

## EXPOSITION OF JUDGES

### Message #2

### Judges 1:1-36

I think it was D. L. Moody who once said “the place for a ship is in the sea, but the place for the sea is not in the ship.” If the sea gets into the ship, the ship is going to sink. The place for the people of God to live out their faith is in the world, but it is a complete disaster if the world gets into the people of God. The story of the book of Judges is a story of God’s people sinking fast; because instead of them making a difference in the world, the world made a difference in them.

**When you read through the book of Joshua, it is a powerful book of national Promised Land conquest.** The nation Israel moves into the Promised Land under the great leadership of Joshua and starts taking the land God gave her. Major victories occurred under Joshua and one of the last things Joshua did before he died, was to divide the land up among the tribes of Israel (Joshua 13-21). **When you read through the book of Judges, it is a pathetic story of defeat.** **When Joshua dies thing go down hill fast.**

When Joshua died there was still work to do. As Dr. Wiersbe said, the people of Israel owned the land but did not possess the land and therefore could not enjoy the land (*Be Available*, p. 19). Each tribe needed to clean up their own territory. There were pocket areas of trouble and cities in each tribal territory that needed its enemies removed. It is kind of like when we believe on Jesus Christ, we all have our own work to do in our own lives. There are pocket areas of things in our own lives that need to be removed. **As long as God’s people are willing to follow God’s Word day by day in facing enemies and getting rid of them, there is no problem. However, the moment we drift away from the Word of God there is always big trouble.**

When we come to **Judges 1**, we come to events that happen after Joshua dies. When you look down through this first chapter, things appear to start out good but, upon careful reflection, we must admit they aren’t all that good. One would think that after Joshua died, your first prayer would be who should be our next leader. One would think the mindset would be, we did great things under Moses and great things under Joshua so who should we follow now? One would also think that your first priority would be to carefully obey God’s Word like Joshua told them to do (Joshua 23:6). But that is not what happened.

As Judges opens, there seems to be an independent attitude that says we really don’t need another Moses or Joshua; we can handle things ourselves. **What Israel is about to learn is if you don’t have a godly leader raised up by God to lead you and direct you according to God’s Word, you can end up in a mess.**

**Judges 1:1** appears to start right with Israel praying to God and asking for His guidance and help. Everyone seems to want to do what is right and they want to know who should go to war first. Each tribe was apparently ambitious and ready to go. Each tribe took the position we can do this all by ourselves. They partially obeyed God’s Word, but they did not fully obey. What we see in **chapter 1** is:

**EVEN IF THINGS APPEAR TO BE GOOD FOR A WHILE, IF GOD’S PEOPLE DO NOT PRECISELY FOLLOW AND OBEY THE WORD OF GOD, THE END RESULT WILL BE DISASTER.**

God had told Israel to destroy all enemies and get them out of the land (Exodus 23:33; 34:11-16; Numbers 33:51-56; Deuteronomy 7:1-5). In Judges 1 we see the beginning failure of eight tribes. Four tribes do not show up in chapter 1 - Reuben and Gad lived outside the Promised Land and their Amorite enemies had already been defeated by Moses (Numbers 21; Joshua 22). Levi did not receive any specific territorial allotment but was to be provided for by all tribes (Numbers 18:20-21; Deuteronomy 14:27, 29). Issachar will show up later in Judges with Deborah, Barak, and Tola (Judges 4-5; 10-11). So what we have here are the beginning movements of not getting the job done of eight tribes:

**TRIBAL MOVEMENT DIRECTION #1** – Judah and Simeon partially conquer their allotted territory. **1:2-20**

In Judges 1:1, the sons of Israel pray to God and ask who should go up against the Canaanites first. God’s answer in verse 2 is let’s start this process with Judah. Judah was the tribe from which the Messiah would come. When Joshua led Israel, all tribes worked together under his leadership; so now that he was gone, when Judah was selected it seemed logical to Judah that they could form a partnership with Simeon.

The alliance between Judah and Simeon seems like the rational and reasonable thing to do.

- 1) The Simeonites were allotted land within the southern boundary of the tribe of Judah (Joshua 19:1-9).
- 2) Both Judah and Simeon had the same mother and father, Jacob and Leah (Genesis 29:33-35).
- 3) They both had land to conquer.
- 4) They both had Canaanite enemies to defeat.

This all appears to be good, but upon closer examination you will see there are problems. In verse 2 God told Judah to go take the land, and in verse 3 Judah gets Simeon his brother and says let’s rout the Canaanites from my part of the Promised Land, and then we will rout them from your part of the Promised Land. It appears to be the right thing to do; God’s people working together following the Word of God. But unless I overlooked it, God did not tell Judah to do this.

**There is one slight problem; God did not tell Judah to get Simeon.** In all reality this was, as Gary Phillips said, “editing God” (*Judges*, p. 23). Judah was one of the largest tribes numerically and it did not need Simeon’s help, who was one of the smallest tribes. Judah could have depended on God to carry out her assignments, and Simeon could have depended on God to carry out her assignments. In fact this was God’s intent. **God wanted each tribe to learn that they could trust Him.** If each tribe would obey His Word, they would see God do great and mighty things. **This alliance that appears to be a sign of strength is really a sign of weakness and unbelief in God’s Word and it actually circumvents the entire process.**

There are some people who go to church who are always more interested in what some other church is doing rather than what they are doing. The problem with this focus is these kinds of people never fully see what God could do with them, because they never get specifically focused on their own war.

Now the Promised Land featured different cities, which were really city/states, each having their own king and their own false gods. There were Canaanites (actually most all people in the land could be classified as Canaanites because most of these groups were descendants of Canaan the son of Ham (Genesis 10:6; 15-20) **(1:3)** - the high class, civilized people who worshipped false gods; the Perizzites **(1:4)** - the rural people who didn't think you needed any walls for any separation; the Jebusites **(1:21)** - the isolated group from the high country; and the Amorites **(1:34)** - the peace at any cost group.

All of these rejected the true God of Israel, and all of these powers refused to give the land to Israel and get out of it. So Judah and Simeon merged together and immediately went to work on conquering about nine different cities and areas:

**(Area #1)** - They conquered Bezek. **1:4-7**

Their first campaign was a success. They went up against 10,000 men at Bezek and defeated them **(1:4)**. The specific location is uncertain, but some think this was located about thirty miles north of Jerusalem (see map) and others believe it was located by Gezer (Merrill Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, p. 169).

Now what is odd about this is that they captured the king and cut off his big toes and thumbs **(1:6)** as he had apparently done to seventy kings. This made it impossible for him to run or handle a weapon. It also made it impossible for him to function as a false priest of a false god.

This Canaanite king recognized this was retributive justice from the hand of God **(1:7)**. When this happened to him, he immediately had a guilty conscience and he knew why God had done this. When God finally punishes false religious and political leaders, they will all know they are getting exactly what they deserve.

There are some good lessons: 1) Vengeance may be delayed, but it will come. 2) When enemies control our life, we will not be able to run a good race and wage a good war. 3) There is one slight problem here. God did not tell them to cut off thumbs and toes; He told them to destroy them and they disobeyed and brought this king to Jerusalem where he lived out his days and died.

**(Area #2)** - They conquered Jerusalem. **1:8**

Next they conquered the most important city in the world, Jerusalem. It would not become the key city of Israel until King David, but it was somewhat taken here. We learn from **verse 21** that they did not drive out the entire enemy. They did not fully occupy the city. They apparently killed some of the people and set part of the city on fire, but they did not completely do what they were supposed to do. A job half done is a job not done.

**(Area #3) - They conquered the Negev. 1:9**

The Negev area is the dry hill country in the southwestern portion of the Promised Land. It starts south of Beersheba and runs along the Egyptian border on the west and Jordan on the east all the way to the gulf of Aqaba.

**(Area #4) - They conquered Hebron. 1:10**

Hebron is located about nineteen miles southwest of Jerusalem. Seshai, Ahiman, and Talmai were the three sons of the giant named Anak (Judges 1:20). These were the same people who had frightened ten of the twelve Jewish spies who first explored the land (Numbers 13:22, 28). But this time the men of Judah conquered them.

**(Area #5) - They conquered Debir. 1:11-16**

Debir was located eleven miles southwest of Hebron. This city of Debir was apparently the academic center of the Canaanite people. The original name of the city Kiriath-sepher means it was a “city of books” or “city of writing.”

Caleb, who had been given this part of the Promised Land by Moses (Numbers 14:24; Joshua 14:6-15; Judges 1:20), decided that the one who would attack and capture Debir would get his daughter Achsah in marriage. Typically a young man would pay a dowry price to the father for his bride, and in this case the dowry was a city. Othniel, Caleb’s younger brother, captured it and Caleb gave him his daughter. In fact, Othniel would later become Israel’s first judge (Judges 3:7-11).

Othniel’s new wife, Achsah, urged him to go to her father and ask him for the upper and lower spring land area in the southwestern portion of the Promised Land which Caleb gave her (**1:15**). The land Achsah had been given was in the dry Negev (**1:15**), so she requested that she be given some of the “springs” of water. Apparently Othniel was much better at capturing cities than asking for things from his father-in-law, so Achsah followed up with her dad herself.

Moses’ father-in-law had been a Kenite and so his descendants lived in the Promised Land too. According to **verse 16**, they settled in an area south of Arad, which is a city located about sixteen miles south of Hebron.

**The problem with all of this is that God wanted these people driven completely out of the land. This was to be God’s people’s land and they are not fully obeying him. They are doing what is right in their own eyes. Partial obedience is not complete obedience.**

**(Area #6) - They conquered Zephath. 1:17**

Now the Judahites join in with the Simeonites to start taking their cities. When they came to the city of Zephath, they totally and completely destroyed it. In fact, this Hebrew word “utterly destroy” will not be used again until Judges 21:11. The “hiphil stem” of the word means they were the cause of the destruction.

Again the assignment is to take the land and rid the people from the land. But in this case they wipe out the city, which to me does not appear to be the assignment.

J. Vernon McGee said the tribes mentioned in this chapter are mentioned in the context of failure (*Judges*, Thru The Bible, Vol. 2, p. 47). In other words, they are all failing.

**(Area #7)** - They conquered Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ekron. **1:18-19**

We may observe from **verse 19** that the Lord was with Judah and had helped her in the hill country, but now they came down into the valley and they are starting to lack faith. These were intimidating cities on the Mediterranean coast that would become Philistine areas.

**Notice verse 19; they were not able to drive out the inhabitants because of their iron chariots.** They saw all of the intimidating technology of the Philistines and said, we can't win against that and so they stopped obeying God. Apparently, **when they saw the iron chariots they forgot that they had Almighty God on their side.** As Dr. Leon Wood said, they were losing their faith in God (*Distressing Days of the JUDGES*, p. 141).

**(Area #8)** - They allotted Hebron to Caleb. **1:20**

It is like they stopped the warfare and just settled down in the land. They apparently took Hebron due to Caleb who had a track record of obeying God. He ended up living in the field and suburbia areas of Hebron. Judah and Simeon had done something for God, but they quit and didn't do everything. **You cannot quit the warfare and accomplish all God wants.**

**TRIBAL MOVEMENT DIRECTION #2** – Benjamin and Manasseh do not completely conquer their territory. **1:21-28**

What we have here in all reality are seven failures.

**(Failure #1)** - Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites. **1:21**

There had been a partial victory in Jerusalem (**1:8**), but not a total victory in Jerusalem. **The excuse is tolerance.**

**(Failure #2)** - Joseph's sons did not completely destroy all those from Bethel. **1:22-26**

Bethel had been a key city to the Patriarchs - Genesis 12:8; 13:3; 28:10-12; 35:1-7. Notice we learn that the key to victory is "the LORD was with them" (**1:22**). What this means is that they believed the Word of God and obeyed the Word of God and when they did, God gave them victory.

However, they made a deal with a Hittite (**1:24-25**). If he would reveal the entrance area into the city, they would spare him and apparently let him go to his homeland area, the land of the Hittites, and let him live there where he built a city he named "Luz." **The excuse was "the end justifies the means."**

**(Failure #3)** - Manasseh did not take possession of Beth-shean. **1:27a**

Beth-shean was a very important fortress city that controlled a trading route across the Jordan river.

**(Failure #4)** - Manasseh did not take possession of Taanach. **1:27b**

Located five miles southeast of Megiddo which controlled a main travel route from Egypt to the north.

**(Failure #5)** - Manasseh did not take possession of Dor. **1:27c**

A key Mediterranean coastal city.

**(Failure #6)** - Manasseh did not take possession of Ibleam. **1:27d**

Sat at southern end of Jezreel valley.

**(Failure #7)** - Manasseh did not take possession of Megiddo. **1:27e**

These were key cities of a valley that runs from the Mediterranean to Mount Gilboa.

The result of all of this in **verse 28** is that the Canaanites were not completely driven out of the land which is what God told Israel to do.

**TRIBAL DIRECTION MOVEMENT #3** – Four tribes do not completely drive out the Canaanites. **1:29-33**

The common denominator of all of these tribes is **“incomplete obedience.”**

**(Failure #1)** - Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites from Gezer. **1:29**

Gezer was a strategic city located eighteen miles west of Jerusalem. It was an important guard city that could monitor enemies coming from the west into Jerusalem. They did not drive the enemies out of this area, but all just lived together as if they were one big happy family.

**(Failure #2)** - Zebulun did not drive out the Canaanites from Kitron or Nahalol. **1:30**

Further north, Zebulun did not follow through on his assignment but made the Canaanites forced labor.

**(Failure #3)** - Asher did not drive out the Canaanites from seven cities. **1:31-32**

With Asher things get a little worse. Previously at least the Canaanites were made slaves, but now the Asherites not only don't get rid of the Canaanites, they choose to live with them. They don't make them slaves, they just all settle down as one big happy family living together in these cities.

**(Failure #4)** - Naphtali did not drive out the Canaanites from Bethshemesh and Bethanath.  
**1:33**

Now one could rationalize and say, well the Canaanites work for us and are our servants. So it isn't so bad having them in the land. The problem is God told them not even to associate with these people, but drive them out of the land (Joshua 23:5-11).

**TRIBAL DIRECTION MOVEMENT #4** – Dan is dominated by the Amorites. **1:34-36**

Now things get even worse. Instead of chasing the enemies completely out of the land, to living with them in the land, and now we learn that the enemies are controlling part of the land. The Amorites were dominating this tribe for a while until they became a little stronger. They chased the tribe of Dan out of the plains and into the mountains.

How in the world did all of this happen? People stopped precisely following the Word of God.

After Joshua died the people had a job to do and simply didn't do it. They started editing the Word of God and stopped carefully obeying Scripture. They picked what they wanted and applied what they wanted, but they did not fully obey God.

**Chapter 1** says we are God's people, but we don't really take God's Word seriously. We are God's people and we fool around with the Word but we don't truly obey it.

These people experienced some blessings and some victories, but not to the level they should have. The defeats were indicators they were not fully obeying God's Word and walking by faith with a complete trust in God. If we want the full blessings of God, then we need to wage a good war by faith and obey God's Word, every bit of it.

### **Key Lessons:**

1. God says what He means; and the moment we start editing God's Word, it is the moment we are heading to trouble.
2. When we disobey God and do not fully obey Him, our spiritual life will be filled with negatives. You may say, well I'll deal with most things but not everything. I'll obey partially but not fully. There will be many problems.
3. God gives His people plenty of time to start fully obeying Him; start making right judgments today.

God is perpetually at war with sin no matter what the time frame. He is particularly interested that His own people get evil out of their lives.