Bathra* 14b) ^[1]

The theme verse of Judges 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 3 times (17:6, 18:1, 19:1).

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

1:21 says that at the time of the writing of the book., the Jebusites still controlled Jerusalem, which means David hadn't conquered it yet.

So it's best to locate the book in the reign of Saul, Israel's first King.

Since 1 Samuel 10:25 tells us Samuel was a writer, it's reasonable to accept the Talmud's assertion he wrote Judges sometime between 1040 & 1020 B.C.

No doubt he drew on other records & chronicles for his source material.

The period of the Judges began with the death of Joshua & ended with the coronation of Saul – so a span of about 300 years; 1350-1050 B.C.

If you were to take the chronology given for each of the Judges and string them end to end, it adds up to 410 years.

That leaves a difference of over a hundred years; how do we account for it?

Keep the historical setting of Judges in mind.

Joshua broke the back of Canaanite dominance in the land by staging a brilliant military campaign in which the entire army of Israel participated.

Once the main cities were taken & kings defeated, each individual tribe was responsible for taking possession of its territory.

That's where things began to come apart.

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

And instead of keeping themselves isolated from their influence, the Israelites ended up being seduced & compromised by their incredibly sensuous culture & lifestyle.

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

The cycle went like this:

- Devotion
 - Blessing
 - Prosperity
 - Apathy
 - Decadence
 - Judgment
 - Oppression
 - Repentance
 - Deliverance
 - Recycle
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- Devotion - Joshua's generation loved God and served Him.
 - Blessing – In fulfillment of the promise of Deut. to bless obedience, God showered His favor on Israel.
 - Prosperity – The blessing brought peace & prosperity to the people.
 - Apathy – Having an easy life, and the passing of the previous devoted generation, the people felt no need to pursue God and became spiritually lazy.
 - Decadence – Spiritual laziness opened the door to idolatry & interest in the sensuous practices of the Canaanites.
 - Judgment – God hates idols, so He sent judgment on Israel by raising up enemies to afflict them.
 - Oppression – Weakened by sin, Israel fell easy prey to her enemies who put her under subjugation.
 - Repentance – Oppressed Israel then cried out to God for deliverance.

- Deliverance – He sent a deliverer, who removed the oppression.
 - Recycle – The people rejoiced and praised God, renewing their commitment to Him.
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During the period of the Judges, Israel was less a united nation & more a patchwork mosaic of territories where the individual tribes were at different places in the cycle.

One tribe moved into the Decadence phase faster than its neighbors.

So it experienced judgment while the neighboring tribes were still experiencing blessing & prosperity.

The result is that the record of the Judges *overlap* because the work of the Judges wasn't national, it was regional, only covering the territory of one to a few tribes.

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 great social structure that allows incredible prosperity in which almost everyone gets to 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, & almost always – the rise of a dictator the people *welcome* because he restores order.

Where are we as a nation on this wheel of history?

What makes it all the interesting is that for the first time in History, because of modern technology, *it isn't just our nation* that finds itself in this place.

It's the entire modern world.

And so we see the stage set so well for the emergence of someone who will rise up, and take the wheel of control – promising mankind a bright new day in a New World 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 – & refers to anyone who rules by not only passing sentence, but 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.

Outline

- I. Possessing Canaan 1-2:10**
 - II. The Judges 2:11-16:**
 - III. Examples of Decadence 17-21**
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I. Possessing Canaan 1-2:10

A. Victories 1:1-26

1. Judah’s & Simeon’s 1:1-20

¹ 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?” ² And the LORD said, “Judah shall go up. Indeed I have delivered the land into his hand.”

In the Book of 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 that which God had given them.

The people asked God who was to be first in striking out against the last holdouts of resistance in their territories.

The idea was that as one 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 first territory to fight was Judah.

3 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 had set specific borders for the region of Judah, Simeon’s inheritance was left kind of scattered around *inside* Judah. [Joshua 19:9]

4 Then Judah went up, and the LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand; and they killed ten thousand men at Bezek. 5 And they found Adoni-Bezek in Bezek, and fought against him; and they defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites. 6 Then Adoni-Bezek fled, and they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and big toes. 7 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” and refers to a ruler.

This guy was the king of Bezek who’d spread his influence over a region of 70 cities.

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

A city exerted it’s 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 it’s vicinity.

Each of these city-states was governed by a king.
Adoni-Bezek had managed to extend control over 70 cities around Bezek.

The way he showed his dominance was by cutting off the thumbs & big toes of the kings he conquered.

Since a ruler was responsible for leading his people militarily, without being able to hold a sword or keep your footing in battle, you couldn't lead your people.

Adoni-Bezek had then brought these disabled kings to his palace where he'd kept them as trophies of his victory by throwing them scraps from his table.

This guy was an ancient version of Saddam Hussein.

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

Then they took him along with them as a trophy of their victory when they assaulted the city of Jerusalem. There he died of his injuries.

⁸ 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.

Jerusalem occupied a strategic position along the central highlands & like Bezek was another city that asserted dominance over the surrounding region.

Though Jerusalem wasn't in the territory assigned to Judah, it did provide 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.

⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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.

11 From there they went against the inhabitants of Debir. (The name of Debir was formerly Kirjath Sepher.) 12 Then Caleb said, “Whoever attacks Kirjath Sepher and takes it, to him I will give my daughter Achsah as wife.” 13 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 years before had 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 had promised to give Caleb his choice of where ever he wanted to settle in Canaan. Caleb had chosen 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.

14 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?” 15 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 bridal 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 that would irrigate the field.

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

You see, 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 years later anchored these stories in real historical events.

And this passage reminds us that our faith isn't just a philosophy that came from some smart guy's brain.

Our Faith is in a God Who works **IN** History, a God Who's done *specific things* that make a difference for us between heaven & hell.

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

What saves us is something a man named Jesus did 2,000 years ago on a wooden cross in front of a hill called Calvary.

16 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.

Jethro, Moses' father-in-law was a Kenite, one of a nomadic people who lived in Midian, to the southeast of Israel.

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

17 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 some of the places they'd been allotted.

Instead of taking possession of Hormah, they completely 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.

18 Also Judah took Gaza with its territory, Ashkelon with its territory, and Ekron with its territory.

This was the coastal region that would in just a short time become the

home of the Philistines.

19 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.

This is a bit confusing – after telling us in v. 18 that Judah conquered the coastal region, we read they were *not* able to take the *lowland*. The word “lowland” here usually refers to a *plain*, but can mean “valley.”

The writer is probably referring to the *Shephelah* – the region that stretches between the coastal plain & the Central highlands. The Shephelah is 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 cities in Canaan.

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

[\[2\]](#)

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

And what was the reason? The enemy had a superior technology.

Question: Was superior weapons or forces ever a problem for Israel when they were trusting in God?

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

The writer is making a turn now, letting us know that 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.

20 And they gave Hebron to Caleb, as Moses had said. Then he expelled from there the three sons of Anak.

Since the writer has already referred to Caleb & the conquest of Hebron, this may be evidence of the fact that he used several different records to compile his narrative of this period.

2. Benjamin fails at Jerusalem 1:21

21 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 the city & making it their center.

The tribe of Benjamin, who were skilled warriors, weren't able to dislodge the Jebusites from the city.

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 of course, David took the city & made it the capital of the Israel.

3. Joseph's victory at Bethel 1:22-26

22 And the house of Joseph also went up against Bethel, and the LORD was with them.

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

23 So the house of Joseph sent men to spy out Bethel.

(The name of the city was formerly Luz.) 24 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." 25 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. 26 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 between 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.

B. Failures 1:27-36

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

27 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.

What? They were somehow *more determined* than the Canaanites of Bezek, or Jerusalem, 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 or in their victory at Bethel.

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.**

Let me say that again –

Hang on to that thought – we'll come back to it.

28 And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites under tribute, but did not completely drive them out.

As God had told them to!

His commands had been clear – they were **NOT** to make deals with the Canaanites.

They were not to put them under tribute.

They were to wipe out the Canaanites, erasing every last vestige of their occupation.

The reason why is because the Canaanite culture was hideously sick; immoral & perverse to its core.

It was like a rabid dog, snarling & vicious & destined to destruction, but on its way out it could inflict a lot of damage on Israel.

There's only one thing to be done with a rabid dog; ***put it down!***

That's the mission God gave Israel – they were to be His agent of judgment on the unbelievably wicked Canaanite culture.

But Israel didn't fulfill her mission.

Having entered into a land won for her by Joshua, she settled down into what was handed her.

Here's what the ancient Jewish historian Josephus says,

“After this the Israelites grew weak as to fighting any more against their enemies, but applied themselves to the cultivation of the land, which producing them great plenty & riches, they neglected the regular disposition of their settlements, & indulged themselves in

luxury & pleasures.” [3]

In other words – growing tired of battle, they forsook pressing forward to take ground God had given them, and decided to camp on what they already had.

Israel seemed to have the upper hand – after all, they were able to make the Canaanites pay tribute.

But the fact is, it was tribute made off of territory Israel had *forfeited* by a lack of faith.

And once you start down that road,

Fudging on faith *here*,

Backing off from a whole-hearted pursuit of God *there* –

It starts a progressive slide into a moral & spiritual abyss.

Watch how things go from bad to worse now . . .

29 Nor did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites who dwelt in Gezer; so the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them.

1 place

30 Nor did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron or the inhabitants of Nahalol; so the Canaanites dwelt among them, and were put under tribute.

2 places

31 Nor did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Acco or the inhabitants of Sidon, or of Ahlab, Achzib, Helbah, Aphik, or Rehob. 32 So the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; for they did not drive them out.

7 places – & now, no tribute is given – because instead of the

Canaanites living among the Asherites, the Asherites are living among the Canaanites!

33 Nor did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh or the inhabitants of Beth Anath; but they dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land. Nevertheless the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh and Beth Anath were put under tribute to them.

And then the worst case of all . . .

34 And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountains, for they would not allow them to come down to the valley; 35 and the Amorites were determined to dwell in

Mount Heres, in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim; yet when the strength of the house of Joseph became greater, they were put under tribute. ³⁶ Now the boundary of the Amorites was from the Ascent of Akrabbim, from Sela, and upward.

While the other tribes managed to settle in their allotted territories, Dan was ousted from theirs altogether. They were forced to take refuge in the inhospitable mountains.

The chronicle of the tribes goes from the victories of Judah to the defeat & humiliation of Dan.

What marked the decline was their weakening dependence on & devotion to God.

When Israel had been wandering in the wilderness, they were completely dependent on God.

They looked to Him for daily direction as He led them by the pillar of cloud & fire.

He covered them with a cloud from the blistering heat of the desert sun.

He gave them manna and water ever day.

Living in the empty spaces of the desert had taught them what it means to be totally dependent on God.

But as soon as they crossed the Jordan & entered into Canaan, the pillar departed, the cloud removed, the manna stopped & the water ended.

Now they enjoyed the benefits of God's blessing by being in the Land of Promise with its springs, rivers, fields & harvests.

Joshua conquest gave them a few cities, and once he was gone, with no successor named to replace him, the people settled in & got busy with the task of making a living.

They knew they were supposed to finish the task of conquest, but why bother when there were fields & houses aplenty.

The narrative here in ch. 1 parallels the experience of many Christians.

They've entered into new life in Christ & like Judah at Bezek, at first had some great victories over some major sins.

Just as Ephraim & Manasseh took Bethel, every now & then they gain victory over some stronghold.

But for the most part, they've settle into what we might call a "normal" Christian life.

They look around at where other Christians are at, average the total, and resign themselves to that.

They know there's a lot more spiritual growth they *could* pursue, but hey - why bother?

After all, they no longer do the obvious things Christians don't do; smoke, chew, go with those who do.

They go to church & know most of the songs.

Their Bible is one of those medium-sized study versions with just the right amount of wear on cover & gold leaf page edges.

They know the right spiritual lingo & who the main players on the Christian scene are.

They vote conservative, & have the Christian radio stations set on buttons in their car.

Every once in a while, when they have a moment for quiet reflection, there's a little voice that urges them to go deeper with God – but afraid of where that might take them, of what might be required of them, they quickly turn on the radio, TV, or go to the show to drown out that little voice.

God had so much more for Israel – but possessing it would mean more battle.

They were content with what they had rather than what God wanted them to have.

And because they stopped moving forward in faith, they ended up losing it all.

You see, the Canaanites were an evil presence in the land, a corrupting influence that Israel would either get rid of, or be ruined by.

There was territory under the Canaanite's feet God wanted Israel to possess.

Possessing it would mean some work, some battle.

But if Israel looked to the Lord, she was promised victory.

For no reason other than laziness, Israel decided she'd come far enough – and allowed some of the territory God had given her to lie under enemy domination.

And working from that place, the corrupting influence of Canaanite culture polluted Israel.

It wasn't long until the people of Israel were worshipping the

Canaanite gods, practicing Canaanite customs, and aping Canaanite wickedness.

Here's the lesson – Don't settle down to an average, normal Christian life.

Don't look around at what believers around you are doing, are allowing.

Don't park your spiritual life on the side of the street in some cultural Christian ghetto and call it quits on going any further with the Lord.

Don't call a truce with the spiritual Canaanites of your life, those sins that have retreated behind some heavy walls or dark holes.

If you aren't moving forward in faith, renewing yourself to a daily dependence on God, then for sure you are moving backward.

And just like Israel, you will discover, too late, that the things you thought you had control over, have chased you off into a lonely place.

Those who start like Manasseh always end up like Dan.

Don't be content to let sin have some little corner.

Root it out. Go after it as Judah went after Adoni-Bezek.

Look at the last v. of ch. 1

³⁶ Now the boundary of the Amorites was from the Ascent of Akrabbim, from Sela, and upward.

The writer carves out a spot smack dab in the middle of Israel & identifies it as belonging to the enemies of God's people.

Here's Israel - & living right in their midst is gross evil.

Picture a woman wearing a beautiful formal gown.

It's stunning! She's got the elbow length white gloves; gorgeous heels.

Her hair & make-up is perfect.

She's wearing exquisite matching earrings & necklace.

And on her nose is a massive, angry red boil an inch across, huge head on it, looks like it's about to explode.

No matter how gorgeous she looks everywhere else – the one thing everyone remembers sees & remembers about her is that boil.

A Christian can be doing pretty well in most of life, but if he or she accommodates some sin, some attitude, some thing God's Spirit has pointed out needs to be overcome, it can quickly become a blemish that ruins life.

Recent history has given us plenty of examples of men, Christian leaders, who compromised with sin, and it led to their very public fall.

Today, they are bywords, jokes.

There's one man who used to head a ministry we here at Calvary Chapel endorsed, who wasn't guilty of some tragic moral scandal – he was just so incredibly arrogant he went down in flames.

A person's problem doesn't have to be a serious moral problem, it might be a more socially acceptable sin like anger, or gossip, or greed, or laziness.

It doesn't matter what the sin, what form the evil take.

To accommodate it, to let it abide in a life that is supposed to belong to God, is to present to the enemy a shunt from which he will spread spiritual poison.

[1] Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

[2] Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

[3] Barber, *Judges* pg. 34