

## **Sermon 1: Judges 1:1-2:5: The Conquering of Canaan?**

### **OUTLINE**

Introduction  
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### **INTRODUCTION**

The big surprise of the book of Judges is one of the main lessons that we learn from the book. We so often approach this book with a heroes-of-the-faith mentality, looking at the men and women listed here as champions of faith that put us to shame and how they primarily exist as moral examples of how to do better. Now don't get me wrong, Paul tells us that the OT is given for our instruction, and Heb. 11 lists some of those in the book as having moments of shining faith, this is true. But when we understand the book of Judges correctly we see its primary purpose is something completely opposite. The book of Judges is an apologetic paving the way for King David. Most of it was likely written by Samuel, and so we find this regular refrain in the book, 17:6, 'In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.' Variation of it occurs again in 18:1 and 19:1, and the book ends with 21:25, 'In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.' And the very next thing you read is the title to the book of Ruth, which tells the family story that gave rise to David. There is a little bit of double meaning going on here, because God is the King of Israel, and He is not being obeyed; and there was no Davidic king either. But that double emphasis of no king, and each one doing their own thing show that when there is no godly king, the people go astray. It underlines the great need for a Savior King who will lead the people of God first in deliverance and victory; and secondly in holiness and obedience to God. The book of Judges is a repeating cycle of failure, a sinful people failing God, and sinful leaders failing to properly deliver and lead the people of God. It is a book that points to our need for Christ, our promised Davidic King who will fulfill the promises of Gen. 3:15; the promises of Abraham, who will bring the people of God into God's rest; who will lead them in triumph against the seed of the serpent; and who will lead them into obedience to God not disobedience.

Judges is situated after that first generation after Joshua. It extends to the lives of Eli and Samuel who make way for the kings Saul and David and covers a period of just over 400 years. It is a window into apostasy and how Israel lost their religion and their morals. The overall structure of the book confirms this perspective. The book opens with a double introduction and ends with a double conclusion. In the double introduction in chapters 1-2 we see that Israel is fighting foreign wars and served foreign idols. But the book ends in a much worse condition with Israel fighting a civil war and serving domestic gods.

Sandwiched in to this double introduction and conclusion is what is called the cycle section. This section is made up of 12 judges: Othniel; Ehud; Shamgar; Deborah/Barak; Gideon; Tola; Jair; Jephthah; Ibzan; Elon; Abdon and Samson. These cycles reveal two trends firstly, the cycles follow a typical pattern:  
Israel does evil in the sight of YHWH  
YHWH sends oppressors  
Israel is oppressed for x amount of years

Israel cries out to YHWH  
YHWH raises up a deliverer  
The Spirit of YHWH comes upon the deliverer  
The oppressor is subdued  
The land has rest for x amount of years  
Repeat.

This pattern is typical but as you move closer to the end of the book you start losing the pattern, Israel doesn't always cry out, nor do the people turn to God in repentance, nor is the land always given rest. There is a trend to disintegration enhancing the theme of decline.

The idea that Israel did what was evil in God's eyes is repeated throughout the book, 2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1. Evils include:

- A failure to rid the land of the Canaanites
- A failure to remember YHWH's saving acts
- A failure to heed the call to arms
- Building altars to Baal
- Worshipping Gideon's ephod
- Making images and having home cults
- The replacing of YHWH with Baal-berith
- Tribal sponsorship of idols
- Increasingly immoral behaviour

The themes of application are many making Judges a particularly relevant book for today. They experienced the Canaanization of Israel through the seduction of sexuality and a cultural inferiority complex as a people who were recently slaves and nomads came into established towns, cultures and impressive religious systems. Christians face the same temptations of sexuality and adopting what appears to be culturally superior. We see Israel failing to rid the land of the Canaanites in some instances enslaving them for financial gain increasing their influence, by failing to take on the big enemies by trusting in God or employing worldly means. We see a need for constant renewal and repentance and a remembering of God's past saving acts. We see the development of the downgrade and the collective effect of little compromises and how they affect the next generation. We see the danger of ungodly leaders. We are reminded of God's faithfulness to His people and that He uses weak vessels, and most of all we are reminded of our need for a perfect judge and saviour.

Today we look at the first of the two introductions to Judges 1:1-2:5. We have two points, we want to look at the continuing conquest of the land after the death of Joshua in chapter 1, looking at Israel's efforts at picking up on the hints of the text and how it is telling us to interpret those efforts. Secondly, we will look at God's response to this era in 2:1-5.

### **Israel's efforts**

We need to remember that the total rejection of God does not begin with a total denial of God but small, incremental and seemingly insignificant compromises. It begins with sins of omission not commission, it begins with partial obedience, it begins with a negotiated compromise not an all out rebellion. Judges chapter 1 gives us an account of the ongoing conquest of the land, some of the ground that is covered here is a repeat of ground covered in Joshua 13-19. The ordering of the various reports is not chronological but geographical moving from the

south and ending with the northern most tribe, Dan. We will see that the author gives us the slow fade into apostasy and how it all began with partial obedience; a lack of faith; compromises with the people of the land, and adopting worldly tactics to get God's job done. Upon first reading of this chapter you might think that they got off to a good start and then began to depart from the way, but in truth even the apparent successes are mixed and tainted. We will look at the progress report of the chapter as our introduction into some of Israel's darkest days and learn how sin takes a people.

The book begins with what happened after Joshua died, and we are shown Judah, the largest tribe and the tribe from whom kings would one day come appointed by the Lord to take the lead in the conquest (v1). God tells Judah that He has given the land into their hand, v2. The first act of Judah is one of faithlessness, instead of going in confidence because God has promised them victory they turn to Simeon for aid, v3. This is hardly the nation inspiring example that Judah should have given. This lack of faith will pop up several times in this chapter. It reminds us that we make a liar of God by not believing His promises. We are slow to believe promises of receiving eternal life and doubt the sufficiency of Christ, we are slow to believe promises about receiving answers in prayer because we pray in Christ's name once again once again insulting the Son as somehow deficient to qualify us to pray acceptably to the Father.

Despite this lack of faith we see that God blesses His faithless people and they see victory v4. However, on the heels of this victory we see that they compromise again. Instead of totally wiping out the enemies they spared the king Adoni-Bezek as a trophy and copied his Canaanite POW policies hacking off body parts, v6-7. We take comfort in the fact that we do see God actively punishing the wicked seeing that they get a taste of their own medicine but this sparing of the king sounds a lot like Saul sparing Agag of the Amalekites in 1 Sam. 15. This was a compromise that cost him the kingdom. This apparent success is marred by partial obedience. The sparing of POWs in this holy war was a major compromise of the original mandate. We should reflect on our own Great Commission and see whether we are offering full or partial obedience.

In v8 we see an apparent victory in the defeating of the Jebusites in Jerusalem. We know that they were a tenacious enemy in a good position, and Judah defeats them. However we see that they did not secure the defeat for by 1:21 we see that the Benjamites are still not able to drive them out. This stronghold would hold out as a thorn in Israel's side until David drives them out.

Hebron was taken by Caleb v20, this is one of the highlights of the conquest and a reward for Caleb for his faithfulness when Israel wanted to originally inhabit the land. A Hebron like victory is recorded of the defeat of Debir in 11-15. Here we see Caleb offering his daughter to anyone who defeats Debir. Othniel, the first judge of Israel is the one who takes up the challenge and is victorious, this victory is tainted with an avunculate marriage. Another highlight is recorded of the defeat and utter destruction of Zephath and it was even renamed Hormah which means utter destruction. Verses 18-20 record Judah's victories against the Philistine areas. We see that they defeated Gaza, Ashkelon and Ekron and they were able to take the hills but we see that they were not able to drive them from the plains, v19, 'And the LORD was with Judah, and he took possession of the hill country, but he could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain because they had chariots of iron.' This verse seems to house a contradiction, for we see that the Lord is with them, but that they were not able to drive out the chariots. This

would have resulted from their lack of faith. So for all their successes we see these disturbing signs of a lack of faith.

Benjamin's failure is recorded in v21. The only tribe that is portrayed as having more success than failure is Joseph v22-26. Joseph is made up of the two half tribes. We see them going about subduing the land, but how do they do it? Instead of engaging in battle they found someone to get them into the city. We see that they take the city but the man they covenanted with ended up leaving and restarting the city all over again, and so the whole point of removing idolatry was not accomplished.

The lesson here is the temptation we face as the people of God to employ compromising means to get the job done. We are about the Lord's business but we revert to wrong means to move the work forward. We can trust in marketing and manipulation and not trust in the Spirit and faithfully declare the truth and try and sugar coat it.

The rest of the chapter is a record of the failures of the other tribes. In v27-28 we see the failure of Manasseh to subdue the land and instead of driving them out they used them for financial gain by enslaving them.

Ephraim registers no successes v29.

Zebulun failed to remove the Canaanites from the land but later when stronger instead of driving them out they enslaved them, V30.

In v31-32 we not only do Asher not defeat the Canaanites but dwell in the land as minor residents.

Naphtali fail in the same way v33 and resort to forced labour when they get stronger.

And Dan the northernmost tribe is shown to be forced into the hill country.

We see the recurring phrase '...did not drive out.'

The easiest application we can make is not to equate Israel with NZ or America and talk about our foreign policy and try and apply this to modern attitudes around immigration. Rather we need to apply this to our war against sin. John Owen has written a book called the mortification of sin. Owen speaks of sin in the heart as an "enemy whose secret strength we cannot discover." "It can lie so close in the mind's darkness, in the will's indisposition, in the disorder and carnality of the affections, that no eye can discover it." For this reason, Scripture speaks of the heart as being "deceitful above all things" (Jer. 17:9). The heart inclines a person to call good evil and evil good; the heart so deceives that a person may perform a work that appears to be good and righteous, but in fact self-love and desire for self-aggrandizement give rise to the external work. All of these corruptions and deceits have a place in the lives of Christians because of the remnants of indwelling sin that will never be thoroughly purged until believers are taken to glory.<sup>1</sup>

If we leave this sin unattended it will take us, if we do not wage war against sin heartily it will have a foothold to take us. We must necessarily try and kill sin with all that we are every time we battle it. We must have a no survivor attitude to killing sin or our own spiritual lives will suffer the survival of Canaanite entities that will slowly cause us to become accustomed to sin's presence and it will

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1 Beeke, J. R., & Jones, M. (2012). *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (p. 213). Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books.

slowly take over. Israel did not fear that they would be Canaanized because they had won some battles, they overestimated their strength and this was the first step of their apostasy.

Lack of faith, not driving out all idolatrous elements, and being pragmatic and worldly in how they executed God's will, so the slow fade begins.

### **God's analysis**

As sinners we are complacent and too easily satisfied. We can have a church that has one or two good strong ministries and we think we are ok when there are gaping holes. We can think we are ok personally if we waddle through distracted devotions, only sin in small ways and give money and work as a volunteer for a charity. Israel was complacent and too easily pleased with their own progress. It is possible to read chapter one and think that they didn't do too badly, but a slow and careful read exposes the flaws. All doubt is removed when God through a theophanic visitation of the Angel of the Lord gives His analysis in 2:1-5. We have studied chapter 1 and seen the progress of the various tribes, now we stop to hear what God has to say about the situation. This would be equivalent to us looking at each other's lives and thinking that the other person seems to be doing alright, but then God visits us and we are exposed for the massive amount of sinful that was thinly veiled by a half-hearted obedience.

V1 begins by giving us the travelling route of God's messenger, 'Now the angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bochim.' Each of these names is significant and reflects Israel's own backslide. Gilgal was the first camping ground west of the Jordan, it was there that Israel's new generation renewed the covenant in circumcision, and God declared that He had rolled away the shame of Egypt from them, they were truly free (Josh. 5:9). Gilgal sounds like the Hebrew 'to roll.' But Bochim was the new name place given at the place where God told Israel He must punish them, Bochim means weepers. From covenanters to weepers this is the road of Israel's disobedience. The place of God making the covenant with them, to the place where God pronounces the covenant curses upon them.

The rest of verse 1 gives us a record of God's initiating grace. 'And he said, "I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you.' Here we see that it was God who initiated Israel's deliverance from Egypt, a fact which should have roused their gratitude. We see too that God has been faithful to His promises to Abraham in delivering them, a fact which should have convicted them of their own covenant unfaithfulness. And we see that God made a perpetual covenant with the people to never abandon them, this is the opposite of what Israel did to God, as soon as they got settled in the land they took up the idols of the surrounding nations.

Verse 2 rehearses Israel's obligations and God's analysis of their failure. 'and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.' But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done?' Israel were not to make covenants with the people of the land, have peace treaties or tolerate their idolatry. And it may look like Israel were waging a lot of war in chapter 1 but here we see God's evaluation of their obedience. They did not trust God to help them take out difficult enemies but saw how big their enemies were instead of how big God was. They did not uncompromisingly exterminate the idolaters as the arm of God's justice but instead negotiated a

surrender where they would be slaves for Israel's economic gain. What might appear to be the inability to remove the idolaters from the land turns out to be a culpable offense. The impossibility of their driving out the Canaanites is now exposed for what all disobedience truly is. It is not the failure to do the impossible, but the unwillingness to obey and making all sorts of excuses that appear legitimate. Ouch!

Are we guilty of making excuses for our disobedience, do we appeal to apparently legitimate problems to cover up our unwillingness to give total and costly obedience? Will we like the Israelites justify our sins? 'I can't quit my addiction I have an addictive personality.' 'I am just trying to be contextual and relevant, all things to all men.' 'Small compromises won't kill me.' 'No one can sustain that intensity of commitment.' 'I have tried and I can't stop.' Israel complained of iron chariots, argued the benefit of enslaving the Canaanites for financial gain, were willing to strike compromises to get the desired results and apparently ran into a brick wall. God says, 'You have not obeyed my voice.' Total obedience to God is required because He cannot allow anything to challenge His glory and place in our lives.

We see in verse 2 God says, 'What is this you have done?' And in verse 3 He announces the consequences, the disciplinary action according to the covenant, 'So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you.' There is a tension here. God has covenanted with Israel forever, but what does He have to do when they violate the covenant? We must feel the tension here He has to be faithful to His promise to save and yet faithful to His justice. In the Old Covenant there was provision for God to save Israel by faith, yet if they were disobedient they would suffer physical consequences like exile and enemy attack. Being a mixed multitude of saved and not, nearly every generation experienced some sort of punishment.

This tension between God's desire to save and His holiness are not only felt in Israel but in the whole world. God has made humanity to be in a relationship with Him, but we sin, we provoke Him to judge. Yet He has a desire to save, how will God resolve this tension? God will suffer the penalty of our sin in order to heal us and restore us to Him. He will pay with the person of His own Son to pay that we might live. Christ becomes the covenant breaker that we might be found in an eternal covenant with God.

The discipline that God afflicted the Israelites with is a scary discipline that none of us wants. Perhaps I can use this example to remind us of a principle that is no longer taught but was taught by the Puritans. Isaiah 63:17 is quoted by John Owen in relation to what will happen if we coddle sin, if we refuse to kill it as Israel refused to deal with the Canaanites, 'O LORD, why do you make us wander from your ways and harden our heart, so that we fear you not? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your heritage.' Owen points out that God not only hardens the hearts of His enemies but His people when He deals with them in covenant discipline. Let me ask you, would you be scared if God hardened your heart so that you felt no fear of your sins? Let me ask you, are there sins in your life that you refuse to give up, that God has allowed you to keep as thorns and snares to drive you back to Him?

The descriptions of thorns, gods and snares are fitting for a description of sin. Sin is our god when we serve it instead of God's will, we make an idol of that

which competes for our service. Thorns are painful and so are the consequences of sin. Snares are traps and sin because we are naturally addicted to it enslaves us. There is a great irony here because God saved His people from slavery in Egypt but through their disobedience they have re-enslaved themselves.

What is God's assessment of your life?

Do you have legitimate looking excuses for half-hearted obedience?

Are there sins you are coddling that God might hand you over to because you are refusing to acknowledge and mortify them?