

## “Conquer or Be Conquered” (Judges 1:1–3:6)

I am delving into territory where angels fear to tread. Yes, I am kicking off a series on the Book of Judges. I can almost hear you saying, “What? Keith, what are you thinking? Is the ministry so demanding that you have lost your mind?” Well, perhaps. If you are familiar with the Book of Judges, you know that it is one of the most difficult books in the Bible. It is a truly bizarre book. We will meet a man wearing a loom in his hair. We will read of an army defeated by its own soldiers. Indeed, this is a strange book! Judges is also a dark, R-rated book. We will read the horrific story of a man chopping his dead girlfriend into pieces and delivering those pieces by special messenger to twelve different parts of Israel. We will also study a woman who wins a battle for Israel by hammering a nail through a man’s head. Judges is anything but routine, run-of-the-mill stuff. The book is so intense that when your kids are playing their X-Box 360 or PS2/PS3 they may say, “Dad, Mom, I’m not playing Halo...I’m playing Judges!”

So why study Judges? First, I believe “ALL Scripture is God-breathed and profitable” (2 Tim 3:16). When Paul wrote these words he was speaking primarily of the Old Testament. So Judges is directly from God and is useful<sup>1</sup> for life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> Second, I made a commitment many years ago to preach the whole counsel of God’s Word (Acts 20:27). Hebrews 13:17 says that I’m going to have to give an account to God for you so I want to make sure that you get a solid diet of God’s Word. Third, I want you to appreciate the theology of narrative literature (i.e., stories). Often we assume that stories belong in Sunday school for little kids. Yet, many scholars argue that story is one of the most sophisticated forms of communication known to man.<sup>3</sup> Regardless, stories are the emphasis of Scripture. Over three-quarters of the Bible consists of story. [Grab the pages of Romans-Revelation and provide a visual.] It is imperative, therefore, that we appreciate and understand stories.<sup>4</sup> Finally, God directed me to preach through Judges because the church of Jesus Christ is becoming just like the world. After our vision series on “transferring truth to the next generation,” I sensed that God wanted me to preach a series on what can happen when leaders and followers fail to fulfill this vision.

I am titling our series through Judges, “Avoid Generation Degeneration.”<sup>5</sup> It is my hope that we will learn from the stories of Judges *how* to live for God and transfer truth to the next generation. In the introduction to Judges the writer helps us to see that *God’s love compels us to fight against competing passions.*<sup>6</sup> The introduction is broken down into two sections that are intended to be read together.<sup>7</sup> In 1:1–2:5, God deals with Israel’s military failure to conquer the land. This is the political section. In 2:6–3:6, God deals with Israel’s religious failure to obey the law. This is the theological section. The first section narrates matters from the Israelites’ point of view, while the second section narrates from God’s point of view.

The Book of Judges begins with these words: “**Now it came about after the death of Joshua that the sons of Israel inquired<sup>8</sup> of the LORD, saying, ‘Who shall go up<sup>9</sup> first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?’ The LORD said, ‘Judah shall go up; behold, I have given the land into his hand’**” (1:1–2). These opening verses impart two very important truths. First, *God’s people need to inquire of Him.* In 1:1, Israel exercises godly wisdom by inquiring of God. In this moment, God’s people are seeking Him to accomplish His purposes His way. Likewise, as individuals and churches we must seek the Lord’s face and ask for His direction. It is always dangerous to have our own plans and vision and then ask God to bless what we want to do for Him. Today, are you seeking Christ’s vision and goals for your life? Second, *God’s kingdom does not collapse when godly leaders die.* Even though Joshua died, God raises up Judah (1:2).<sup>10</sup> We must always remember that our help is in the name of the Lord, not in the name of our pastor or any Christian leader. We are all expendable! Even when Jesus Christ Himself went away, He told His disciples that it was to their advantage for Him to leave (John 16:7).<sup>11</sup> If you are to transfer truth to the next generation, you must remind yourself that God wants to use you, but He doesn’t need you. Are you holding your life and ministry loosely? Do you recognize that it belongs to God and He can do with it whatever He wants?

The account of Judah continues in 1:3–4: **“Then Judah said to Simeon his brother, ‘Come up with me into the territory allotted me, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I in turn will go with you into the territory allotted you.’ So Simeon went with him. Judah went up, and the LORD gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hands, and they defeated ten thousand men at Bezek.”**

Judah seeks the cooperation of Simeon. He believes he needs his brother’s assistance to do what God calls him to do. He also offers Simeon his assistance. Each time Israel acts in tribal unity the Lord grants victory.<sup>12</sup> God’s blessing is poured out when His people operate in corporate unity (1:3; cf. 1:17, 22). We too must recognize that we need other brothers and sisters in Christ to do what God has called us to do. Who are you currently serving with in ministry? Do they know how significant they are to you?

The first four verses beg the question: Why does God want to annihilate the Canaanites? The answer is simple: God didn’t want the wickedness of the Canaanite society (e.g., child sacrifice, sexual immorality, idolatry) to contaminate His people (Num 33:55). Israel was God’s special people, chosen to fulfill divine purposes. Israel would give the world the knowledge of God, the Scriptures, and the Savior. In order to accomplish these purposes, Israel had to be free from the pollution of all the other nations. Yet, it is critical to recognize that God gave the Canaanites over 400 years to repent (Gen 15:16). This showcases God’s mercy and grace. But eventually, God’s patience runs out. He must judge sin! It is also worth noting that Judges records a slice of time where God pours out His judgment through His people. This is not a common theme throughout the Bible; it appears nowhere in the New Testament. Rather, God commands us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matt 5:44).

In 1:5–7, our story continues: **“They [Judah and Simeon] found Adoni-bezek [Lord of Bezek] in Bezek and fought against him, and they defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites. But Adoni-bezek fled; and they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and big toes. Adoni-bezek said, ‘Seventy kings with their thumbs and their big toes cut off used to gather up scraps under my table; as I have done, so God has repaid me.’ So they brought him to Jerusalem and he died there.”** Judah and Simeon discover an effective way of ending Adoni-bezek’s military career. There is no way he can handle a bow or spear again. But mutilation was a pagan practice. And besides, God wanted these men put to death, not mutilated. God never said, “You can play with your enemies like a cat plays with a mouse.” This is an early indication that God’s people are conforming to their culture.<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, Adoni-bezek, a man like Osama bin Laden, acknowledges, “What goes around comes around!” He seems to understand how God’s justice works. Similarly, we must understand that God is a God of justice. When we sin against Him, even as believers, there are consequences for our sin (2:14–15; cf. Gal 6:7–8). *God’s love compels us to fight against competing passions.*

The storyline continues in 1:8–16. Judah leads some victories in the South, one of them being against Jerusalem (1:8).<sup>14</sup> At this time in history, Jerusalem does not belong to Israel.<sup>15</sup> From there, Judah and company wipe out various Canaanite cities (1:9–11).<sup>16</sup> In 1:12–16, there is a peculiar story about Caleb offering his daughter Achsah for a wife to anyone who attacks and captures Kiriath-sepher. Othniel,<sup>17</sup> a Kenite does so and receives Achsah as a wife. Achsah then persuades Othniel to ask her father for a field. I’m sure this isn’t an easy request for this new son-in-law to ask of his father-in-law. Achsah then asks her father for springs of water. (Water is a valuable commodity. Without water, what benefit is a field?) He graciously obliges her. So what’s the point of this bizarre account? The point is this: God shows His grace and mercy to foreigners. Even in the Old Testament, God’s program includes those who are not Israelites. When people like the Kenites turn to God, they are shown grace. What a reminder that God’s plans and purposes include *all* who will believe in Christ and be saved. No matter who you are or what you’ve done, God welcomes you *if* you will believe in His Son (John 3:36).

In the paragraphs that follow, the author of Judges records the downward spiral of God’s people. Small compromises lead to catastrophic failures. As you study this passage, your goal must be to learn from the failures of God’s people (Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:6, 11). Notice the steps of progression that lead to demise.

**Step One: Partial obedience (1:17–32).**<sup>18</sup> Things began well in 1:17–18: “**Then Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they struck the Canaanites living in Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. So the name of the city was called Hormah**” (i.e., “destruction”). **And Judah took Gaza with its territory and Ashkelon with its territory and Ekron with its territory.**” This is exactly what God wanted.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, from this point forward God’s people compromise His command to exterminate the Canaanites.<sup>20</sup> The turning point in our story comes in 1:19: “**The Lord was with the men of Judah.** [They are unstoppable and can conquer anyone they face.] **They conquered the hill country, but they could not conquer the people living in the coastal plain, because they had chariots with iron-rimmed wheels.**” Since when have chariots been able to thwart God’s purposes and power?<sup>21</sup> The problem here is not the Canaanites’ impressive technology; it is Israel’s refusal to rely upon the Lord (see 2:1–5). God will give His people victory when they trust in Him.<sup>22</sup> As Paul says in Rom 8:31: “If God is for us, who is against us?” Even when you feel that there are obstacles in your path, if God has called you to do something, He will do it! The reason that Judah did not have victory is that they did not trust God. We too will not experience spiritual victory unless we place our confidence in the Lord.

In 1:20, we come upon another significant verse: “**Then they gave Hebron to Caleb, as Moses had promised; and he drove out from there the three sons of Anak.**” Now this sounds kind of bland, but the Book of Joshua enlightens us. Caleb is one of the great heroes of the Old Testament, partly based on what happens here. Caleb and Joshua were in the group that spied out the land back in Numbers 13. The other spies got cold feet and wanted to turn back at that point. One of the reasons they were scared was what they saw at the city of Hebron. Hebron was located down in the territory of Judah, situated on a mountaintop. It had high and impressive walls. Not only that, one of the leading families of Hebron was a fierce warrior clan known as the sons of Anak. The Anakites were huge people; so huge, in fact, that they scared the living daylights out of the spies. But while other people were scared, Caleb was challenged. He said, “Don’t worry about the Anakites. Once we get into the land, I’ll take Hebron and deal with the Anakites.” And he did just that—and at 80 years of age! Caleb didn’t believe in taking his Social Security check and sliding for home. He is a warrior who never gives in. The rest of Israel had its struggles, but it wasn’t because of Caleb. Caleb did his job. What an inspiring character! May you and I be like Caleb. By the way, this past Thursday, my friend, Jason Wolden, told me that he finished reading a book by Francine Rivers that really impacted him. The book is a historical fiction work on the life of Caleb called, *The Warrior*.<sup>23</sup> Jason is a missionary and Multnomah Biblical Seminary grad so I take his book recommendations seriously. Perhaps you should pick up this book and follow in the footsteps of Caleb?

After a few glimmers of hope in 1:17–20, several other tribes from Israel also fail to drive out the Canaanites. As a result, there are consequences. In 1:25–26, the Israelites let an entire family go free and the family builds a city in the land of the Hittites.<sup>24</sup> In 1:27, the writer of Judges makes the point: “**...so the Canaanites persisted in living in that land.**” Seven times in 1:27–33 Israel is accused of not taking possession of the land of the Canaanites.<sup>25</sup> At first the victorious Israelites allow the Canaanites to live in a distance (1:22–26) and then the Israelites fail to drive out the Canaanites and the Canaanites live among them (1:27–30).<sup>26</sup> Israel’s problem is partial obedience. Similarly, when we refuse to completely obey God, we miss out on all that God wants to do in and through us. What area of your life are you half-stepping with God? *God’s love compels us to fight against competing passions.* The next step down is...

**Step Two: Coexistence with the enemy (1:33–36).** Verse 33 clearly states that the Israelites “**lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land.**” A refusal to drive out the Canaanites led to living with them. Furthermore, instead of eliminating the Canaanites, the Israelites make slaves of them. Economics have taken on a higher priority than obedience!<sup>27</sup> Obedience is often uncomfortable, inconvenient, and sacrificial. Yet, when you chose to obey, God abundantly blesses you. What area of your life is God calling you to submit to Him today? Are you currently addicted to pornography? Are you pursuing materialism at any expense? What sin are you allowing to come into your life that is competing against your relationship with God? *God’s love compels us to fight against competing passions.*

[Partial obedience leads to coexisting with the enemy, and then to...]

**Step Three: Cooperation with the enemy (2:1–5).** In 2:1–3 we read: **“Now the angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim.<sup>28</sup> And he said, ‘I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land which I have sworn to your fathers; and I said, ‘I will never break My covenant with you, and as for you, you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land;’<sup>29</sup> you shall tear down their altars.’ But you have not obeyed Me; what is this you have done? Therefore I also said, ‘I will not drive them out before you; but they will become as thorns in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you.’”** This section makes it clear that the Israelites are believers in spite of their disobedience. The phrase, “I brought you up out of Egypt” (2:1) was a description of salvation in the OT. It is the equivalent of the cross for you and me. In 2:2, the Lord declares, “I will never break My covenant with you.” God keeps His promises. He doesn’t add on all kinds of hidden conditions and “ifs” and “maybes.” He does what He says. How do we know our sins are forgiven? God said so. How do we know we have eternal life? God said so. How do we know we are part of God’s family? God said so, and He never goes back on His Word. That is a foundation block for life. We can trust the Word of God because the God of the Word stands behind it.<sup>30</sup> Yet, the covenantal faithfulness of God demands a response from the recipients.<sup>31</sup> In the same breath, the Lord told Israel not to make any covenant with the Canaanites<sup>32</sup> and to tear down their altars. Unfortunately, Israel disobeyed God’s commands. So God said, in effect, “Since you don’t want to get rid of the Canaanites, I will let you keep them nearby!” God lets His people have what they want. He gives them the desires of their hearts, but sometimes this is a punishment. If God’s people are half-hearted about getting rid of their spiritual enemies, God leaves them with their enemies!<sup>33</sup>

The story continues in 2:4–5: **“When the angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept. So they named that place Bochim (“those who weep”); and there they sacrificed to the LORD.”** The people of Israel wept and sacrificed to the Lord, but it did not bring about lasting change. It is good to be moved to tears but better to be brought to repentance.<sup>34</sup> God wants to produce “good grief” in us.<sup>35</sup> One of the most certain facts of spiritual experience is that the path of partial obedience leads to Bochim. The most miserable people in the world are believers who will not commit themselves to the Lord. They do not have the best of both worlds but the worst. If we try to walk the tightrope of compromise and partial obedience, we will not know spiritual victory and God’s blessing. We will know the bitterness of defeat and frustration in our Christian lives.<sup>36</sup>

[Partial obedience leads to coexisting with the enemy, cooperating with the enemy, and eventually...]

**Step Four: Being corrupted by the enemy (2:6–13).** This section goes back into history and explains further the decline of God’s people. **“When Joshua had dismissed the people, the sons of Israel<sup>37</sup> went each to his inheritance to possess the land. The people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, who had seen all the great work of the LORD which He had done for Israel. Then Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of one hundred and ten.<sup>38</sup> And they buried him in the territory of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel. Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals, and they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked the LORD to anger. So they forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtaroth.”** Instead of removing the spiritual cancer from their land, the Israelites caught the disease. Just before Moses died, he instructed Israel to do three things: destroy all the inhabitants of Canaan, avoid intermarriage with the Canaanites, and shun worship of the Canaanite gods (Deut 7:1–5). In the Book of Judges, Israel fails on all three accounts. The breaking of God’s law and the record of Israel’s subsequent moral degradation are sad indeed.

These verses emphasize that the best thing mature believers can do is encourage the next generation to discover God for themselves.<sup>39</sup> It is quite possible that Joshua's generation did this and his descendants chose to go their own way. We cannot be sure! We must all take responsibility to pass the baton of faith and also recognize that we are responsible for ourselves.

[Partial obedience leads to coexisting with the enemy, cooperating with the enemy, being corrupted by the enemy, and...]

**Step Five: Divine discipline (2:14–15).**<sup>40</sup> These two verses remind us that God is not a God to be mocked. The author of Judges writes, **“The anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies around them, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. Wherever they went, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had spoken and as the LORD had sworn to them, so that they were severely distressed.”** The curses of the Mosaic Covenant are now implemented against the nation Israel. The Israelites will now suffer military defeat at the hand (or sword) of their enemies. God will cease to send rain for their crops, and their cattle will no longer thrive and reproduce. What God had warned He is now unleashing on His people. As believers, we must not make the mistake of assuming that we can presume on God's grace. If you are a child of God, eventually He will discipline you (see Heb 12:5–11). *God's love compels us to fight against competing passions.*

[Fortunately, divine discipline leads to...]

**Step Six: Divine deliverance (2:16–18).** God is a God of compassion and grace. He shows this clearly in 2:16–18: **“Then the LORD raised up judges who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them. Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they played the harlot after other gods and bowed themselves down to them. They turned aside quickly from the way in which their fathers had walked in obeying the commandments of the LORD; they did not do as their fathers. When the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them.”**<sup>41</sup> In response to their suffering, the Israelites cry out to God for relief. God, in His grace, raises up a judge who delivers the Israelites from the oppression of their enemies. These judges are not men who wear long, flowing black robes, sit on high benches, and make legal decisions. Rather, the judges (*shopetim*) are political-military leaders of Israel who exercise nearly absolute power because of their office and abilities. Old Testament scholar, Bruce Waltke, prefers to call judges “warlords.”<sup>42</sup> This seems to be in keeping with their role throughout the book. The deliverance of Israel typically lasted the length of the judge's life. In spite of our sin, God always finds a way to express His grace and mercy.

[Despite God's constant mercy and grace, God's people still rebel against His love. The final step of demise is...]

**Step Seven: Advancing in apostasy (2:19).** Through and through, the Book of Judges concludes with bad news. A glaring example of this is found in 2:19: **“But it came about when the judge died, that they would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them and bow down to them; they did not abandon their practices or their stubborn ways.”** Even when the Lord provides judges to deliver His people, disobedience grows worse following each judge's death. You discover the true nature of people by observing them when they are not bound by external constraints. Take a class full of second graders. Let the teacher leave the room and all Cain gets raised. They, like Israel, are showing their true nature.<sup>43</sup> Tragically, we are just like our spiritual ancestors.

[The introduction of Judges concludes on an interesting note.]

**Left Behind: A statement of divine purpose (2:20–3:6).** You're most likely familiar with the *Left Behind* book and video series. It chronicles unbelievers who are "left behind" to endure the tribulation after the rapture of the church. Well, in the context of Judges, God allows some of the Canaanite nations to be left behind. The author of Judges tells us precisely why God allows this: God uses the Canaanites to test Israel "whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk in it as their fathers did, or not" (2:22). God's people are to choose between right or wrong, obedience or disobedience. The final verses, 3:5–6, summarize the entire introduction. They also function as a report card, expressing God's evaluation of Israel. The verdict is clear: Israel failed!<sup>44</sup> First, they "lived" among the Canaanites (3:5). Second, they "took" the Canaanites in marriage (3:6). Third, they "served" other gods (3:6). These three verbs ("lived," "took," and "served") emphasize the sins that continue to haunt Israel throughout the Book of Judges.

Like Israel, we must be on guard against the sins that Israel succumbed to. This means studying the Book of Judges and learning from their failures. If you have placed your faith in Jesus, you are a part of the bride of Christ (Rev 19:7). Consequently, Jesus expects you to "walk in a manner worthy of His calling" (Eph 4:1). In doing so, you can express gratitude to God for His unconditional love and grace. *God's love compels us to fight against competing passions.*

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### **Scripture References**

Judges 1:1–3:6

2 Timothy 3:16–17

Genesis 2:16–17; 3:1–7

Deuteronomy 28:1–14

Deuteronomy 7:1–12; 30:19–20

Joel 2:12–13

2 Corinthians 7:8–11

### **Study Questions**

1. Why is godly leadership so important (1:1)? Who are the godly leaders that have impacted my life? What do these leaders have in common? Do I consider myself a leader? Why or why not? How can I grow in my leadership qualities?
2. Why is it so difficult to persevere in the Christian life and ministry (1:2–36)? Who are the people I know that are marked by perseverance? How have these individuals been able to walk with God over the course of their lives? Read 1 Corinthians 9:24–27. How is the Christian life like a fight? How should I train to win this spiritual battle? Read Ephesians 6:10–18.
3. How does partial obedience and compromise lead to sin (2:1–5)? When have I seen my own personal compromise result in severe consequences? What sin am I allowing to come into my life that is competing against my relationship with God? What advice would I give the next generation on how to avoid small compromises? Why is it so important to remember and retell the mighty acts of God?
4. When have I experienced God's discipline in my Christian life (2:14–15)? How did I respond to this chastening? What is the tension between God's unconditional love and His fatherly chastening? How would I explain this to a new believer? Read Hebrews 12:5–11.
5. How does God use people and circumstances to test me (2:22)? Read Psalm 106 and James 1:2–12. What have I learned through the trials and tests that God has brought into my life? In what areas of my life have I seen the most growth? Why does God continue to show such amazing grace in my life (2:20–3:6)?

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The adjective translated “profitable” or “useful” (*ophelimos*) means “*useful, beneficial, advantageous*.” See BDAG s.v. *ophelimos*. The only other NT occurrences are 1 Tim 4:8 [2x] and Titus 3:8.

<sup>2</sup> Judges contains tension and strife between rival groups, disputes over land and territory, uncertainty over the roles of men and women, power-hungry political leaders, child abuse, spouse abuse, senseless and excessive violence, male political leaders who chase women, excessive individualism, moral confusion, and social chaos. See J. Clinton McCann, *Judges*. Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox, 2002), 1–2.

<sup>3</sup> See Robert Alter, *The Art of Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

<sup>4</sup> See Jeffrey D. Arthurs, “Preaching the Old Testament Narratives” (pp. 73–85) in *Preaching the Old Testament*, ed. Scott M. Gibson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006). Dr. Arthurs is one of my former preaching professors and is one of the finest homiletics I know.

<sup>5</sup> This title is based upon Judges 2:19: “But it came about when the judge died, that they would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them and bow down to them; they did not abandon their practices or their stubborn ways.”

<sup>6</sup> This big idea comes from Steve Mathewson, “The Fight of Your Life” (Judges 1:1–2:5).

<sup>7</sup> Younger argues that we should never interpret Judges 1:1–2:5 apart from 2:6–3:6. K. Lawson Younger Jr., *Judges, Ruth*. NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 84. Tanner writes, “The Book of Judges may be viewed as having a two-part introduction (1:1–2:5 and 2:6–3:6) and a two-part epilogue (17:1–18:31 and 19:1–21:25). Parallel ideas and motifs link the first introduction (1:1–2:5) with the second epilogue (19:1–21:25), and in like manner the second introduction (2:6–3:6) with the first epilogue (17:1–18:31).” J. Paul Tanner, “The Gideon Narrative as the Focal Point of Judges,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:594 (April-June 1992): 149.

<sup>8</sup> Eaton writes, “Presumably they consulted the ‘Urim and Thummim’, the stones kept in the high priests coat that could be thrown like dice. The way they landed could reveal the will of God. They could say ‘yes’, ‘no’, or give no answer.” Michael Eaton, *Judges and Ruth*. Preaching through the Bible (England: Sovereign World, 2000), 10.

<sup>9</sup> The major divisions of Judges 1:1–2:5 open with a form of the verb *'alah* (to go up; 1:4, 22; 2:1; cf. 1:1, 2, 3).

<sup>10</sup> Perhaps God told Judah to go first because Judah was the kingly tribe (Gen 49:8–9).

<sup>11</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *Judges: Such a Great Salvation*. Focus on the Bible (Ross-Shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2000), 20.

<sup>12</sup> Davis, *Judges*, 20; Eaton, *Judges and Ruth*, 10–11.

<sup>13</sup> This begins the “Canaanization of Israel.” See Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*. The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 91. Another view is that the account of the defeat of Adoni-Bezek (1:4–7) is intended to show that God’s treatment of the inhabitants of the land was just. Without the confession of Adoni-Bezek that he justly deserves this punishment, one might raise the question of whether God’s treatment of the inhabitants of the land was fair. Why should Israel be commanded to carry out such harsh judgment on these people? The writer uses Adoni-Bezek’s own words to show that God’s ways are just (1:7).

<sup>14</sup> McCann writes, “The focus on Judah and Jerusalem invites attention to the larger context of the prophetic canon. The humbling of Adoni-bezek, for instance, happens in Jerusalem (1:7). The later humbling of the Judean monarchy will also happen in Jerusalem, suggesting ultimately that God plays no favorites. God wills justice and righteousness, and the failure to embody it will eventually bring any people down.” McCann, *Judges*, 29.

<sup>15</sup> The Israelites conquered Jerusalem, but they didn’t occupy it (1:21) until the time of David (2 Sam 5:7). Later, Jerusalem would become “the city of David” and the capital of Israel.

<sup>16</sup> In Judges 1:10, the three sons of Anak were “killed” by Judah. But, in 1:20 it says they were merely “expelled” from the land, which is what Joshua 15:14 says as well. Which was it? There are two basic views in response to this problem. One view assumes that these two passages refer to the same event, while the other view maintains that they refer to different events. *The Same Event*. According to this position, the children of Judah were led by Caleb. Thus, one passage could refer to the men who did it and the other to their leader. Further, the Hebrew word for “expel” can mean to “drive out” or “destroy.” In this sense they were expelled not only from the land of Judah, but also from the land of the living. *Different Events*. According to this view, the first chapter of Judges does not follow in chronological order, being almost verbatim from Joshua 15:13–19. If so, the events would be as follows: when Joshua conquered the land, the sons of Anak were simply “expelled,” only to return when Joshua turned elsewhere. Later, after the initial campaigns, Judah settled the land and Caleb and his men actually “killed” them. Either position would resolve the difficulty. See Norman L. Geisler and Thomas A. Howe, *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1992), 145.

<sup>17</sup> Othniel later was called to serve as Israel’s first judge (Judges 3:7–11).



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<sup>18</sup> These seven steps come from Bob Deffinbaugh, "Israel's Dark Ages" from the series *From Creation to the Cross* [http://www.bible.org/page.php?page\\_id=1482](http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=1482).

<sup>19</sup> Their success was pretty limited, however, because a number of years later the Philistines came and took back all three of these cities. By the time of Samson, the Philistines were again in control of these towns.

<sup>20</sup> Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 73.

<sup>21</sup> After all, the Lord destroyed the Egyptian chariots in the Red Sea (Exod 14:23–28; 15:4). He promised to give the Canaanite chariots into Israel's hands and instructed Joshua to burn them (Josh 11:4–6, 9). Later Joshua assured the tribe of Joseph that the Canaanite iron chariots would not prevent them from conquering the plains (17:16–18).

Judges 4–5 records how the Lord demolished the iron chariots of Sisera. Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "A Rhetorical Use of Point of View in Old Testament Narrative," *BSac* 159:636 (Oct 2002): 407.

<sup>22</sup> See Num 14:42–43; Josh 1:5; 6:27; and Judges 6:16.

<sup>23</sup> Francine Rivers, *The Warrior: Caleb* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale 2005).

<sup>24</sup> This story in Judges 1:22–25 is very reminiscent of the story about Rahab in Joshua

<sup>25</sup> If one includes Judah (1:19) and Benjamin (1:21) the final count is nine.

<sup>26</sup> Barry Webb, *The Book of the Judges: An Integrated Reading* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 99.

<sup>27</sup> Albert H. Baylis, *From Creation to the Cross: Understanding the First Half of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 173.

<sup>28</sup> The LXX identifies Bochim with Bethel. If this is correct, Judges 2:1–5 is linked to the epilogue, in which the Israelites gather at Bethel and weep before God.

<sup>29</sup> This echoes Exod 23:32–33: "You shall make no covenant with them or with their gods. They shall not live in your land, because they will make you sin against Me; for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you."

<sup>30</sup> Gary Inrig, *Heart of Iron, Feet of Clay* (Chicago: Moody, 1979), 15.

<sup>31</sup> Deuteronomy 6 outlined the nation's basic responsibilities: love and obey the Lord as the only true God (6:1–5); teach your children God's laws (6:6–9); be thankful for God's blessings (6:1–15); and separate yourself from the worship of the pagan gods in the land of Canaan (6:16–25). Unfortunately, the new generation failed in each of those responsibilities.

<sup>32</sup> This echoes Exod 23:32–33: "You shall make no covenant with them or with their gods. They shall not live in your land, because they will make you sin against Me; for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you."

<sup>33</sup> Eaton, *Judges and Ruth*, 14.

<sup>34</sup> Block writes, "This chapter contains no hint of repentance. The word *shub* occurs only once (v.19), where it denotes a turning from the way of Yahweh to paganism." Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 134.

<sup>35</sup> Davis, *Judges*, 28. See also Joel 2:12–13: "'Yet even now,' declares the LORD, 'Return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping and mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments.' Now return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and relenting of evil."

<sup>36</sup> See also Inrig, *Heart of Iron, Feet of Clay*, 19.

<sup>37</sup> The name "Israel" occurs more often in Judges than in any other book of the Hebrew Bible. See Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 591.

<sup>38</sup> How could Joshua be dead in 1:1; be alive in 2:6, die in 2:8, and finally be buried in 2:9? The authors of Scripture did not always write their historical accounts in chronological order. They wrote to convey both their story and their theology. The author of the Book of Judges used the flashback technique here, as he did later (see chapters 17–21).

<sup>39</sup> Eaton, *Judges and Ruth*, 17. "An up-coming generation has to be able to say to their parents what the people of Samaria said to the Samaritan woman: 'We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves...'" (John 4:42)."

<sup>40</sup> Cf. God's judgment at Kadesh-barnea, Num 14:1–10.

<sup>41</sup> Much of the era of judges involves a series of seven cycles that are recorded in the book of Judges. Each cycle has five component parts: Israel's sins, God disciplines them through military conquest by a neighboring country, Israel repents and cries out to God for deliverance, God grants a judge who delivers them from bondage, and God frees the land from military oppression for the remainder of the judge's life. That is one cycle: sin, conquest, repentance, deliverance, and freedom. Then, when a judge dies, the repetition of Israel's misfortunes begins again, followed by conquest, followed by repentance, etc. Seven such cycles are recorded in the book of Judges.

<sup>42</sup> Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 588.

<sup>43</sup> Davis, *Judges*, 41–42.

<sup>44</sup> Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 140.