

Exegetical Notes - Judges 1:1-2:23
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Judges 1:1-2:23

Background: When Joshua died, the conquest of The Promised Land was only partially completed. In large part, Israel had followed the instructions of YHWH regarding the taking of the land and the destruction of the indigenous population who lived there, but Israel had not followed God completely. Large sections of the indigenous population remained and were not under Israeli control.

From the time of the occupation (around 1380 BC) until the beginning of the Monarchs (1050 BC) Israel was a THEOCRACY, a nation whose king was God. Israel was supposed to listen to and follow the word of the Lord, but as we have already seen, Israel was not good at following the instructions of YHWH. Her failure to do so left her in trouble time and again. Partial obedience to the word of the Lord is disobedience to the word of the Lord and always leads to disaster. "Judges provides many examples of the principle that OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW BRINGS PEACE, WHEREAS DISOBEDIENCE MEANS OPPRESSION AND DEATH" (Charles Ryrie). This is the constantly repeated lesson of the Book of Judges. Judges is the story of the time in Israel's early history when "Every man did what was right in his own eyes" (17:6 and 21:25). This always results in chaos and disaster.

In the Book of Judges a recurrent theme emerges: Step one - The people are following the will of YHWH; Step two - The people stop obeying the word of the Lord; Step three - An enemy arises that oppress the people of God; Step four - The people cry out to God for help; Step five - God answers Israel's prayer by sending them a deliverer (a judge to lead her, a Messiah); Step six - The people repent and return to the Lord. Then, the process begins again. Judges simply repeats this pattern over and over again. God's people are "stiff necked and disobedient." God is forever faithful. If God's people would follow God's word, they could save themselves hardship, worry, pain, etc. But, they choose to do what seems right in their own eyes.

Verses 1:1-8

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.”

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.

⁸ The men of Judah attacked Jerusalem also and took it. They put the city to the sword and set it on fire.

- According to Joshua 24:29, Joshua died at the age of 110. During his lifetime, he provided leadership for the nation and Israel was obedient to the word of the Lord as given through Joshua. At the time of his death, the conquest of the Promised Land was partially completed but not finished entirely.
- After Joshua’s death the question was asked, “Who will be the first to go up and fight for us against the Canaanites?” The question is put to YHWH. It indicates that the land was only partially conquered and questioned the new order that would be established with Joshua’s death. Judah had always gone up first. Would that continue to be the order of YHWH or would things change now that Joshua was dead?
- YHWH’s answer was that Judah would go first. The order established by YHWH would prevail after Joshua’s death.
- Judah invited the tribe of Simeon to join them. The territory of Simeon was surrounded by that of Judah. That they should move together is reasonable.
- Judah & Simeon attacked the Canaanites and the Perizzites at Bezek. God gave them victory. They struck down 10,000 men at Bezek.
- Adoni-Bezek, Lord of Bezek, fought against Israel there. He and the leaders of his army were captured. The Israelites cut off the thumbs and the big toes of Adoni-Bezek and the leaders of his army. This rendered them

unable to hold weapons. They did not kill Adoni-Bezek as part of the ban God has placed on the occupants of the land. Instead they took him to Jerusalem where he died.

- The men of Judah also captured Jerusalem and put it to the sword.

Verses 9-11

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).

- Judah then continued to drive out the indigenous population of the Promised Land.

Verses 12-15

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.

- Caleb offered to give his daughter, Aksah, to the man who captured Kiriath Sepher. Othniel, the son of Caleb's brother, Kenaz took the area. Caleb gave Othniel Aksah as his wife. Othniel will become Israel's first judge.
- Caleb gave his daughter a portion of land, too.

Verses 16-21

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.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.

- Moses' father-in-law was Jethro, the Priest of Midian. Exodus 2:16.
- Moses father-in-law had settled among the tribe of Judah and had assisted Judah in claiming its portion of the Promised Land.
- Judah continued its conquest taking the cities of Zephath, Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ekron. But Judah was unable to drive out the people who lived in the plains because these people had superior military weapons.
- Caleb drove out the people of Anal.
- The Benjamites did not drive out the Jebusites.
- The plan of God that the indigenous population be entirely driven out of the Promised Land was not being followed by the people of Israel.

Verses 22-26

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.

- Another compromise is made by the tribes of Joseph. Bethel is attacked but a man from that city is allowed to live. He then established a city of his own.

Verses 27-36

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. 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.

- As time elapsed and Israel saw the advantage of enslaving the indigenous population, God's plan for taking the Promised Land was forgotten.

Verses 2:1-5

2 The angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bokim and said, "I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land I swore to give to your ancestors. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you, ² and you shall not make a covenant with the people of this land, but you shall break down their altars.' Yet you have disobeyed me. Why have you done this? ³ And I have also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; they will become traps for you, and their gods will become snares to you.'"

⁴ When the angel of the LORD had spoken these things to all the Israelites, the people wept aloud, ⁵ and they called that place Bokim. There they offered sacrifices to the LORD.

- God sent an angel, a messenger, to the people of Israel to remind them of his plan for the taking of the Land. God pointed out through his messenger that Israel had violated his specific commands and broken covenant with him. The angel warned that YHWH would not continue to uphold Israel, if Israel continued to disobey. The messenger pointed out the reason for God's command concerning the people who lived in Israel before Israel. These people would lead Israel away from God and into the worship of false gods, if they were not driven out of the land. They would become traps for Israel.
- Israel repented of her disobedience when she heard the word of the Lord. The place was called Bokim. The Hebrew word means weepers or weeping. There, Israel wept when she realized that she had violated the word of the Lord.

Verses 6-9

⁶ After Joshua had dismissed the Israelites, they went to take possession of the land, each to their own inheritance. ⁷ The people served the LORD throughout the

lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel.

⁸ Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of a hundred and ten. ⁹ And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Heres in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.

- These verses repeat Joshua 24:29-33

Verses 10-15

¹⁰ After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. ¹¹ Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. ¹² They forsook the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They aroused the LORD's anger ¹³ because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. ¹⁴ In his anger against Israel the LORD gave them into the hands of raiders who plundered them. He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist. ¹⁵ Whenever Israel went out to fight, the hand of the LORD was against them to defeat them, just as he had sworn to them. They were in great distress.

- Though Israel heard the warning of YHWH given at Bokim, as time moved, she ignored the warning and the prediction God had given came true. Israel forsook God and began to worship the gods of the indigenous populations she had not driven out.
- Consequently, God no longer favored Israel in battle. God gave the people of Israel into the hands of the people they had not driven out and Israel became the slaves of those peoples.

Verses 16-20

¹⁶ Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders. ¹⁷ Yet they would not listen to their judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them. They quickly turned from the ways of their ancestors, who had been obedient to the LORD's commands. ¹⁸ Whenever the LORD raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the LORD relented because of their groaning under those who oppressed and afflicted them. ¹⁹ But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their ancestors, following other gods and serving

and worshiping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways.

- To help Israel, God raised up JUDGES, local political leaders to deliver Israel from the hands of her enemies.
- As long as an appointed Judge lived, Israel followed the Lord. But when the Judge died, Israel went back to following the gods of the indigenous populations. Israel would not remain true to YHWH.

Verses 20-23

²⁰ Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and said, “Because this nation has violated the covenant I ordained for their ancestors and has not listened to me, ²¹ I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died. ²² I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the LORD and walk in it as their ancestors did.” ²³ The LORD had allowed those nations to remain; he did not drive them out at once by giving them into the hands of Joshua.

- Israel’s behavior angered God. He removed his hand of protection allowing Israel to fall because she did not obey the plan of God.



(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *To Obey or Disobey – That Is the Question!* They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. All rights are reserved by Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville, Pennsylvania, & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. They are used here by permission.)