

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
1-10-24

Judges 1

Israel Fights the Remaining Canaanites

¹ After the death of Joshua, the Israelites asked the LORD, “Who of us is to go up first to fight against the Canaanites?” ² The LORD answered, “Judah shall go up; I have given the land into their hands.”

1:1 The people of Israel had finally entered and taken control of the land promised to their ancestors (Genesis 12: 7; Exodus 3: 16-17). The book of Judges continues the story of this conquest that began in the book of Joshua. Through God’s strength, the Israelites had conquered many enemies and overcome many difficulties, but their work was not yet finished. They had effectively met many political and military challenges, but facing spiritual challenges was more difficult. The unholy but attractive lifestyle of the Canaanites proved more dangerous than their military might. The Israelites gave in to the pressure and compromised their faith. If we attempt to meet life’s challenges with human effort alone, we will find the pressures and temptations around us too great to resist.

1:1 Soon after Joshua died, Israel began to lose its firm grip on the land. Although Joshua was a great commander, the people missed his spiritual leadership even more than his military skill, for he had kept the people focused on God and his purposes. Joshua had been the obvious successor to Moses, but there was no obvious successor to Joshua. During this crisis of leadership, Israel had to learn that no matter how powerful and wise the current leader was, their real leader was God. We often focus our hope and confidence on some influential leader, failing to realize that in reality it is God who is in command. Acknowledge God as your commander in chief, and avoid the temptation of relying too heavily on human leaders, regardless of their spiritual wisdom.

1:1 Everyone wants guidance in making tough decisions. The Israelites were no different. To ask for this national guidance, the elders probably gathered at the tabernacle in Shiloh as they had done when the land was divided (Joshua 18). There they may have used the Urim and Thummim to seek God’s answers. These were two stones or plates made according to God’s instructions and used to seek his guidance in making difficult decisions that involved the entire nation. They were used to take away the possibility of human error and allow God to make the choice.

1:1 The Canaanites were all the people groups who lived in Canaan (the Promised Land). They lived in city-states where each city had its own government, army, and laws. One reason Canaan was so difficult to conquer was that each city had to be defeated individually. There was no single king who could surrender the entire country into the hands of the Israelites. Canaan’s greatest threat to Israel was not its army, but its religion. Canaanite religion idealized evil traits: cruelty in war, sexual immorality, selfish greed, and materialism. It was a “me first, anything goes” society. Obviously, the religions of Israel and Canaan could not coexist.

1:2 The book of Joshua tells of a swift and thorough conquest of enemy armies and cities, while the book of Judges seems to suggest a more lengthy and gradual conquest. When the Israelites first entered the Promised Land (Joshua 1– 12), they united as one army to crush the inhabitants until they were too weak to retaliate. Then, after the land was divided among the 12 tribes (Joshua 13– 24), each tribe was responsible for driving out the remaining enemy from its own territory. The book of Judges tells of their failure to do this. Some tribes were more successful than others. Under Joshua, they all

began strong, but soon most were sidetracked by fear, weariness, lack of discipline, or pursuit of their own interests. As a result, their faith began to fade away, and “everyone did as they saw fit” (17: 6). In order for our faith to survive, it must be practiced day by day. It must penetrate every aspect of our lives. Beware of starting out strong and then getting sidetracked from your real purpose— loving God and living for him.

Judah (With The Tribe Of Simeon) Defeats Bezek And Their King – Verses 3-7

³ The men of Judah then said to the Simeonites their fellow Israelites, “Come up with us into the territory allotted to us, to fight against the Canaanites. We in turn will go with you into yours.” So the Simeonites went with them. ⁴ When Judah attacked, the LORD gave the Canaanites and Perizzites into their hands, and they struck down ten thousand men at Bezek. ⁵ It was there that they found Adoni-Bezek and fought against him, putting to rout the Canaanites and Perizzites. ⁶ Adoni-Bezek fled, but they chased him and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and big toes. ⁷ Then Adoni-Bezek said, “Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off have picked up scraps under my table. Now God has paid me back for what I did to them.” They brought him to Jerusalem, and he died there.

1:3 Judah said to Simeon his brother, “Come up with me”: The leaders of the tribe of Judah acted wisely here. By partnering with another tribe, the work was much easier. Here, the tribes functioned in the same way that God wants the church to function - as a body, with each part of the body helping out other parts of the body.

1:4 The LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand: Seeking the LORD, obeying His guidance, and working together as a body always produces great results. Their success was plain to see: the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hands.

1:6 The maiming of Adoni-Bezek was one example in a long string of actions that demonstrated Israel’s tendency to disobey God’s instructions by only giving partial obedience. Enemy kings were supposed to be executed, not humiliated. This defeated king recognized God’s righteous punishment more clearly than God’s people acknowledged God’s commands. When we understand what God tells us to do, we run great danger if we don’t carry out both the letter and the spirit of his words.

Judah’s Victories In The Southern Part Of The Land Given To Israel – Verses 8-15

⁸ The men of Judah attacked Jerusalem also and took it. They put the city to the sword and set it on fire. ⁹ After that, Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites living in the hill country, the Negev and the western foothills. ¹⁰ They advanced against the Canaanites living in Hebron (formerly called Kiriath Arba) and defeated Sheshai, Ahiman and Talmi. ¹¹ From there they advanced against the people living in Debir (formerly called Kiriath Sepher). ¹² And Caleb said, “I will give my daughter Aksah in marriage to the man who attacks and captures Kiriath Sepher.” ¹³ Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother, took it; so Caleb gave his daughter Aksah to him in marriage. ¹⁴ One day when she came to Othniel, she urged him to ask her father for a field. When she got off her donkey, Caleb asked her, “What can I do for you?” ¹⁵ She replied, “Do me a special favor. Since you have given me land in the Negev, give me also springs of water.” So Caleb gave her the upper and lower springs.

1:8 Judah fought against Jerusalem and took it: Here it is recorded that the city of Jerusalem fell to Judah. It was occupied for a time (Adoni-Bezek was taken there and died there), but later fell back to the Jebusites (see [Judges 1:21](#)). Under the leadership of King David Israel conquered the city again some 400 years later ([2 Samuel 5:6-10](#)).

1:8-15 Although the Israelites conquered Jerusalem, they did not occupy the city until the days of David (2 Samuel 5: 6-10). This same event is recorded in Joshua 15: 16-19. Caleb was one of the original men who scouted out the Promised Land (Numbers 13– 14) and, with Joshua, encouraged the people to conquer it. For his faithfulness, he was given the land of his choice.

Judah's Victories In The Southern Part Of The Land Given To Israel – Verses 16-20

16 The descendants of Moses' father-in-law, the Kenite, went up from the City of Palms with the people of Judah to live among the inhabitants of the Desert of Judah in the Negev near Arad. **17** Then the men of Judah went with the Simeonites their fellow Israelites and attacked the Canaanites living in Zephath, and they totally destroyed the city. Therefore it was called Hormah. **18** Judah also took Gaza, Ashkelon and Ekron—each city with its territory. **19** The LORD was with the men of Judah. They took possession of the hill country, but they were unable to drive the people from the plains, because they had chariots fitted with iron. **20** As Moses had promised, Hebron was given to Caleb, who drove from it the three sons of Anak.

1:16-19 Why did God order the Israelites to drive the Canaanites from their land? Although the command seems cruel, the Israelites were under God's order to execute judgment on those wicked people. The other nations were to be judged for their sin as God had judged Israel by forcing them to wander for 40 years before they were allowed to enter the Promised Land. Over 700 years earlier, God had told Abraham that when the Israelites entered the Promised Land, the gross evil of the native people would be ready for judgment (Genesis 15: 16). But God wasn't playing favorites with the Israelites because eventually they, too, would be severely punished for becoming as evil as the people they were ordered to drive out (2 Kings 17; 25; Jeremiah 6: 18-19; Ezekiel 8). God is not partial; all people are eligible for God's gracious forgiveness as well as for his firm justice.

1:19 Canaanite chariots pulled by horses were among the most sophisticated weapons of the day. Israelite foot soldiers were absolutely powerless when a speeding iron chariot bore down upon them. This is why Israel preferred to fight in the hills where chariots couldn't venture.

The Tribe Of Benjamin & The House Of Joseph Conquers The City Of Bethel – Verses 21-26

21 The Benjamites, however, did not drive out the Jebusites, who were living in Jerusalem; to this day the Jebusites live there with the Benjamites. **22** Now the tribes of Joseph attacked Bethel, and the LORD was with them. **23** When they sent men to spy out Bethel (formerly called Luz), **24** the spies saw a man coming out of the city and they said to him, "Show us how to get into the city and we will see that you are treated well." **25** So he showed them, and they put the city to the sword but spared the man and his whole family. **26** He then went to the land of the Hittites, where he built a city and called it Luz, which is its name to this day.

1:21-26 Tribe after tribe failed to drive the evil Canaanites from their land. Why didn't they follow through and completely obey God's commands? (1) They had been fighting for a long time and were tired. Although the goal was in sight, they lacked the discipline and energy to reach it. (2) They were afraid the enemy was too strong— the iron chariots seemed invincible. (3) After Joshua's death, power and authority were decentralized to the tribal leaders, and the tribes were no longer unified in purpose. (4) Spiritual decay had infected them from within. They thought they could handle the temptation and be more prosperous by doing business with the Canaanites. We, too, often choose to tolerate sin rather than drive it from our lives. We may know what to do but just don't follow through. This results in a gradual deterioration of our relationship with God. In our battles, we may grow tired and want rest, but we need more than a break from our work. We need to know that God loves us and has given us a purpose for life. Victory comes from living according to his purpose, willing to fully obey him.

Manasseh And Ephraim Fail To Drive Out All The Canaanites – Verses 27-29

²⁷ But Manasseh did not drive out the people of Beth Shan or Taanach or Dor or Ibleam or Megiddo and their surrounding settlements, for the Canaanites were determined to live in that land. ²⁸ When Israel became strong, they pressed the Canaanites into forced labor but never drove them out completely. ²⁹ Nor did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites living in Gezer, but the Canaanites continued to live there among them.

1:27-29 The Canaanites were determined to dwell in the land: At first there were pockets of Canaanites that these tribes were unable to push out of the land. But when the tribes eventually grew strong enough, they compromised with those Canaanites and thought they could use them to their advantage. They did not completely drive them out: In the same way, when someone first begins their Christian life, they may not be strong enough in the LORD to deal with all the things they see that need changing; yet as they grow in the LORD, they must not slack in dealing with those areas. We never are to make a peace treaty with our sins; instead, be determined to drive them out.

The Tribes Compromised – Verses 30-36

³⁰ Neither did Zebulun drive out the Canaanites living in Kitron or Nahalol, so these Canaanites lived among them, but Zebulun did subject them to forced labor. ³¹ Nor did Asher drive out those living in Akko or Sidon or Ahlab or Akzib or Helbah or Aphek or Rehob. ³² The Asherites lived among the Canaanite inhabitants of the land because they did not drive them out. ³³ Neither did Naphtali drive out those living in Beth Shemesh or Beth Anath; but the Naphtalites too lived among the Canaanite inhabitants of the land, and those living in Beth Shemesh and Beth Anath became forced laborers for them. ³⁴ The Amorites confined the Danites to the hill country, not allowing them to come down into the plain. ³⁵ And the Amorites were determined also to hold out in Mount Heres, Aijalon and Shaalbim, but when the power of the tribes of Joseph increased, they too were pressed into forced labor. ³⁶ The boundary of the Amorites was from Scorpion Pass to Sela and beyond.

1:30-36 When the strength of the house of Joseph became greater, they were put under tribute: Again, instead of doing what God said should be done with these enemies (to completely drive them out), they decided to use them as they thought best; to put these enemies under tribute. There is a dangerous and seductive form of pacifism in the Christian life, which ignores the reality of the spiritual battle so clearly described in Ephesians 6:10-20 and referred to by analogy in the Book of Judges. This pacifist attitude will happily make a peace with the devil that basically says, “I will not harm your interests if you leave me mostly alone.” This attitude of spiritual surrender is unacceptable for the Christian.