

*DHW*  
**BIBLE STUDY CLASS**  
**JUDGES 1**  
**LESSON 1**

**INTRODUCTION**

The opening phrase, “Now after the death of Joshua” connects the book of Judges with the book of Joshua. It continues with the history of the nation Israel. When Moses died, God chose Joshua to succeed him to lead His people to claim the Promised Land. But when Joshua died, there was no single godly leader to succeed him to lead the people of God. Instead God graciously raised up special leaders who were called “judges”. In times of crisis these judges provided the heroic and necessary leadership. This period of the history of the children of Israel is about 1380 B.C. to 1030 B.C. Although the name of the inspired writer of Judges is unknown the Jewish Talmud identifies the writer as Samuel<sup>1</sup>

The book of Judges can be broadly divided into three sections. The *first section* is Judges 1:1-3:6. This introductory section contains two parts. The first part, Judges 1:1-2:5, provides a “flashback” to the time of

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<sup>1</sup> The Talmud contains the laws, and a compilation of expositions of duties imposed on the people, either in Scripture, by tradition, or by authority of their doctors, or by customs. (Webster Dictionary, American Christian History Education Series, 1828)

Joshua. It gives an account of some of the attempts by the tribes to possess their land inheritance which were given by “lots.” The second part, Judges 2:6-3:6, gives an account which anticipates the repetitive cycle of events in the remainder of the book. The *second section*, which is the main section, is Judges 3:7-16:31. It chronicles the events which happened to the children of Israel under the judges. There were twelve judges in all. Six of them—Othniel, Ehud, Deborah and Barak, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson—are narrated with more details whereas the other six only their names were mentioned. The *third section* is Judges 17:1-21:25. The writer narrates two instances that describe the spiritual declension and moral deterioration of the children of Israel during the 350 years of its history at this time.

Two main themes are prominent in Judges. God’s power, patience, persistence, pity, and provision for His people are shown in the course of His relationship with His chosen people. Contrastingly, the children of Israel repeatedly broke the covenant God made with them, showed a lack of faith in the LORD their God, and compromised their rich religious heritage with those of the inhabitants of the land. While the covenant-keeping God showed His faithfulness and love to them, they reciprocated with their covenant-breaking attitude, their unfaithfulness and disobedience.

This first lesson beginning with Judges Chapter 1 can be sub-divided as follows:

1) Judges 1:1-8 – Judah Subdues the Canaanites in Bezek,

(2) Judges 1:9-15 – Judah Subdues the Canaanites in Hebron;

(3) Judges 1:16-21 – Judah Subdues the Canaanites in Gaza,

(4) Judges 1:22-29 – The Central Tribes Fail to Drive Out the Canaanites; and

(5) Judges 1:30-36 – the Northern Tribes Fail to Drive Out the Canaanites.

As we study the lives of these judges and the children of Israel, we will know more about the LORD God, and also discover the great principles God reveals about His work in dealing with His people. The motto in the times of the Judges was: “Every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”

### **Judah Subdues the Canaanites in Bezek**

The narratives of the book of Judges began after the death of Joshua. This first chapter as we have earlier learned is one of a two-part introduction to the rest of the book. The death of Joshua signalled a new era of the history of the children of Israel. Joshua had led all the children of Israel to renew the covenant God had made with them in a ceremony in Shechem (Joshua 24:25-27). The children of Israel made a solemn commitment to serve the LORD their God and to obey Him (Joshua 24:24). At that time, Joshua had fulfilled his mission having got the children of Israel to be united in one spirit and to pledge their loyalty to the LORD. One would expect great things from

the children of Israel but sadly it did not happen. What really happened would be most instructive for every individual Christian and Church.

There was no successor to Joshua, unlike Moses who had Joshua, to lead the children of Israel. So, they asked the LORD through the priest who used the Urim and Thummim.<sup>2</sup> It was the right thing for them to do. They started well. They asked the LORD who should lead them to fight against the Canaanites. The LORD told them that Judah was to lead them, and He further assured them that He had delivered the land into their hands (1:1, 2). Judah went to the Simeonites to ask for help to fight against the enemies, and promised to reciprocate the same when it was their turn to confront the enemies. The LORD did not tell Judah to join hands with Simeon. This shows that Judah lacked confidence and trust in the LORD, in spite of the experience they had earlier in their successful conquest of the land. The LORD kept His promise, and Judah defeated and killed 10,000 Canaanites and Perizzites in Bezek, a small town in Judah’s lot. They captured Adoni-Bezek, the king of the enemies. They then cut off his thumbs and two big toes. The reason for this physical mutilation was to incapacitate the king

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<sup>2</sup> Compare – Numbers 27:21 And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask *counsel* for him after the judgment of Urim before the LORD: at his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, *both* he, and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation.

from ever taking arms and going to war, and neither could he easily escape from his conquerors. Judah's act was senseless. God did not tell the children of Israel to mutilate the enemies, but to put them to death or to drive them away. Judah had not obeyed God. Instead they "edited" God's command and ignored his clear command and guidance. Adoni-Bezek remarked that the mutilation inflicted on him was because he had done the same to seventy kings. In other words this was a Canaanite way of humiliating and deriding a person. Judah imitated this wicked practice of the pagans.

#### **Judah Subdues the Canaanites in Hebron;**

After Jerusalem had been taken Judah moved south to fight against the Canaanites who were living in the mountain ranges, and in the low-lying valleys and lands. Earlier, Caleb who was a Kenite and who also belonged to the tribe of Judah, had captured Hebron (Joshua 14:15). The great city of Hebron was formerly named Kirjath-Arba. Arba was the name of the father of the Anakim. The Anakim were the giants whose land the twelve spies Moses sent to survey. The spies, except Caleb and Joshua, returned with a negative report, thus they were afraid and refused to enter to take the land which God had promised them. Hebron apparently was a military stronghold of these giants, but it was taken by Caleb. After Hebron was taken, the next natural city to take was Debir which was only eleven miles southwest of Hebron. The former name of Debir was Kirjath-Sepher (Hebrew, *city of*

*books*) Caleb's nephew, Othniel, the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, assisted him in conquering Debir. Caleb rewarded Othniel by giving his daughter, Achsah, to him in marriage, including two springs of water in the land. The victory over the southern land of Judah was totally complete when the military stronghold, the city of Hebron, and the cultural centre, the city of Debir, were taken. Othniel later became the first judge of Israel. It seems that the family of Caleb had great faith in the LORD.

#### **Judah subdues the Canaanites in Gaza,**

Then the children of Kenite, descendants of Moses' father-in-law together with the children of Judah went farther south to Arad, an important city in the wilderness of Negev. Instead of driving the inhabitants away or putting them to death, the children of Judah dwelt among them. This was a clear violation of the commandment of the LORD. Next Judah combined with Simeon slew the Canaanites in Zephath, and utterly destroyed its city, Hormah (1:17). The children of Judah then turned their attention to the coastal Philistine cities of Gaza, Askelon and Ekron. They claimed the hilly country in this southern region but they could not drive the Canaanites out in the lowlands because the Canaanites had chariots of iron. The reason why the children of Judah could not drive out the Canaanites here was because they did not trust God, who had promised them that He had handed the land into their hands. The same was true of the

Benjamites who did not drive out the Jebusites who inhabited Jerusalem. Earlier it was mentioned that Jerusalem was taken by the children of Judah (1:8). Apparently the city was given to the children of Benjamin. The children of Benjamin, instead of driving out the Jebusites, lived together with them because they preferred co-existence with the enemies to shedding of blood and killing of the Jebusites. A short flashback was mentioned about Caleb who took Hebron as promised by God through Moses (1:20). By contrast the children of Benjamin failed to secure Jerusalem.

#### **The Central Tribes Fail to Drive Out the Canaanites**

The sons of Joseph were Manasseh and Ephraim. The Ephraimites had their land inheritance. They sent spies to descry (explore, search) Bethel. They were seeking to find a way to enter Bethel. They found a man who came out of the city. They asked the man to show them the entrance into the city, and they would be merciful to him and his family. The man showed the children of Ephraim the way into Bethel. The Ephraimites then destroyed the city and its inhabitants but spared the man and his family who had helped them. The Ephraimites won a significant victory over Bethel. The man and his family who were spared went to dwell in the land of the Hittites, who were the most widespread and powerful of the Canaanites. He built a city there and called it Luz, the same name which Bethel was originally called (1:26). But the Ephraimites failed to drive out the Canaanites who dwelt in

Gezer (1:29). Instead they co-existed with them, a clear violation of the commandment of the LORD.

The children of Manasseh, who lived on the western side of Jordan, did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean, Taanach, Dor, Ibleam, Megiddo and their towns. Instead they let the Canaanites live with them. These cities were strategically located in the valleys of Jezreel and Esdraelon, and they formed a zone separating the tribes of Israel in central Canaan from the northern tribes. They chose to impose tribute in the form of forced labour and levy on the inhabitants of the land rather than obeying God who commanded them to put them to death or to drive them out. This compromise by allowing the Canaanites to live in their midst is in violation of the LORD'S command and it would bring disaster upon them later in the years ahead.

#### **The Northern Tribes Fail to Drive Out the Canaanites**

The northern tribes of the children of Israel are mentioned in brief succession. It is a sad account because the remaining tribes in the west did not obey God to either destroy or drive out the inhabitants of the land. Instead they imposed tribute upon the inhabitants. In the case of Dan it was completely a dismal scene. Zebulun failed to drive out the inhabitants of Kitron and Nahalol. Instead they imposed forced labour and levy on them. The same attitude was shown by the children of Asher. They did not drive out the inhabitants of Accho, Zidon, Ahlab, Achzib, Helbah, Aphik and Rehob. They

moved into these cities and lived in the midst of the Canaanites. The children of Naphtali whose land inheritance was immediately north of Zebulun also did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh, nor the inhabitants of Beth-anath. Now, Beth-shemesh means “house of the sun”, and Beth-anath means “house of Anath.” It is obvious that the Canaanites worshipped the sun-god and “Anath”, the fertility goddess and consort of Baal, which means “lord”, the supreme male deity of the Canaanites. The gravity of the situation was that idolatry remained rooted in the land. It would become a problem that would eventually undermine the religious commitment of the children of Israel to love the LORD their God and serve Him only. The very foundation of the nation would be gradually shattered and this would destroy them.

It was even worse with the children of Dan. They were allotted the coastal territory west of the land settled by the children of Benjamin. The valleys in this part of the land were fertile. But they could not settle there because they failed to drive out the Amorites and also failed to establish themselves in the land as God promised. Instead the Amorites held firmly to their settlement in Mount Heres in Aijalon, where Joshua previously had experienced a most spectacular victory (Joshua 10:12). Subsequently the Amorites drove the children of Dan to the hill country. What a turn around! However, the Ephraimites prevailed over the Amorites, and spared them, but put them under tribute.

Four other tribes of Israel are not mentioned. They were the tribes of Reuben, Gad, Levi, and Issachar. The reason was because the Reubenites and Gadites settled on the eastern side of Jordan. The Levites were not entitled to possess land. On the other hand, they were given the privileged responsibility and duty to serve the Tabernacle of the LORD, and to teach the Law of God given through Moses to the people. They were given forty-eight cities and their suburbs, which were contributed by the other tribes. These cities and suburbs were evenly spread throughout the land; and the Levites, being the guardians of the Law, which God gave through Moses, were to teach and instruct the children of Israel. One more tribe is left, and that tribe is Issachar. They would be mentioned later in chapters 4, 5 and 10 – Deborah and Barak, and Tola, who were representatives of Issachar.

### **PRACTICAL VALUE**

It is every clear that the children of Israel, after the death of Joshua, did not uphold the commitment they had made with God to serve and obey Him. When the tribes obeyed God, they prevailed against the enemy just as God promised them. But almost all the tribes chose a more comfortable co-existence by compromising with the enemy. They could have enjoyed the initial peaceful and trouble-free land by compromising. But this was in direct violation of the commandment of God. They “edited” God by thinking that they knew better. Joshua was dead and gone, times had changed and they must adjust to the new

condition and situation. Many Christians today are displaying the same kind of thinking as those Israelites. Today, man boasts that his modern society is more enlightened and he knows what is best for him. Christians have to beware of such sentiments and attitude. God's truth is unchangeable in every age. The moment Christians start to compromise God's truth and God's instructions for godly living, there is no stopping of him sliding down the spiritual spiral stairway. Asking ourselves some pertinent questions might be helpful: How different are you from your unbelieving friends in the jokes they tell? What kind of pastime and entertainment do you choose? What do you do with your spare time? Is there any difference in the way you talk about other people? Is there anything in your character and conduct that others could observe that you are a believer and follower of Jesus Christ? Thank God for His infallible, inerrant, and authoritative Word, which has been providentially copied and preserved through the ages. The answers and guidelines to the above-mentioned questions can be found in the Bible, if only we diligently and sincerely search for the truth and then apply it to our daily life. Just as God has promised, obedience to Him brings much blessings; rejection of His Word leads to misery and much loss.

A perennial question which has been frequently asked is: Wasn't God cruel and unjust in commanding Israel to exterminate the inhabitants of Canaan? God actually could have wiped out all the Canaanites had He

not been patient with them even before He chose the nation Israel. What God did was postponing His righteous judgment on them. These Canaanites knew who God was. They knew who the God of Israel was. They knew about the mighty works of God in Egypt and how the nations on the eastern side of Jordan were conquered. They could and should have responded like Rahab, who acknowledged "the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath" (Joshua 2:11). All the Canaanites could have done the same for the LORD God is merciful and gracious, if they had repented, He would spare them. Another reason why they had to be driven out or put to death was because of their idolatry and wickedness, and they rejected and rebelled against God. That is sin, and the penalty of sin is death. G. Campbell Morgan remarked: "God is perpetually at war with sin. That is the whole explanation for the extermination of the Canaanites."

Christians must take their knowledge of God seriously, and the confession they have made when they first accepted Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord. They must also feed on the Word of God which is their only spiritual sustenance, and to miss their spiritual meals for days, weeks and months, is going to cripple and destroy them.

AMEN