

A PERSONAL
VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY

JUDGES

By Sharon Cravens

Before jumping into this study, I'd like to share a wonderful summary of Judges that Guzik quoted from Clarke: "There is, however, one light in which the whole book may be viewed, which renders it invaluable; it is a most remarkable history of the longsuffering of God towards the Israelites, in which we find the most signal instances of his *justice* and *mercy* alternately displayed; the people *sinned*, and were *punished*; they *repented*, and found *mercy*. Something of this kind we meet with in every page. And these things are written for our warning. None should *presume*, for God is JUST; none need *despair*, for God is MERCIFUL."

Judges 1:1 ¶ Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them?

Judges 1:2 And the LORD said, Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand.

Judges 1:3 And Judah said unto Simeon his brother, Come up with me into my lot, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I likewise will go with thee into thy lot. So Simeon went with him.

It is good to note that after the death of Joshua the tribes moved forward to drive out the rest of the Canaanites from the land. Even more important is that they sought the LORD's will as to where to start. I am assuming it was through the use of the Urim and Thummim as revealed to the high priest. The LORD identified Judah and declared that He had delivered (past tense) the land into his hand. Judah still had to physically go to war, but the LORD's direction promised them the victory; from the LORD's perspective the victory was already won. Since Simeon's inheritance was within the confines of Judah, they were asked to join Judah in the fight against the Canaanites with the promise that they would help Simeon when the time came.

Another important fact to keep in mind as we read through this book is that the LORD did not have Joshua appoint a specific successor to his position of leadership. I believe the LORD expected that they should recognize Him as the only leader they needed, and it seems that they understood this initially.

Judges 1:4 And Judah went up; and the LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand: and they slew of them in Bezek ten thousand men.

Judges 1:5 And they found Adonibezek in Bezek: and they fought against him, and they slew the Canaanites and the Perizzites.

Judges 1:6 But Adonibezek fled; and they pursued after him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes.

Judges 1:7 And Adonibezek said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered *their meat* under my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me. And they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died.

Judah first went up against the Canaanites and Perizzites and killed 10,000 men in Bezek, about 12 miles south of Jerusalem. During the battle they came upon the king, Adonibezek, and he fled before them. After catching him, they cut off

his thumbs and two big toes. It seems that the king recognized this as fit retribution for how he had treated 70 “kings” during his reign. He also recognized that it was God who was exacting that retribution. Then it is noted that he was taken to Jerusalem where he died.

We usually think of a king as one who is ruler over a realm of significant size. In biblical times the term “kings” referenced the recognized ruler of any town or city.

JFB adds a historical note regarding the mutilation of the king: “Barbarities of various kinds were commonly practised on prisoners of war in ancient times, and the object of this particular mutilation of the hands and feet was to disable them for military service ever after.”

Judges 1:8 Now the children of Judah had fought against Jerusalem, and had taken it, and smitten it with the edge of the sword, and set the city on fire.
Judges 1:9 ¶ And afterward the children of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites, that dwelt in the mountain, and in the south, and in the valley.
Judges 1:10 And Judah went against the Canaanites that dwelt in Hebron: (now the name of Hebron before *was* Kirjatharba:) and they slew Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmai.

These verses seem to indicate that Judah had already defeated the city of Jerusalem and burned it. Evidently they didn’t totally drive out the people who lived there, and it once again became a Jebusite stronghold since we know that David had to defeat the Jebusites to take possession of it.

The troops of Judah then headed down to fight the Canaanites that lived on the mountain, in the south (the Negev) and in the valley. It is noted specifically that they attacked the Canaanites in Hebron, previously known as Kirjatharba. We learned from Numbers that the three kings identified were children of Anak (the giants).

Numbers 13:22 “And they ascended by the south, and came unto Hebron; where Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the children of Anak, were.”

I am reminded that Hebron and its environs had been given to Caleb at his request. It is not surprising to find him leading the troops against the giants since he and Joshua were the only two spies not intimidated by them when reporting back to Moses at Kadeshbarnea.

Judges 1:11 And from thence he went against the inhabitants of Debir: and the name of Debir before *was* Kirjathsepher:
Judges 1:12 And Caleb said, He that smiteth Kirjathsepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife.
Judges 1:13 And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother, took it: and he gave him Achsah his daughter to wife.
Judges 1:14 And it came to pass, when she came *to him*, that she moved him to ask of her father a field: and she lighted from off *her ass*; and Caleb said unto

her, What wilt thou?

Judges 1:15 And she said unto him, Give me a blessing: for thou hast given me a south land; give me also springs of water. And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the nether springs.

The troops of Judah moved on to attack the people of Debir, previously known as Kirjathsepher. Caleb is in the lead and decided to offer his daughter Achsah as wife to the one that conquered this town. Othniel, Caleb's younger brother, was the one to claim the prize. After becoming Othniel's wife, Achsah asked him if she could ask her father for an extra blessing. The land he had given them was in a dry area, so she asked to be given an area with springs as well. Caleb readily gave his daughter both the upper and lower springs in that area.

Achsah obviously knew that her father dearly loved her. She was also smart enough to recognize that he could provide something she and her husband needed. Based on those two facts, she boldly approached her father and made her request, and he immediately gave her what she asked for and more. This made me think about a beautiful verse in Hebrews...

Hebrews 4:16 "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

...and another in James...

James 4:2 "...yet ye have not, because ye ask not."

...and finally in Matthew...

Matthew 7:11 "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"

We should be able to approach our heavenly Father to supply our needs with the same confidence that Achsah approached her father.

Judges 1:16 And the children of the Kenite, Moses' father in law, went up out of the city of palm trees with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which *lieth* in the south of Arad; and they went and dwelt among the people.

It is noted that the descendants of Moses' father-in-law lived among the people of Judah in the wilderness area of Arad.

Judges 1:17 And Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they slew the Canaanites that inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. And the name of the city was called Hormah.

Judges 1:18 Also Judah took Gaza with the coast thereof, and Askelon with the coast thereof, and Ekron with the coast thereof.

Judges 1:19 And the LORD was with Judah; and he drave out *the inhabitants*

of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron.

The troops of Judah and Simeon proceeded to destroy the people and the Canannite city of Zephath; the city was renamed Hormah.

They proceeded from there to the land of the Philistines and took possession of the cities of Gaza, Ashkelon and Ekron. As with Jerusalem, it seems that they did not completely drive the people out of these areas since they reappear in the biblical record as Philistine strongholds.

It is noted that the LORD was with Judah as they drove out the people living in the mountains. They did not succeed in driving out the people living in the valley, however, because they had iron chariots. This must have been the point where the troops of Judah refused to move forward in faith because of fear; they allowed the circumstances to overrule their confidence in the LORD.

Judges 1:20 And they gave Hebron unto Caleb, as Moses said: and he expelled thence the three sons of Anak.

I think this statement is repeated here because it shows the contrast of results when encountering the enemy in faith vs. encountering the enemy lacking faith. Caleb defeated the giants, the sons of Anak, because he had faith that the LORD would deliver them. The troops of Judah didn't have the faith to believe that the LORD could deliver them the victory in spite of the enemies' chariots of iron.

Judges 1:21 ¶ And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem unto this day.

This seems to be another statement of contrast. Benjamin did not completely drive the Jebusites out of Jerusalem due to lack of faith and/or obedience.

Judges 1:22 And the house of Joseph, they also went up against Bethel: and the LORD *was* with them.

Judges 1:23 And the house of Joseph sent to descry Bethel. (Now the name of the city before *was* Luz.)

Judges 1:24 And the spies saw a man come forth out of the city, and they said unto him, Shew us, we pray thee, the entrance into the city, and we will shew thee mercy.

Judges 1:25 And when he shewed them the entrance into the city, they smote the city with the edge of the sword; but they let go the man and all his family.

Judges 1:26 And the man went into the land of the Hittites, and built a city, and called the name thereof Luz: which *is* the name thereof unto this day.

Attention turns now to the house of Joseph (the tribe of Ephraim I assume since Manasseh is identified in following verses). It is noted that they went up against Bethel, previously known as Luz, and the LORD was with them. They sent spies to the city in preparation for the attack, and they encountered a man coming out

of the city. They told the man that if he would show them the entrance to the city, they would spare him. He complied. When the troops of Joseph attacked the city, they spared the man and his family—just as they had Rahab and her family at Jericho.

It is noted that the man took his family to the land of the Hittites and built another city that he called Luz that was still in existence at the time the book of Judges was written. There is no indication that he had acted from a desire to know the God of Israel since he immediately took his family to an area that served his false gods.

Judges 1:27 Neither did Manasseh drive out *the inhabitants of Bethshean and her towns, nor Taanach and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Dor and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Ibleam and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Megiddo and her towns: but the Canaanites would dwell in that land.*

Judges 1:28 And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute, and did not utterly drive them out.

The news doesn't get any better. Manasseh failed to drive out the people of Bethshean, Taanach, Dor, Ibleam and Megiddo and their surrounding towns. The Canaanites were determined to stay in the land. As long as Israel maintained the upper hand, they were able to make the Canaanites pay them tribute even though they couldn't drive them out of the land.

It stands out to me that we have heard no more about the people seeking the LORD for continued direction, and the results seem to indicate that the people aren't gaining full victory because of that fact.

Judges 1:29 Neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer; but the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them.

Judges 1:30 Neither did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, nor the inhabitants of Nahalol; but the Canaanites dwelt among them, and became tributaries.

Judges 1:31 Neither did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Accho, nor the inhabitants of Zidon, nor of Ahlab, nor of Achzib, nor of Helbah, nor of Aphik, nor of Rehob:

Judges 1:32 But the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: for they did not drive them out.

Judges 1:33 Neither did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Bethshemesh, nor the inhabitants of Bethanath; but he dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: nevertheless the inhabitants of Bethshemesh and of Bethanath became tributaries unto them.

Judges 1:34 And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain: for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley:

Judges 1:35 But the Amorites would dwell in mount Heres in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim: yet the hand of the house of Joseph prevailed, so that they became tributaries.

Judges 1:36 And the coast of the Amorites *was* from the going up to Akrabbim, from the rock, and upward.

These verses go on to detail the failures of the tribes of Ephraim, Zebulun, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan to completely drive out the Canaanites from the lands allotted to them. Though some were able to exact tribute from the Canaanites among them, others settled for accepting them as their neighbors. It's a sad commentary considering what might have been if they had been obedient to the LORD.

*Deuteronomy 20:16–17 “But of the cities of these people, which the LORD thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, **thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth: But thou shalt utterly destroy them;** namely, the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee:”*

So how does this apply to the believer today? We need to have faith in God to drive out the enemies to our spiritual well being—the things of this world. We should never compromise with the things of this world and settle for spiritual weakness. We need to recognize that the LORD expects us to fight the good fight of faith. Paul worded it this way to Timothy:

1 Timothy 6:11–12 “But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.”

We should strive to be able to declare with Paul:

2 Timothy 4:7–8 “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.