

THE BOOK OF JUDGES

“AFTER THE DEATH OF JOSHUA...”

JUDGES 1

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Who will lead Israel?

Our text begins “*After the death of Joshua...*” in Judges 1a (or more specifically translated: “*Here’s what happened after the death of Joshua...*”). We should understand that what we learn in *the Book of Judges* is the second act or second movement of the Israelites’ possessing the Land of Canaan as God had commanded them to do (Joshua 1).

We should note a shift in redemptive-history at this juncture. In Scripture, at the death of certain biblical figures there are new redemptive-historical beginnings. For instance, after the death of Joseph, there is the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt; after the death of Moses there was revealed the leadership of Joshua as the Israelites take Canaan through conquest; after the death of Joshua, the rule of the Judge-Warriors began; with the death of David later, the kingdoms of the north and south began to unravel and divide, headed toward exile.

We already know from previous Scriptures in the Pentateuch that the people of God are awaiting the Seed of the Woman who will crush the head of the serpent, and destroy the seed of the serpent (Gen. 3:14-16). We already know that the promises to Abraham and to “his seed” have yet to be fulfilled (Gen. 12; 15). We already know that the promise of a Prophet Greater than Moses who will rule the people for God has not yet come (Deut. 18:15ff). We already know that Joshua was to replace Moses after his death and lead the second generation of Israelites to conquer and possess Canaan as part of God’s will and plan for his people.

Now Joshua is dead. There is much to anticipate about the future as the people of God: When will the Seed of the Woman come to deliver and redeem Israel from God’s and their enemies? When will God’s covenant promises be fulfilled? When will a prophet greater than Moses arise?

And just as important the question to be asked is: *Who will lead Israel?* Moses was known as the “friend of God” who spoke to God face to face and everyone knew Moses was Israel’s leader without a doubt (Exodus 33:11); after Moses died Joshua took over as commander of the Lord’s army and everyone knew it well; later in redemptive-history the kings like David and Solomon would be given to lead Israel, *but at this time*, who will lead Israel- *-Joshua is dead?!*

Everyone knows that the people of God must be led, or they will be tempted toward individualism and *doing what is right in their own eyes*- -the people of God need a leader who can give a corporate vision to the church under age. There is work to be done on

building and establishing God's Kingdom so that they gates of hell will not prevail- -and a leader is desperately needed (this is not the work of lone rangers, cowboys, and wranglers of the sort in the Western genre, like *Judge Roy Bean* himself, although the leaders God will raise up will look like some of them at times!).

This should help us to get at the redemptive-historical setting of *the Book of Judges*. An important question to ask up front: ***“Will one of the Judge-Warriors found in the Book of Judges ultimately fulfill God’s promises? Will one of the Judge-Warriors found in the Book of Judges ultimately redeem Israel and conquer all of God’s enemies? Will one of the Judge-Warriors lead Israel to total and final conquest of the land?”***

The Book of Judges serves as a bridge between the time of Moses and the first and second generation of Israelites who lived in Canaan and the time of the Davidic Monarchy that would still be future. Another way of saying this is that *the Book of Judges* must be interpreted after the Abrahamic Covenant, and be understood as a bridge between the Mosaic and Davidic Covenants.

The Book of Judges with the death of Joshua opening it signaled the transition from the period of Israel's conquest of the land to the period of the settlement in the land of Canaan. *The Book of Judges* is then situated between the great Exodus event and the Monarchy that is to come; we learn that this is the author's purpose by reading the first and last verses of the book:

ESV Judges 1:1 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?”

ESV Judges 21:25 In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Why Judges?!

But wait just a minute, pastor, before you continue! Isn't *the Book of Judges* a mere Sunday school book? Shouldn't we just pick a few good guys out of it and learn from them, then move on? Certainly we shouldn't preach from the book, or have a sermon series from a "Sunday school book" should we?! Of course we should! It is part of the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:28)- -part of the whole of God's special, inspired and infallible revelation- -part of Holy Scripture that we dare not ignore.

When one first comes to *the Book of Judges*, most of the time there is a perplexing confusion that results in closing it immediately, and then going to the Gospel of John for refreshment. In *Judges* there is great evil and strange ancient practices revealed, and geography and people we do not know- -nor understand!!

The mood of *the Book of Judges* is unique as well in Scripture. When you read the Gospel of John it opens with life and light and redemption and God dwelling with us. When you come to *Judges* for the first time, or read all the way through it, you find yourself in what might be called a very Tolkienesque-kind-of-world (It should be pointed

out that J. R. R. Tolkien himself perhaps got his mood and ideas of the shadowy evil world in *Lord of the Rings* from *the Book of Judges*).

The mood of *the Book of Judges* is like that: shadowy, not completely darkness, but shadowy; to use weather language, it is always *cosmically overcast* with not much of the spring-like sunlight breaking through.

Yet there *is* God's light that pervades the darkness (very similar to Tolkien's use of good and evil). In *the Book of Judges* there is light, there is hope, there is faithfulness, there is an eschatological end goal and plan of God that must be achieved because of God's sovereignty, but the setting is shadowy, overcast, war-like, and chilly.

We all know or have heard perhaps the stories of Gideon, Deborah and Samson in Sunday school, but most of us at first glance are not sure what to do with characters and stories about Adoni-Bezek, left-handed Ehud, Othniel, Shamgar, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon (they sound like characters on a Star Trek show- -perhaps Klingon-like people!)

As Professor Dale Ralph Davis wrote: "The church (in general) has a problem with *the Book of Judges*. It is so earthy, so puzzling, so primitive, so violent—in a word, so strange, that the church can hardly stomach it. As with many Old Testament materials, the sentiment seems to be, 'If we just study the epistles [of Paul] long enough, maybe Judges will go away.' The church has her way of dealing with embarrassing scripture; ignore it" (pg. 9).

If you're looking for what might be the most "relevant" and "practical" book for how to have a better marriage, or how to have a great and happy life, then you might have come to the wrong place! However, it should be noted that Judges is imminently relevant and practical for the people of God. Why? Because God and the salvation of His people is revealed in it! The Gospel is made known to sinners!

Each generation of God's people can be encouraged by "such a great salvation" (Judges 15:18; Heb. 2:3) that is revealed in the Book and thus the reason why this is our next book to study as a congregation.

What is the book about?

What is *the Book of Judges* about? The book is about any things, many characters, but it is primarily about one gracious and merciful God who is faithful to his people. What else? The book reveals how unity in the people of God and faith in God can bring about the defeat of the world, flesh and the devil. The book reveals how where there is lack of faith in God and His promises, there will be division, failure, worldliness in and among the people of God.

As Professor Daniel Block writes in his excellent commentary: "...*the Book of Judges* declares that if God's people ever forget the grace that he has lavished upon them in redemption, covenant relationship, and the revelation of his will, the slide into apostasy is

inevitable.... [On the other hand] *the Book of Judges* teaches its readers in every age that the darker the human heart the more brilliant the light of God's grace" (*Judges*, NAC, preface).

The Book of Judges is basically about the victory of God and His faithfulness in spite of His people's constant spiraling into sin; their consistent defeat by the forces of evil and their desire to do what is right in their own eyes, rather than achieving the will of God. *The Book of Judges* is about the Canaanization of Israel (Block, pg. 71).

The basic message of warning to God's people in every age from *Judges* is this: The covenant people, the visible church becomes more and more corrupt and sinful over time because of their losing sight of God's Word and their First Love who is Christ.

Contrary to the way some have taught or understood *the Book of Judges* as being a collection of heroic personalities to emulate and follow, the people in *the Book of Judges*, and particularly the judges themselves have many sinful flaws. The author did not write the book as a mere collection of morality tales but as a testimony of God's faithfulness and love to his people even *when His people are not*. Even when the church's best leaders are flawed and sinful, God does not forsake his very own elect ones.

What good could possibly come out of a book about the constant sin and failure of God's people?

EVERYTHING GOOD! Everything God's people need for life and godliness in fact. The failure of God's people, even the strongest of the Judge-Savior-Warrior-Deliverers of Israel teach us that it will not be a merely earthly Judge-Warrior who will save us.

We must look upward toward heaven, seeking the God who would be successful and victorious *for us*. Only God can save- -God is the God who is the True Judge-Savior-Warrior-Deliverer on behalf of His people!

There is a cycle that we will notice throughout *the Book of Judges*: God is faithful, the people sin against God, God sends their enemies against them to chastise them, they repent and cry out to God for mercy, and God is faithful again- -all because of his grace (We will look a more detailed example and summary of this cycle in a future sermon, D.V.)!

As Michael Wilcock suggests in his excellent commentary, perhaps *the Book of Judges* should have the title that the spiritual biography of John Bunyan had: *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (preface). *Judges* is a book revealing that where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more!

So Joshua is dead (1:1a) and so is the hope of the people gone? Is it now possible without *Yeshua-Joshua*- "*He who is salvation-redemption*" to possess the land and lay hold of God's covenant promises? Yes! God is still with his people. As God is described in 1:22b:

“...and the LORD was with them.”

What/Who are the “Judges”? We will focus on this in our next sermon

But I will say a few things: In many ways the judges did what prophets, priests and kings would do more formally in their offices later, but at this particular time in redemptive-history they delivered and saved God’s people by the sword rather than merely by the Word of God as the later prophets would be called to do.

In other words, these judges were primarily raised up by God to reveal God, and particularly God as THE JUDGE of all the earth.

But the Judge-Warrior-Saviors were also capable of death and so their ministries could never continue and their ministries were imperfectly fulfilled as well as we will see throughout our sermon series (2:19); “Joshua is dead” is the opening of our book remember (Judges 1:1).

Perhaps the title “Judges” is deceiving for we English readers (“Judges” comes from the Latin Vulgate of Jerome) and perhaps a better title of the book would be ***“Book of Saviors”*** or ***“Book of Warrior Deliverers”*** or ***“The Book of Tribal Rulers”*** (see Block, pgs. 23-25).

And why did God raise up Judge-Savior-Warrior-Deliverers?

ESV Judges 17:6 In those days there was no king in Israel. (18:1; 19:1; 21:25)

More on the nature and character of the Judges in our next sermon, D.V.

Holy War!!

The Book of Judges opens with holy war! In fact, *the Book of Judges* opens immediately **with action!** We get action from chapter 1:1-2:5, then there is a settling down into narrative and background in flashback (2:6-10). The author understood a good story (or cinematic experience speaking in modern terms today!); the author understood that a good story usually should begin right away with action—with the story itself, then he settles back, and lays the foundational back story and history behind all that we have already been engaged in (as we will see in chapter 2)!

And so Judges begins! There is holy warfare as God’s people war against His and their enemies- -this is the setting. The second phase of Joshua’s conquest of the Promised Land continues with the Israelites who survive him.

The opening scene in 1:1-2 reveals the people of Israel consulting YWHH the Commander-in-Chief for instruction as to where to attack next in their conquest of the Promised Land. Israel under Joshua had succeeded in destroying much of the Canaanites’ persons and possessions (Joshua 11:16-23), but the Canaanites continued to put up a fight and would continually “come back for more”!

The Canaanites put up a good fight against God and His people so that Joshua in some of his last words told the Israelites that there was still many people yet to destroy and land yet to be taken (Joshua 23:1-13).

Our text begins with the author desiring us to see in the first 21 verses that when Judah sought the LORD in the battle, God guided them and assured them that He is with them, and that they would indeed possess the land that was covenantally promised to them. The Israelites were always to remember when they marched against the enemy what God had told Moses and Joshua before them (Deut. 31:1-6; Joshua 1:1-9):

Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you."

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

Judah's success in Judges Chapter 1 is due to God's faithfulness. And so Judah "goes up" against the Canaanites; or as Xenophon (ca. 430s B.C, contemporary of Socrates) the ancient writer of warfare history called this, the troops engage in *Anabasis* which is a "march up-country" (1:8) (a *katabasis* is a "march down-country by the way, 1:9; our English word "expedition" is a translation of *anabasis* or "march up-country and it originally meant to march up from a coastline to the interior of a country).

The author of Judges desired that we the readers understand up front that if there is to be any success for the people of God, any true and real success in the church under age, it will be all because of God's faithfulness to his promises!

Judah's spiritual warfare against God's enemies in Canaan is successful because God wars sovereignly on behalf of His people.

Is that fair? That Judah would conquer and destroy the Canaanites? "Poor Canaanites," "there's room enough for all religions," "let's be tolerant" modern people might say today. Yet, the Canaanites were defiled and filthy sinners who were sinfully trespassing on the covenant land God had promised His people; the Canaanites were the very flesh and blood unbelieving manifestation of the seed of the serpent who had no right or claim to any of God's world, and God had said of them:

^{ESV} Deuteronomy 9:4-6: "Do not say in your heart, after the LORD your God has thrust them out before you, 'It is because of my righteousness that the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,' whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is driving them out before you. ⁵ Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. ⁶ "Know, therefore, that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people."

In other words, the Israelites were to understand that they were recipients of God's grace in receiving the land simply because God desired in His sovereignty to show them grace and mercy; to the wickedness of other nations, God desired in His sovereignty to show them His just justice and power in order to glorify Himself.

ESV Deuteronomy 18:9-14: "When you come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations. ¹⁰ There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, ¹ anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer ¹¹ or a charmer or a medium or a wizard or a necromancer, ¹² for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD. And because of these abominations the LORD your God is driving them out before you. ¹³ You shall be blameless before the LORD your God, ¹⁴ for these nations, which you are about to dispossess, listen to fortune-tellers and to diviners. But as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you to do this.

God's purpose and will because of God's sovereign rule over heaven and earth was that His covenant people were to engage in warfare that exterminated His enemies at this time in redemptive-history; the people or nations far from the covenant at this time in history that did not live and obey God would be devoted to destruction.

What is the Herem? [חָרַם] vb. Hiph. ban, devote, exterminate -- ban, devote. This is a word used in Holy War to mean that the enemies of God, including their persons and possessions, must be wholly exterminated, or devoted to destruction, or under God's eschatological wrath-ban (see Joshua 11:20, ESV translated "utterly destroyed").

ESV Joshua 11:20 For it was the LORD's doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be devoted to destruction and should receive no mercy but be destroyed, just as the LORD commanded Moses.

God's Kingdom judgment would come upon his enemies; God's eschatological wrath would intrude upon His enemies through the sword of divine judgment wielded by God's people, the believing Israelites. The enemies of God and his people were placed "under the ban" or sentenced to utter extermination and devastating destruction as a preview of the wrath of God that has yet to come upon unbelievers (2 Thess. 1:8-10; 2 Peter 3:6-11).

As we see in the first few verses of chapter 1, the Tribe of Judah's first great victory was against Adoni-bezek who was a warrior king of the Canaanites. They pursued him and in an ancient Middle Eastern fashion cut off his thumbs and his big toes (1:6). No more military service for him! Without thumbs you cannot hold a sword and fight; without toes you cannot run and fight against your foe- -you're "through" "finished" "caput" as they say!

Notice Adoni-bezek's response: "As I have done, so God has repaid me" (1:7). This pagan sinner far from the covenant promises understood the justice of God better than some evangelical Christians today! Adoni-bezek understood that he had received his just recompense for sinning against God, the Maker of Heaven and Earth.

This reveals that no matter how pagan, or ungodly, or far from the covenant one may be, unbelieving pagans still know the truth of God and His power and attributes, and that they deserve the punishment of God for their sins (as Romans 1:19-25 teaches); pagan King Adoni-bezek knew that he deserved punishment for his sinful behavior. He “got what was comin’ to him”- -and he knows it!!

Successes and failures in the HEREM warfare

As we see in our text from chapter 1, there were successes and failures among the Israelite tribes in this holy-war campaign. In the southern campaign and theatre of the war, there were successes, but in the northern campaign there were failures. Judah was successful as God had promised (1:2, 4, 8, 10); also all the tribes who warred against the Canaanites with Judah were successful (Simeon, 1:4; Descendents of the Kenite, 1:16).

It is important to note that God acted through his people corporately as a church that was unified in purpose to destroy the enemy. Judah warred against the Canaanites with Simeon together as they engaged in eschatological-spiritual warfare against God’s and their enemies (1:3-7). In fact, it should be noted that Simeon was one of the weaker of the tribes, and Judah the stronger, and here we see the Church working together as different parts of the body, even weaker parts, work together to achieve the end goal of establishing God’s Kingdom (cf. 1 Corinthians 12).

Sadly, *the Book of Judges* will reveal that Israel will continue to deteriorate spiritually in her tribal unity and become disparate and separate tribes who will continue to fail before their God. As the Church becomes more divided at this time, so the Church of God’s people at this time would become less powerful, less effective and mighty against the enemy.

In fact, the Church will become weakened through assimilation. Rather than Israel living holy and obediently before God in the Promised Land, their sinful actions in this first campaign in *the Book of Judges* will cause them to live with and eventually *become like the Canaanites* they were sent to destroy.

The first major failure of this *Herem* campaign was due to disobedience in the Tribe of Joseph (look at 1:22-26); the spiritual campaign failure or *Anabasis* (“March up-country”) of the Tribe of Joseph was showing mercy when there should have been justice (1:22ff). The nations at this time were not be recipients of God’s mercy, but rather his justice (unless they repented of this sins and became circumcised Israelites).

Like Judah, the Tribe of Joseph was somewhat successful in scouting out and conquering the City of Luz that was now called Bethel. The tribal “secret service spies” found a man who knew how to breach the wall of the city, and he gave them aid to break in, and so they victoriously struck the city with sword (1:24).

Apparently they did not do much of a background check on this man because he would unfortunately prove quite powerful later; unfortunately, although the Tribe of Joseph did

not know it at the time, they had struck a deal with the devil by telling the man that if he advised Israel, then they would treat him kindly and show him God's mercy (1:24b).

Rather than completely destroying every person of the city and permanently breaking down the altars of idols and stamping out every activity of sinful corruption, the Canaanite City of Luz was relocated *because they did not destroy this powerful man and his family* (1:25). The man was apparently either a king-ruler or at least a powerful and knowledgeable leader of the people who was left in the city, and the Tribe of Joseph let him and his family go (we must contrast this with the destruction of Adoni-bezek and Judah's obedience to God, 1:6-8).

The Tribe of Joseph might have destroyed much of Canaanite culture and idolatry in that one particular location, but it was relocated and thrived in another –the *pagan relocation* city was in the land of the Hittites (1:26, which incidentally was part of Israel's inheritance, too (Gen. 15:20; Exodus 3:8); this will have consequences for Israel later in redemptive-history, see Judges 3:5; Ezra 9:1).

The purpose of this holy-war conquest was to destroy all forms of paganism and every trace of anti-God thinking and lifestyle and set up God's Kingdom that would expand over the entire earth (cf. Romans 4:13).

Yet “they [the Tribe of Joseph] let the man and his family go” (1:25) and where did this seed of the serpent go? To build a city; NOT the City of God, but like Nimrod and Cain and all before him, this man went to build the *Anti-City*, the dreaded City of Man (*De Civitate Homo*).

This was a great loss in this holy war, but sadly there would be many more. As we have seen, although there were great victories spiritually in the southern campaign, there were also some major spiritual defeats in this campaign that should be duly noted (in fact the text is repetitive just so that we will take note of this!).

The Tribe of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem (1:21). The Tribe of Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean (1:27), or of many other places. The Tribe of Ephraim was unsuccessful in their campaigns against the Canaanites (1:29), as well as Zebulun, Asher, and Naphtali (1:30-33). Notice the same clauses in verses 27-33; the repetition is _____ *did not drive out or possess (Heb. Yarash)...*”:

Judges 1:27 Manasseh did not drive out... [In Hebrew the passage begins with a negative followed by the verb to emphasize the failure, thus “*Lo Yarash*”: לֹא-יָרָשׁוּ].

^{ESV} Judges 1:28-33: 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.

Because of the failure of God's people to fully possess the land and destroy the Canaanites (some were merely placed into slavery rather than being slaughtered as God had told them, 1:28, 35), the Angel of YHWH went up from Gilgal to Bochim (2:1, which we shall deal with in our next sermon).

This "*did not drive out...*" is repeated over and over to stress the Israelites' lack of faith in God and their manifestation of covenantal disobedience. For they were told by God through Moses expressly, specifically, repetitively to *Yarash* (to "drive out" or "dispossess" completely).

The people of God were told time and again that God would be faithful to them- -they just had to believe and see his victory and promises come to pass:

ESV Exodus 33:2 I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

ESV Numbers 33:52 then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you and destroy all their figured stones and destroy all their metal images and demolish all their high places.

ESV Deuteronomy 11:23 then the LORD will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations greater and mightier than yourselves.

ESV Joshua 3:10 And Joshua said, "Here is how you shall know that the living God is among you and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites.

But if they did not believe God:

ESV Numbers 33:55 But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then those of them whom you let remain shall be as barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall trouble you in the land where you dwell.

The purpose of their driving out the Canaanites was to keep Israel the visible Church of God holy and pure; they were called to be spotless and by grace show forth God's power, glory, and grace to the world; Israel was called to live and make known the gospel of Christ! This was an extremely high calling! The land was the place where God would dwell with his people so that the Israelites would be recipients of "by faith" the Gospel of Christ and make it known to the nations- -but the Church never got established with purity and holiness; the Church herself failed to believe the Gospel!

God had told the Church "under age" at that time (numerous times!) that if they did not completely drive or *yarash* the unbelieving Canaanites out, they would begin to

intermarry, and live and worship false gods with them; they would become idolaters, and the Gospel of Christ would be ignored, and the people would worship and serve someone or something rather than the only Living and True God:

ESV Exodus 23:33 They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against me; for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you."

ESV Exodus 34:14 (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God),¹⁵ lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice...

ESV Deuteronomy 7:3-4: You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons,⁴ for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly.

Israel was called to be holy, set apart, a light to the world as those who were to show the world the true God and the way he required all creatures to live before him. In Israel, God would fully reveal himself and give a picture or foretaste of what the renewed Heavens and Earth would look like when sin was done away with and God dwelled in the presence of His people.

***Yet the pagan, idolatrous Canaanites now lived next door!
Guess who's coming to dinner, indeed?!***

This is the extremely sad field report given on these important campaigns in Judges 1. What to make of it? Many did not drive out the Canaanites as we have seen and the author of Judges wants us as readers and believers to meditate upon this covenantal unfaithfulness.

Their unwillingness to follow YHWH's orders completely and wholeheartedly enabled by His grace, would cause not only individuals to sin, but would potentially endanger the entire church under age with cancerous sin. When individuals sinned blatantly and disobediently in the church, the whole church would be affected- -the Gospel, or Good News of Christ would be threatened.

The Church of Christ must be kept pure so that the Gospel can make known God's promises in Christ and so that sinners can be healed of their condition before God. The Church has always been called to unity to God's Word and obedience to His promises.

YHWH was clear to His people that all they had to do was follow His instructions and they would see **victory after victory**. When God had spoken as King, there were to be no "what ifs" or "ifs, ands, or buts" that expressed the people's response; there was to be **simple obedience**. YHWH's orders extended back to Moses after the Exodus and was continually made clear through Joshua.

What was the Mission of the Church from the Beginning?: God said: I will love you and show mercy to you for your sins; I will lead you with all my power and grace and you will respond by completely destroying my enemies who sin against me and live in Canaan. You are to wipe them out and take the land as your land. You are NOT to live among them, or enslave them, or let any of them go- -they are committed to eschatological destruction!

Why am I doing this? Because I am just God who will punish sinners; I am a saving-redeeming-merciful and compassionate God who will make my Kingdom known to my people on earth.

God said: “Do I make myself clear?” And people said: “Crystal.”

Why then did they not hearken to the LORD their God and be completely obedient to their Divine Commander-in-Chief who loved them?

To remove only some of the cancer from the body does not a successful surgeon make; to compromise on God’s commands in a like manner allows spiritual cancer to remain in the visible Church, and this was the beginning of their failure as the people of God, and their constant desire to do what is right in their own eyes.

Compromisingly strong? “Pragmatism is better than obedience!?”

What we do not want to miss is that Israel appeared strong militarily on the surface; in fact the text tells us that they were able to enslave the Canaanites to become part of their power, military and work-force.

Although Israel seemed strong on the outside, and because they had some military victory in enslaving their enemies, they were deceived into thinking that they did not need to fully obey God. Their so-called outward success was still internally harmful because they were disobeying God in their call to be His people.

This reminds us that Christians and churches even today can look successful on the surface, but inside each one of them, behind the closed doors of the sanctuary, there may be disobedience to God and covenantal unfaithfulness to God’s commands that are merely shielded or veiled by outward appearances of success.

What is true success before God? To make the Gospel known: God saves sinners who repent and believe in Christ; true success before God is to be faithful and obedient to him in reliance upon his grace regardless if outwardly one seems to be successful and strong by doing what is right in one’s own eyes rather than obeying Him.

Israel’s failure was not immediately recognizable or noticeable as we read in chapter 1. Yes, they were a bit disobedient to God, but nothing major- -right- -they did not blatantly sin did they?! I mean they still prevailed over their foes even if they didn’t completely obey by driving out God’s enemies.

What is important to note here is that spiritual failure is not immediately recognizable, and God will show mercy and grace again by appearing to the people and declaring his Word- -but there will be serious consequences for unbelief as we will learn in future sermons.

We see the consequences of Israel's spiritual failure and disobedience later in chapter 2:10-12; the sins of the fathers and mothers were passed on to the next generation, and worse (if it could be any worse), because there was no admonition and training up the children in God's ways, the next generation did not even know the LORD or what he had done prior to their birth:

ESV Judges 2:10-12: 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. 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.

As Professor Davis wrote: "What began as toleration became apostasy" (pg. 25).

And isn't this threat what we see in each generation of Christian history? God says I love you and will be faithful to you. The people of God take that for granted, and begin to seek outward successes in the visible church, making "deals with God" and doing things their own way in God's name, perhaps being not quite as obedient as they should, but knowing that pragmatism is better than obedience at times- -doing what works to make the church grow is better at times than obedience to God's Word.

And the next generation has big churches, full of dead people, and the Word and Sacraments have been replaced by folly and man-centered entertainment to scratch the itching ears of those who don't care much for sound doctrine (cf. 2 Tim. 4:1-5).

Isn't that the motto in many churches today: "***Pragmatism is better than obedience!***"
When God says that "***Obedience to him is better than any sacrifice we can make to him***" (1 Sam. 15:22).

Begin to live with the world, love the world, and you will soon be worshipping and serving God ***like the world***. Think about it! Israel was not doing anything too serious in the minds of many people's eyes- ***they were simply just not fully obeying God!***

But by not entirely driving the Canaanites out, they were taking tea with the devil, sitting at table with worldliness, and it wasn't long before their worship became idolatrous like the pagans around them!

Only God can deliver and save his people from the sins that so easily beset them. As we read through Judges so we also see a reminder of the historical picture of the church. As the people of God we are redeemed by God, then we all are tempted to slip into complacency, sin and cold hearts; when God chastises us, we repent and turn to the

LORD in hopes of walking with him throughout our lives, and He is faithful to us. Thus, the importance of studying this book of the Bible. That God might renew us in the Gospel, and that we might be unified corporately in our spiritual fight against worldliness, the sins that so easily beset us all, the flesh, and the devil!

But what the Book of Judges teaches us if nothing else is that it will be no mere man who will save us- -but only God himself. Even the most devoted of the Israelites were not perfect; the covenant had been broken (as the Angel of the LORD will convict the Church under age of in our next sermon, D.V).

Because God's people are sinners and covenant-breakers, God himself must be our Judge-Warrior-Savior-Deliverer- -God alone must keep the covenant *for us- -for those who believe; and that is what we find in the Person and Work of the LORD Jesus Christ!*

Jesus is our faithful God and the one Israelite man who could be a faithful Judge-Warrior-Savior-Deliverer for all who believe. In Jesus, we see the one who wields the Sword of the Spirit and has the double-edged sword proceeding from His mouth as Risen and Eternal Prophet of God (cf. Revelation 19:11-18).

In Jesus we see one that was filled with the Spirit and stirred up to live perfectly for God where fail; in Jesus we see one given power and strength not to merely overcome our physical flesh and blood enemies, but one who through his death and resurrection can destroy and defeat the threat of sin, Satan and bondage to death and hell.

In Jesus, we see the One who makes full conquest of the Promised Inheritance Land, not here on earth in a typological way, but the place the Land pointed upward and forward to- -the New Heavens and the New Earth where God will dwell permanently and eternally with His people!

In Jesus we see the One who has taken not merely the typological Promised Land but has ascended to God's right hand to prepare the New Heavens and the New Earth that Canaan typified. In Jesus we find the hope of our conquest of the entire world because of God's grace and mercy to us.

May God once again hear the prayers of His visible Church and may he enable us by His Powerful Spirit to go forth as the church militant, the very "church on the march" as we live holy lives separated from the City of Man because in Christ we are already citizens of Heaven, the City of God where God dwells in all of His glory.

So march *unified* Church of God- -seek the LORD through His Word, and believe and obey what it says: His directives to us are clear as a bell:

Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you."

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

God's mission of conquest was ultimately fulfilled by the Great Judge-Warrior-Savior-Deliverer Jesus Christ, and all we have to do is overcome *in him* by faith- -for we are more than conqueror-overcomers in Him who loved us.

Thanks be to God for His Word! Thanks be to God for His Christ!

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Scripture Lesson

^{ESV} **Exodus 23:23-33:** "When my angel goes before you and brings you to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, and I blot them out, ²⁴ you shall not bow down to their gods nor serve them, nor do as they do, but you shall utterly overthrow them and break their pillars in pieces. ²⁵ You shall serve the LORD your God, and he¹ will bless your bread and your water, and I will take sickness away from among you. ²⁶ None shall miscarry or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days. ²⁷ I will send my terror before you and will throw into confusion all the people against whom you shall come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you. ²⁸ And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites from before you. ²⁹ I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the wild beasts multiply against you. ³⁰ Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased and possess the land. ³¹ And I will set your border from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the Euphrates, for I will give the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you. ³² You shall make no covenant with them and their gods. ³³ They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against me; for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you."

^{ESV} **Joshua 11:16-23:** So Joshua took all that land, the hill country and all the Negeb and all the land of Goshen and the lowland and the Arabah and the hill country of Israel and its lowland ¹⁷ from Mount Halak, which rises toward Seir, as far as Baal-gad in the Valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon. And he captured all their kings and struck them and put them to death. ¹⁸ Joshua made war a long time with all those kings. ¹⁹ There was not a city that made peace with the people of Israel except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon. They took them all in battle. ²⁰ For it was the LORD's doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be devoted to destruction and should receive no mercy but be destroyed, just as the LORD commanded Moses. ²¹ And Joshua came at that time and cut off the Anakim from the hill country, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel. Joshua devoted them to destruction with their cities. ²² There was none of the Anakim left in the land of the people of Israel. Only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod did some remain. ²³ So Joshua took the whole land,

according to all that the LORD had spoken to Moses. And Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal allotments. And the land had rest from war.

^{ESV} **Joshua 23:1-13:** A long time afterward, when the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their surrounding enemies, and Joshua was old and well advanced in years, ² Joshua summoned all Israel, its elders and heads, its judges and officers, and said to them, "I am now old and well advanced in years. ³ And you have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake, for it is the LORD your God who has fought for you. ⁴ Behold, I have allotted to you as an inheritance for your tribes those nations that remain, along with all the nations that I have already cut off, from the Jordan to the Great Sea in the west. ⁵ The LORD your God will push them back before you and drive them out of your sight. And you shall possess their land, just as the LORD your God promised you. ⁶ Therefore, be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left, ⁷ that you may not mix with these nations remaining among you or make mention of the names of their gods or swear by them or serve them or bow down to them, ⁸ but you shall cling to the LORD your God just as you have done to this day. ⁹ For the LORD has driven out before you great and strong nations. And as for you, no man has been able to stand before you to this day. ¹⁰ One man of you puts to flight a thousand, since it is the LORD your God who fights for you, just as he promised you. ¹¹ Be very careful, therefore, to love the LORD your God. ¹² For if you turn back and cling to the remnant of these nations remaining among you and make marriages with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, ¹³ know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations before you, but they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good ground that the LORD your God has given you.