



Israel's Inability to Drive Out Enemies Judges 1

Introduction

Does it bother you to leave something not completed? What do you think of a job half done? Have you ever brought it to someone's attention, or had it brought to yours, that a task was not finished? Was it a God-given assignment, such as career, education, marital status, parenting, or church ministry? Was failure to follow through due to apathy, or, as in Israel's case, due to compromise? Or was it both?

Israel, under Joshua's strong godly leadership, had been uniquely united and single-minded in possessing the promised land. "Israel was never again as united or as close to God as in those days of obedient, goal-directed, conquest" (Narrated Bible, Harvest House Publishers). After the death of Joshua and his generation, the cohesion vanished. The task of a leader is to give vision. *Where there is no vision, the people perish* (Proverbs 29:18 KJV). Lack of vision, added to compromise, almost destroyed the fledgling nation. Compromise led to co-existence, which led to intermarriage, which led to idolatry.

Outline of Judges Chapter 1

- I. Incomplete Victory of Judah Over Enemies - Judges 1:1-20
- II. Inability of Others to Drive Out Enemies - Judges 1:21-36

I. Incomplete Victory of Judah Over Enemies - Judges 1:1-20

Judges begins with the words, *Now after the death of Joshua*. The Book of Joshua ended with three burials: Joshua, Joseph's four-hundred year-old bones, and Eleazar the high priest (Joshua 24:29-33). As with Joseph's bones, Israel's early history can be written in four-hundred year segments:

- 400 years of slavery in Egypt (approximately 1800-1400 B.C.),
- 400 years of theocracy (Moses to Samuel, 1400-1040 B.C.),
- 400 years of monarchy (David to Zedekiah, 1000-606 B.C.)
- 400 years from the return of the exiles to Christ (444-4 B.C.).

These are round figures until David, whose kingship is dated 1000 B.C. Dating the Exodus varies from an early date of 1400 B.C. to the late date of 1200 B.C., depending on the choice of Rameses II as the pharaoh of the Exodus, which has not been verified.

- A. Judah Chosen to Advance Against Canaanites - Judges 1:1-2

- 1. Inquiring of God after Joshua's death - 1:1

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?" God had commanded the total destruction of the land's inhabitants by means of a holy war. The tribes began rightly by seeking direction from God. Do you always do this?

What was the justification for this total destruction? The subsequent history of Israel serves to illustrate very pointedly the grave danger that remained for Israel as long as the Canaanites were permitted to live in their midst. "Given over as they were to the most degenerate forms of polytheism and sexual impurity, these depraved inhabitants of the land were sure to exert a baneful influence and spread a deadly contagion among the covenant people of God" (A Survey of Old Testament Introduction, Gleason Archer). It was vital for their survival that the settled tribes get on with the job of conquest with all haste.

- 2. God's promise of victory - 1:2

And the Lord said, "Judah shall go up. Indeed I have delivered the land into his hand." How many armies would fight heartily to the finish if they knew victory was assured!

As with Judah, our victory, as believers, is assured. The same God promises to you and me: *Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world* (John 16:33); *We are more than conquerors through Him Who loved us* (Romans 8:37); *Lo, I am with you always...to the end of the age* (Matthew 28:20).

- B. Judah and Simeon's Combined Force - Judges 1:3-7

Judah recruited neighboring Simeon, whose territory was within Judah's borders at the southern end of Palestine. Judah was chosen either because the conquest was to be completed from south to north, or because Judah was the leading tribe, from whom kings would come, including eventually the King of kings.

- 1. The agreement - 1:3

Simeon agreed and went with his brother for their mutual defense. The tribe of Simeon was eventually absorbed into Judah.

2. The Victory – 1:4-5

Judah obeyed God and experienced the victory He promised. The enemy was defeated at Bezek and their general was captured.

3. The defeated commander - 1:6-7

Adoni-Bezek means “the Lord of Bezek”. It was more likely his title rather than his name (as in Pharaoh, etc.). Adoni-bezek was probably the chief of the local kings. He is the only Canaanite commander mentioned. His defeat was the key to victory in the southern area.

a. Punishment

The punishment of loss of thumbs and big toes was probably standard for the time and place. Adoni-bezek mentioned having done the same to seventy enemy kings. Donald Campbell says that this mutilation indicates already the pagan influence on the Israelites who had been commanded to kill, but not to maim.

b. Moral awareness

As I have done, so God has repaid me shows a sense of moral awareness surprising to any who are inclined to limit morality and justice to the Judeo-Christian cultures. Not only are all people made in God’s image with a conscience and innate sense of right and wrong, but the closer back to the creation we go, and the closer geographically to the race’s roots, the more we find knowledge of God’s principles and original plan for the human race (Genesis 20:9, 38:26, 41:37-38).

c. Death

Adoni-bezek died at Jerusalem, either as a condemned prisoner at the hands of the tribe of Judah, or as a prisoner/hostage in the battle for Jerusalem, which comes next.

C. Additional Victories - Judges 1:8-20

With the decisive first battle won, Judah’s remaining battles are briefly mentioned. A big win over our enemy Satan turns successive encounters into skirmishes. On the other hand, if we are always fighting “holding actions” and never fully facing our foe, the big battle is always ahead of us. Christ defeated Satan personally in His first major encounter (Matthew 4:1-11). Later He defeated Him on the cross for all of us. Will you take, by faith and obedience to God, the victory promised you and paid for in Jesus’ blood?

1. Jerusalem – 1:8

Jerusalem was a prized city then, as it is now. It stood

virtually impregnable atop Mt. Moriah, where Abraham offered up Isaac. Travelers were always said to “go up” to Jerusalem.

“The earliest city, on the hill Ophel, south of the temple area, is shown by archeological evidence to go back to 3000 BC...and is no doubt the Salem of Genesis 14:18) (The New Bible Commentary, Eerdmans).

Even though Judah was victorious in Judges chapter 1, the Jebusites regained control of Jerusalem until David’s day. *The Benjamites did not drive out the inhabitants of Jerusalem; so the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day* (1:21). This means that the account was written before David drove them out, and helps to give a date to much of Judges.

2. Hill country, the South (Negev) and lowland – 1:9

These areas are in the south of Palestine. The hill country is a natural division of north and south. The Negev (meaning dry) is a semi-arid plain which extends from Hebron to the Gulf of Aqaba. It parallels the Dead Sea, 1300 ft. below sea level, the lowest spot on earth. Judah controlled all that land.

3. Hebron and Debir – 1:10-11

Hebron was a fortress city on a hilltop in the northern part of Judah’s territory (Joshua 14:15, 15:13-17). It was promised to Caleb by Moses for fully following the Lord (Numbers 14:24). Abraham and Sarah are buried in Hebron, the patriarchal family burial plot.

a. Caleb’s prize exchange – 1:12-13

Caleb’s earlier challenge to any warrior who would conquer KiriathSepher (Debir) is repeated here. He offered his daughter in exchange for the city, knowing that he himself would live there near her. We would call it a safe offer, especially since it turned out that Caleb’s nephew, Othniel, was the warrior who won her. Othniel became the first judge of Israel.

b. Achsah’s Request – 1:14

Achsah, who did not seem unhappy with the arrangement, sent her bridegroom to Caleb to ask for a field, then she herself asked him for springs to go with it. She also asked from him a blessing. Perhaps she had no brothers, or they died in battle, and so Caleb was keeping his prize city in the family while obtaining a good husband for his daughter. This whole episode is a touching vignette of a father, who is one of the outstanding heroes of the Old Testament, and his daughter whom he loved.

c. Upper and lower springs in the Negev – 1:15

Caleb gave her not just springs, but the upper and lower springs to assure an abundance of water.

We can be like Achsah and go to our Father for springs of living water when we are dry. He will refresh us out of His abundant, ever-flowing supply. *How much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those that ask Him* (Luke 11:13). *If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water* (John 7:37-38). Have you done this?

d. Hebron his at last – 1:20

And they gave Hebron to Caleb as Moses had said. Promised long before, it was finally his. Only Caleb and Joshua, out of the whole generation that left Egypt, survived slavery and the wilderness to become conquerors in Canaan.

4. Kenites settle – 1:16

The Kenites receive special mention because of their relationship to Moses. They were his relatives through his marriage in the Sinai wilderness. They had elected to leave their ancestral home and throw in their lot with Moses. God rewarded them with an inheritance in the promised land. How willing are you to leave your familiar, secure surroundings for an exciting journey into the unknown life following the Lord? The Kenites were like the apostle Peter who said, *Lord, we have left all and followed you. Jesus replied, There is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children* (meaning the possibility of having them), *for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come everlasting life* (Luke 18:28-30).

5. Hormah – 1:17

6. Gaza, Ashkelon, Ekron – 1:18

These are three of the five Philistine cities in the area now known as the Gaza strip.

D. The Lord's Presence – 1:19-20

With the Lord's presence, Judah cleared the hill country, but even though dominant, could not clear the lowlands. The iron chariots of the Canaanites were a factor. But there was a greater reason.

II. Inability of Other Tribes to Drive Out Enemies – Judges 1:21-36

A. Two Phrases for Seven Tribes – Judges 1:21-36

There are two phrases which distinguish this section of chapter 1.

1. They did not drive them out

Following Judah's noteworthy but incomplete attempt to destroy the enemy and rid the land of them, no other tribe was able to drive the enemy out of their midst. The fact that they did not drive out the enemy is stated of seven tribes besides Judah and Simeon (verses 21, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33).

The remaining three tribes are Levi, scattered throughout the land, and Reuben and Gad on the other side of the Jordan.

2. The Canaanites dwelt among them

These are the records of the tribes who allowed the Canaanites to live amongst them in the inheritance God had given.

a. Benjamin – 1:21

Benjamin's territory was north of Judah. Benjamin was the youngest of Jacob's sons. He and Joseph were full blood brothers, born of Rachel. They were unable to expel them, *so the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.*

b. Joseph's two tribes - Judges 1:22-29

Joseph, as Jacob's favorite son, received the double blessing which enabled his two sons to inherit territory.

• Manasseh – 1:27-28

Unlike the other tribes, Manasseh's territory was on both sides of the Jordan River. They left pockets of Canaanites throughout their territory, for the Canaanites were determined to dwell in that land. Our enemy, Satan, is determined to stay in residence unless we are more determined that he will not. Paul warns us to be on guard, *Lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices* (2 Corinthians 2:11) and *Neither give place to the devil* (Ephesians 4:27). Does the devil have a toehold, or a stronghold, in your life? How determined are you to dislodge and defeat him?

- Ephraim – 1:29

Ephraim later became the general name for the northern ten tribes, when their capital was Samaria, a city of Ephraim. So the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them.

- c. Zebulon – 1:30

So the Canaanites dwelt among them and were put under tribute.

- d. Asher – 1:31-32

The tables were turned. The Asherites were so weak that they are described as dwelling among the Canaanites!

- e. Naphtali – 1:33

These too are said to dwell among the Canaanites, but at least they put them to tribute. They taxed them.

- f. Dan – 1:34-36

The Amorites, particularly fierce Canaanites, forced Dan into the mountains and would not let them come down into the valley! The Amorites were determined to dwell in Dan's territory and it took the strength of both Manasseh and Ephraim to put them under tribute later. *Yet when the strength of the house of Joseph became stronger, they were put under tribute (1:35).*

B. Weakened Through Compromise

There is a descending record here. Judah began strong and in combination with Simeon exterminated many Canaanites. Yet they stopped short of complete victory. In the end they tolerated the enemy in their midst.

The remaining tribes had less success in varying degrees, and the last two, Asher and Dan, barely possessed their possession, dominated by the strong and stubborn enemy. "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."

Moses and Joshua had given stern warning regarding the corrupting presence of the enemy and the necessity of total extermination in order to enjoy all that God had promised them (Deuteronomy 7:16-21, Joshua 23:5-13).

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul quotes Isaiah 52:11 to warn us to *Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord, do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you* (2 Corinthians 6:17). Separation is the opposite of compromise.

Applications

1. Resisting your spiritual enemies

Have you grown so accustomed to the spiritual enemies in your midst that you tolerate their corrupting ways and have ceased resisting them? What spiritual enemies can you name which surround you? Where do they need to be confronted and routed by you?

2. Recognizing your spiritual enemies

Is the enemy of your soul, the devil, gaining an advantage over you in the area of entertainment, or other personal choices? Are your means of entertainment and relaxation acceptable to God? Are the things you choose to enjoy any different from those of ungodly people? Do you choose to relax with a good book, a TV program that is uplifting, or do you choose one that undermines your Christian values? Is your spiritual strength and zeal drained and weakened by compromises in what you do in your leisure time? Are your business or personal habits conditioned by the world around or by the word of God and prayer? Will you ask God today to reveal places where Satan has made inroads into your thinking and doing? What changes will you make with His help?