

Judges

June 6, 2010

Background/Judges 1

I. Additional Admonitions on Serving

The book of Judges has always been called by this name, just in different languages. In Hebrew, it is *Sopetim*; in Latin in the Vulgate, it is *Liber Iudicum*; in Greek in the Septuagint, it is *Kritai*.

In Judges, Israel is referred to once as a nation. It is never referenced as such in the book of 1 Samuel. Throughout Judges, there does not appear to be a strong central nation, only a loose-nit group of tribes who occasionally come together under special leadership.

Some of the events in Judges clearly overlap. If they did not overlap, the total time would be 591 years. Usually, it is assumed that about 300 years are covered in this period.

In the first chapter of Judges, we see a summary of events which mostly occurred during the time of the book of Joshua. While Joshua tends to give a very positive review of the initial events of conquest, it does point out that a lot was left undone at the time of Joshua's death and that the tribes had failed to be entirely successful in their assigned tasks. In Judges, the tone is much more negative. After the initial successes of Joshua, the tribes appear to be less successful. It was not until the time of David that Israelites were more successful.

The time of Judges shows how man progresses with and without God. In general, the Israelites of the time do what they feel is right rather than following God fully. We see them disintegrating more and more throughout this time. Yet, we also see incredible feats being performed by the Judges when they follow God. One wonders why they did not learn from this. We see this cycle in Judges:

- Rest
- Idolatry
- Oppression
- Deliverance

The Judges			
Othniel	Ehud	Shamgar	Deborah/Barak
Gideon	Tola	Jair	Jephthah
Ibzan	Elon	Abdon	Samson

II. Who Will Go? Judg.1:1

Judg. 1:1

After the death of Joshua, the Israelites asked the LORD, "Who will be the first to go up and fight for us against the Canaanites?"

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While one might think, based on this opening line, that all the events of Chapter 1 occurred following Joshua's death, many of the events in this chapter might have occurred before it. In general, the book of Judges draws considerably from the book of Joshua including similarities in the opening:

Josh 1:1

1:1 After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide:

III. Judah, the Most Successful Tribe: Judg. 1:2-20

All of these events are basically covered in the book of Joshua.

- Verse 2 While other tribes are certainly mentioned, Judah appears to have the highest profile in the book, apparently foreshadowing its importance in the future. Behind it, the next most prominent tribes are Ephraim and Manasseh, sometimes in a negative light, again a foreshadowing of what will likely happen in the future. From Joshua, we know that this is the promise to all the tribes, not just Judah.
- Verse 3 The Simeonites did not have a land allocation as such, but had been allocated various cities within the boundaries of Judah. By this point, the Simeonites were the smallest tribe having been less than half the number of men that they had when they left Egypt, from 59,300 to 22, 200.
- Verse 4 The use of the term “Canaanites” is rather elastic in Judges. Sometimes, it appears to include all the inhabitants of Palestine. Other times, they might represent only the inhabitants of the valleys and coastal plains. Here, they are associated with Perizzites. There is no way to fully understand exactly who they represent in this passage.
- Verse 6 The NIV interprets Adoni-Bezek as a personal name, but it probably meant “Lord of Bezek.” (NOTE: “Adoni” probably met Adonay, meaning Lord. Adoni-Zedek was the king of Jerusalem.) When the Bible says Adoni so (and so, just think of the Lord Darth Vader! Adoni-Vader).
- Verse 7 Presumably, Adoni-Bezek died from his treatment by Judah, as his injuries were likely greater than simply having his thumbs and big toe cut off. However, Scripture does not say this. He might have been delivered to Jerusalem so that they could see his humiliation and fear the Judahites as a result. Perhaps he died of old age in the city.
- Verse 8 When did this happen? A modern-day person would conclude that it happened shortly after the defeat of Bezer. The ancients were less concerned about timing, but the next verse would imply that this was rather early in the Judges time frame. We know that the Jerusalem was still an active Jebusite city at the time of David, even if burned at this time. The events mentioned in this passage sound different from David’s conquest of the city. Perhaps Judah did not put the city residents to death since the city was not within the territory allocated to them or other Jebusites living north of the city arrived to push Judah out, leaving the people to rebuild their city. In any case, it was in the territory allocated to Benjamin. Perhaps the final comment on this situation comes from:

Josh 15:63

63 Judah could not dislodge the Jebusites, who were living in Jerusalem; to this day the Jebusites live there with the people of Judah.

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2 Sam 5:7, 9-10

7 Nevertheless, David captured the fortress of Zion, the City of David.

9 David then took up residence in the fortress and called it the City of David. He built up the area around it, from the supporting terraces inward. 10 And he became more and more powerful, because the LORD God Almighty was with him.

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Verse 10 Is this the same conquest of Hebron as in?

Josh 15:13-15

13 In accordance with the LORD's command to him, Joshua gave to Caleb son of Jephunneh a portion in Judah-Kiriath Arba, that is, Hebron. (Arba was the forefather of Anak.) 14 From Hebron Caleb drove out the three Anakites-Sheshai, Ahiman and Talmi — descendants of Anak. 15 From there he marched against the people living in Debir (formerly called Kiriath Sepher).

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Verse 11 Joshua had conquered a city called Debir in:

Josh 10:38-39

38 Then Joshua and all Israel with him turned around and attacked Debir. 39 They took the city, its king and its villages, and put them to the sword. Everyone in it they totally destroyed. They left no survivors. They did to Debir and its king as they had done to Libnah and its king and to Hebron.

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Perhaps after the initial conquest, the people of the area took it back. It is not clear if the Israelites settled all the territory immediate that they conquered under Joshua's leadership. Perhaps, the Israelites left the city after conquering and destroying allowing survivors and their kin a chance to rebuild.

Verse 18 These cities might have been re-conquered later by the so-called Sea People. Based in these cities, the Philistines would become Israel's most difficult "internal" problem. The Philistines probably reached Palestine en masse about 1200 BC which means that the Israelites were in the land for a couple of centuries before their arrival.

Verse 20 While Judah was successful, it was not entirely so. Yet, it appears to have done better than the other tribes.

IV. Benjamin: Judg. 1:21

Even though Judah was not entirely successful, we see that the Benjaminites are less so in this statement that parallels Joshua 15:63, but where Judah is the actor rather than Benjamin.

V. Joseph/Ephraim: Judg. 1:22-26, 29

Is this the conquest as Joshua's? If so, this chronicle contains major additions to the account in Joshua 7-8. If not, then apparently the Canaanites retook this city too, causing the Israelites to take it again.

Bethel was in Ephraim, one of the two tribes of Joseph. Joshua was a member of the tribe of Ephraim. While this reports on Joseph, Manasseh is handed separately below, indicating this tribe is really Ephraim (perhaps augmented by Manasseh), who was to be the most important tribe of Joseph per Jacob prophecy at the end of Genesis.

Some compare the situation with Judah and Adoni-Bezek (King, important person, ruler over many) with Joseph and this unknown person—a nobody, unnamed, traitor to his people. As with Rahab, this arrangement was a violation of God's commands not to make treaties with the Canaanites and not to spare any of them? Unlike Rahab, the man did not become an Israelite.

The book of Judges is not kind to Ephraim.

VI. Manasseh: Judg. 1:27-28

The situation with Manasseh appears to represent what happened throughout Israel. Solomon would eventually do this too, perhaps restarting the servitude that had been started but later stopped:

1 Kings 9:20-21

20 All the people left from the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites (these peoples were not Israelites), 21 that is, their descendants remaining in the land, whom the Israelites could not exterminate-these Solomon conscripted for his slave labor force, as it is to this day.

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VII. Zbulun, Asher, and Naphtali: Judg. 1:30-33

Zbulun appears to comply with the situation in Manasseh. However, with Asher and Naphtali, we see another downward shift. Rather than the Canaanites living among the Israelites, these Israelite tribes are living among the Canaanites. Note: The northern area of Asher including the Phoenician cities of Sidon and Tyre.

VIII. Dan, the Worse of All: Judg. 1:34-36

Later we will see the northward migration of the Danites, when they leave behind their inheritance altogether. Here we see the backdrop for this situation and for the story of Samson who was a Danite. The Danites were particularly pressed by the Philistines. Most of the Danite territory lay in plains and were conquered by the Philistines. Even Judah, the most successful tribe, had problems in the plains.

The cities mentioned in verse 35 were in Dan, but apparently after the Danites migrated north, those bordering Ephraim were taken by that tribe.

The Scorpion Pass is my favorite place name in Israel, although we do not know exactly where it is. One can envision John Wayne riding his horse in this place.

IX. From Bad to Worse

Under Joshua, the Israelites have a good beginning in the Promise Land.

However, that did not last long. Soon we see all kinds of problems besetting the Israelites. The problems come from all sides, and some come from within the boundaries of the nation, even between Israelite tribes.

The book is arranged much as this chapter. The situation gets worse and worse in Israel as the book progresses to its end.

Why did God not help the people more? Clearly, He could have cleared the way for them, allowing them to take the land with much fewer problems than we see detailed in these chapters.

Why did the people not follow God more closely? Have they forgotten what He had done for them?

The epitaph of the book of Judges is:

Judg. 21:25

In those days, Israel had no king. Everyone did as he saw fit in his own eyes.

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Do the Israelites need a king?