

Judges 1:1-2:10 – “A Preview and Perspective of Judges”

The events in this book span a period of about 325 years. It takes us from the death of Joshua to Sampson. It's a period of time where the nation of Israel is lacking real leadership. They were to be a nation that was governed by God – a theocracy. But they failed to obey God and follow Him completely. This book details the pattern that occurs when people turn away from Him and follow their own desires. In fact, we're going to see God's mighty hand of deliverance for Israel when they got themselves into trouble and repeatedly cried out to God for help. And yet the book ends with the somber words: *"In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes"* (**Judges 21:25**).

- This was the trial period for this nation to be ruled by God. Joshua established no successor as Moses did because they were now in the land and they were to follow God's commands. But they didn't allow God to lead them. They did what was right in their own eyes. Four times in this book it's mentioned that in those days there was no king in Israel (17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25). They were lacking leadership, more so, they were failing to follow their Leader. It will lead us to 1 Samuel when the people cry out to Samuel for a king: **1 Samuel 8:19–20**, *"Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, "No, but we will have a king over us, ²⁰ that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles."*"
- This is exactly what God desired to do for His people. He's already demonstrated that for them in bringing them into the land. They could trust Him to overcome any obstacles they may have in their way. But instead, they wanted to be like the other nations and have a king to lead them. Sadly, God will give them what they want but it will not be for their best. God will allow them to have a monarchy but more often than not, these kings will end up being wicked kings who will plummet the nation further away from God's ideal.

So, the book of Judges is leading us up to that point. We'll be seeing in Judges the tendency of humanity to carry out their own objectives rather than allow God's rule in their life. And we see very clearly where it gets people.

- "The Book of Judges is a philosophy of history. "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. 14:34)." ¹

¹ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed., Vol. 2, p. 43). Thomas Nelson.

We see in the book of Judges a cycle of sin that is repeated 7 times throughout this book.

1. Serving God
2. Succumbing to Sin / Subjugated to Sin. Suffering and Slavery from Sin
3. Sorry for Sin / Sorrow over Sin. Supplication to God.
4. Saviour is raised up (a judge/deliverer).
5. Salvation and victory.
6. Serving the Lord

It's a dark, depressing time yet a marvelous and encouraging sign to see God intervene and answer the cries of Israel. We serve a loving and gracious God who does not give up on us. After Israel was led away by sin, God raised up a judge. This is not a judge as we would typically think of a judge, like Judge Judy bringing the gavel down in judgment.

- The Hebrew word for judge is Shophet, which means more accurately deliverer, saviour, along with the idea of ruler.
- So throughout Judges we see the unfaithfulness of Israel, but the faithfulness of God.

Throughout Judges God raised up 13 Judges in Israel:

1. Othniel – 3:7-11
2. Ehud – 3:12-30
3. Shamgar – 3:31; 5:6
4. Deborah – 4-5
5. Gideon – 6-8
6. Abimelech – 9
7. Tola – 10:1-2
8. Jair – 10:3-5
9. Jephthah – 10:6-12:7
10. Ibzan – 12:8-10
11. Elon – 12:11-12
12. Abdon – 12:13-15
13. Sampson – 13-16

*Samuel was the last of the judges.

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

We see that after the death of Joshua, things started out well for Israel. They inquired of the Lord. That's always a good thing to do and should be the first thing we do whenever we don't know what to do. And this was how they were essentially to live in this new era of inheritors of a new land.

He is to be their King and ultimate Defender and Deliverer, so go to Him. This is what we are to do, inquire of the Lord knowing that our help comes from Him.

It's interesting because when we come out of Joshua we can have the impression that everything is done, the enemy has been defeated, and the land is theirs. That's true, but there is still work to be done. The land has been won, but they still need to drive out remaining enemies and strongholds.

- It's the same for us. Jesus has already provided the victory and defeated the enemy, but we don't just sit back and think we can just put our feet up and relax. There's still battles to wage and enemies warring against our souls. We don't fight for victory but from victory. We need to make sure no ground is given over to the enemy. We keep fighting until the enemy is subdued and we're resting in heaven.

1:2-3 - *And the Lord said, "Judah shall go up. Indeed I have delivered the land into his hand."* ³ *So Judah said to Simeon his brother, "Come up with me to my allotted territory, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I will likewise go with you to your allotted territory." And Simeon went with him.*

The Lord calls Judah to go first. Judah was always to be the tribe that led Israel into battle. Interestingly Judah means 'praise'. If you want to have the right attitude and perspective in battle, and in life in general, be people of praise. Remind yourself of God's goodness and worship Him. That will give you the right focus.

And Judah is the kingly tribe, the tribe the Messiah will come from. So too, we're reminded that Jesus always goes before us and secures the victory – ***I have delivered the land into his hand.***

As well as things are going, it takes a sad turn now in vs. 3. Judah was to go up, the Lord has promised His help, but Judah seeks the help of Simeon. This was compromise. This was rebellion or at the least, disobedience to the Word of God. Whenever we go beyond what the Word of God shows us by attempting to accomplish His work in our way, we're compromising His Word and

compromising our faith. Even when it's as seemingly innocent as partnering with Simeon. It's revealing a weakness to rely on the flesh more than on the Lord.

This is setting the stage for what we'll see unfolding in Judges as the people of Israel move further along in disobedience and compromise.

1:4-7 - Then Judah went up, and the Lord delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand; and they killed ten thousand men at Bezek. ⁵ And they found Adoni-Bezek in Bezek, and fought against him; and they defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites. ⁶ Then Adoni-Bezek fled, and they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and big toes. ⁷ And Adoni-Bezek said, "Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off used to gather scraps under my table; as I have done, so God has repaid me." Then they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died.

It's interesting that Simeon is nowhere to be found in this series of victories that God gave Judah. You plus God is always the majority. And God gave 10,000 men at Bezek into Judah's hand.

Now speaking of hands, they captured Adoni-Bezek, the king of Bezek (his title not his real name), and they cut off his thumbs and big toes. Now that seems pretty cruel. But it was a common practice in this day. It made it where the person was unable to hold a sword or run and fight in battle. Like hamstringing a horse.

But again, God's command was that they were to utterly destroy all the enemies of the land so that they could not possibly remain and further pollute Israel into idolatry. But they decided to keep Adoni-Bezek alive. Again, they may have thought it served a purpose, but it was going against God's Word. There's never any good that comes from disobedience.

- In fact, this passage reveals a good spiritual truth and law of God – you reap what you sow. Adoni-Bezek's attitude in how he was treated was basically, *'I deserve this! I've done the same to other kings and God has repaid me the same.'* Adoni-Bezek reaped what he sowed.

We're not sure how Adoni-Bezek died. He may have died from his wounds, or they executed him when they arrived in Jerusalem. But speaking of Jerusalem...

1:8 - Now the children of Judah fought against Jerusalem and took it; they struck it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire.

Israel never fully captured the city of Jerusalem as the Jebusites came and took control again (see Judges 1:21). The city was never fully captured and under Israelite control until David (2 Samuel 5:6-9).

- The disobedience of Israel to fully subdue the land, and the problems it brought, is one of the major themes in Judges (as we're already seeing).

1:9-15 - *And afterward the children of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites who dwelt in the mountains, in the South, and in the lowland. ¹⁰ Then Judah went against the Canaanites who dwelt in Hebron. (Now the name of Hebron was formerly Kirjath Arba.) And they killed Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai. ¹¹ From there they went against the inhabitants of Debir. (The name of Debir was formerly Kirjath Sepher.) ¹² Then Caleb said, "Whoever attacks Kirjath Sepher and takes it, to him I will give my daughter Achsah as wife." ¹³ And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it; so he gave him his daughter Achsah as wife. ¹⁴ Now it happened, when she came to him, that she urged him to ask her father for a field. And she dismounted from her donkey, and Caleb said to her, "What do you wish?" ¹⁵ So she said to him, "Give me a blessing; since you have given me land in the South, give me also springs of water." And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs.*

We see here the progression of Judah as he went against the Canaanites dwelling in the land. Now what's interesting is that this victory at Hebron is credited to Judah when we read in Joshua that it was Caleb that secured this victory. And that's not to say that this is a discrepancy in the Word because Caleb was from the tribe of Judah.

- Remember Caleb was an 85 year old man and he wanted the mountain territory where the giants were. He killed ***Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai*** who were the sons of Anak. These were most likely giants.
- Perhaps this is being shown to show what a man of faith can really do. It's not the amount of faith, but the object of your faith. Caleb had said in **Joshua 14:12**, *"It may be that the Lord will be with me, and I shall be able to drive them out as the Lord said."* I love that! He was willing to step out and see what God would do.

And then in vv.12-15 the writer of Judges (most likely Samuel) quotes from Joshua 15:16-19 to show again what faith accomplishes.

We see Caleb as a great man of faith who motivated others to step out by faith.

Othniel is one such person. Perhaps this story is interjected here to introduce us to the first judge we'll read about in Judges.

But Othniel answers Caleb's challenge and he defeats Kirjath Sepher.

- Kirjath Sepher means city of the book. It was renamed Debir.
- Debir means sanctuary. Caleb turned this place of intellect into a sanctuary. That's where we're really going to learn is when we learn to turn to the Lord in trust and follow Him. *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge"* (**Proverbs 1:7**).

So, Othniel is given Caleb's daughter Achsah as a wife. Her name means, 'ankle chain'. Which is not to be confused with the old ball and chain.

But this story from Joshua also reveals how Achsah steps out in faith and asks her dad for a further blessing. *You do not have because you do not ask* (**James 4:2c**).

- Are we asking Him in faith for the things we need?
- Achsah was given springs of water. How we need to daily be filled with the living water of the Holy Spirit that leads us and empowers us on in victory.
- **Luke 11:13**, *"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"*

1:16-18 - *Now the children of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up from the City of Palms with the children of Judah into the Wilderness of Judah, which lies in the South near Arad; and they went and dwelt among the people. ¹⁷ And Judah went with his brother Simeon, and they attacked the Canaanites who inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. So the name of the city was called Hormah. ¹⁸ Also Judah took Gaza with its territory, Ashkelon with its territory, and Ekron with its territory.*

They're moving across the land. From Jericho (**City of Palms**) to the Philistine territory in the southwest – **Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ekron**.

1:19 - *So the Lord was with Judah. And they drove out the mountaineers, but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the lowland, because they had chariots of iron.*

Here we see the success on the mountaintop, but struggle in the valley. So it is with many of us. We love the mountaintop, we love the blessings and highs they produce, but those mountaintop experiences are meant to train us and equip us for what we'll encounter in the valley.

But too often we hit the lowlands and we begin to feel a little... low! Not only physically but mentally and spiritually.

- The problem here is that Judah and his people took their eyes off of God and focused on the chariots of iron. The same God that has brought them victory all the way to now is not about to stop.
- The end of this verse needs to read the beginning of this verse! The Lord was with Judah and if the Lord be with you, what can be against you!? Certainly not some advanced technology like chariots of iron. God's greater than it all.

As Judah began to get his eyes off of God he stopped walking in victory. He began to sink quicker than Peter in the Sea of Galilee the minute he took his eyes off of Jesus.

Be sure you don't focus on your surroundings, but on the One who is surrounding you. Get your eyes off the lowland letdown and onto the Lord who lifts you up! Then you can soar through the valley as though you were on the mountaintop!

1:20-21 - *And they gave Hebron to Caleb, as Moses had said. Then he expelled from there the three sons of Anak. ²¹ But the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who inhabited Jerusalem; so the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.*

We begin to see the areas of compromise being repeated with greater volume as the children of Israel failed to drive out the inhabitants.

Again, Caleb stands as a stark contrast to what we'll see from the rest of the tribes of Israel. He took on the giants with great success. But most of Israel failed to drive out the enemies from their regions.

1:22-26 - *And the house of Joseph also went up against Bethel, and the Lord was with them. ²³ So the house of Joseph sent men to spy out Bethel. (The name of the city was formerly Luz.) ²⁴ And when the spies saw a man coming out of the city, they said to him, "Please show us the entrance to the city, and we will show you mercy." ²⁵ So he showed them the entrance to the city, and they struck the city with the edge of the sword; but they let the man and all his family go. ²⁶ And the man went to the land of the Hittites, built a city, and called its name Luz, which is its name to this day.*

Ephraim and Manasseh (*the house of Joseph*) looked to take Bethel. It was an important city with a connection to the Patriarchs. But it was difficult to enter.

So a man showed them the way in and he was spared, just as Rahab was. But this again was a treaty that Israel was not to enter in to. Another compromising step. And this man went to the territory of an enemy of Israel and builds his city. It's almost as though he's doing so in rebellion against the God of Israel. He's going to do his own thing. And this city was still in existence at the time of this writing. In other words, the consequences of a small compromise reached multiple generations.

1:27-28 - *However, Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth Shean and its villages, or Taanach and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Ibleam and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages; for the Canaanites were determined to dwell in that land. ²⁸ And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites under tribute, but did not completely drive them out.*

We come to this sordid recap of partial obedience. But partial obedience amounts to disobedience. The people of Israel weren't going all the way.

- It's like in golf, if you don't follow through on your swing, you're not going to get the ball to where you need it to go. These Israelites were not following through.
- Too bad Israel didn't have the same determination to kick the Canaanites out of the land as the Canaanites had to stay in the land.

And here's another sad compromising move – they brought ***the Canaanites under tribute***. They put them to forced labour.

- It's sad when Christians think that they can handle an area of sin in their lives, or feel they have it under control without crucifying it. Too often they will find that sin will come back and destroy them.
- By not driving out the Canaanites, they allowed them to grow and become stronger and they will be a real thorn in Israel's side.
- Never make a treaty with sin.

1:29-36 - *Nor did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites who dwelt in Gezer; so the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them. ³⁰ Nor did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron or the inhabitants of Nahalol; so the Canaanites dwelt among them, and were put under tribute. ³¹ Nor did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Acco or the inhabitants of Sidon, or of Ahlab, Achzib, Helbah, Aphik, or Rehob. ³² So the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites,*

the inhabitants of the land; for they did not drive them out. ³³ Nor did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh or the inhabitants of Beth Anath; but they dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land. Nevertheless the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh and Beth Anath were put under tribute to them. ³⁴ And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountains, for they would not allow them to come down to the valley; ³⁵ and the Amorites were determined to dwell in Mount Heres, in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim; yet when the strength of the house of Joseph became greater, they were put under tribute. ³⁶ Now the boundary of the Amorites was from the Ascent of Akrabbim, from Sela, and upward."

Many tribes walked in this compromise. They should have walked in obedience to God's Word so they could truly enjoy God's promises and blessings. But they will continue to be ensnared and enslaved as we'll see in this book.

It's not the life God has for us. Don't live like it.

- God has much for us – blessing after blessing, if we would simply walk in obedience to His Word.
- Don't be satisfied with anything less than God's best.

2:1-3 - Then the Angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said: "I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers; and I said, 'I will never break My covenant with you. ² And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this? ³ Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you.' "

The Angel of the Lord is no doubt the preincarnate Jesus Christ seen in various places in the Old Testament (Genesis 16:9, 22:11, 48:16; Exodus 3:2; 2 Kings 19:35).

This is where the Lord would come and visit people and minister to them where they were at. He had done this with Abraham, Jacob and Joshua (among others), but now He comes as a rebuker of their disobedience and compromise and to lead them to repentance.

The Lord has been faithful but Israel has not.

The Lord will not fully rid the land of the enemy if Israel is not serious about it. God wants our cooperation and partnership. He wants this to be our desire as well.

Wouldn't it be great if we had no thorns or snares in life? But it's through these things that God often will grow us and strengthen us. They're not meant to harm us but to cause us to walk in the ways of the Lord all the more.

2:4-5 - *So it was, when the Angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voices and wept. ⁵ Then they called the name of that place Bochim; and they sacrificed there to the Lord.*

There was a great outcry here. Tears were shed. Bochim means weeping. But these were not tears of true repentance but tears of remorse. Big difference. Real repentance is seen in action not emotion.

- **Joel 2:13**, *"So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the Lord your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm."*

May our sin lead us to greater repentance and to the cross where Jesus' sacrifice has atoned for all.

2:7-10 - *And when Joshua had dismissed the people, the children of Israel went each to his own inheritance to possess the land. ⁷ So the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord which He had done for Israel. ⁸ Now Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died when he was one hundred and ten years old. ⁹ And they buried him within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Heres, in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash. ¹⁰ When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel.*

While Joshua was alive the people walked in obedience and faithfulness. But when he died the next generation did not. They didn't even know the Lord. What a sad reality that we'll see perpetuate through the book.

What a privilege it is to train up our children in the ways of the Lord. May we continually teach God's Word and ways to the next generation. Not compromising truth but proclaiming it and modeling it to those around us.