

Judges

- I. This study is meant to be a light treatment of the Book of Judges.
- II. Preliminary observations.
 - A. This book deals with a 450 year period after the conquest of Canaan. **ACT 13:17-20**.
 1. An addition of the years of the different judges' seasons does come to 450 years.
 2. The KJV is accurate in its historical analysis in **ACT 13:19-20**.
 3. Some modern versions corrupt the actual history to make it appear that it took 450 years to conquer Canaan, after which God gave the Judges.
 - a. Eg. "He overthrew seven nations in Canaan and gave their land to his people as their inheritance. All this took about 450 years. After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet." (ACT 13:19-20 in the New International Version).
 - b. It actually took less than seven years to conquer Canaan. See this by comparing Caleb's age when he first saw Canaan before the wandering period and his age at the time when Canaan was being divided up under conquest. **JOS 14:7-10**.
 - c. The NIV is a broken narrative and scripture cannot be broken (**JOH 10:35**), nor have anything perverted (distorted, misapplied) in it (**PRO 8:8**), nor have contradictions (**2PE 1:20-21**). Therefore, the NIV is not scripture, not inspired prophecy.
 - B. These judges are of special distinction from the judges that were to be appointed for the court system under Moses' Law. **EXO 18:13-27; DEUT 17:9**.
 - C. These judges were called *saviours* and are therefore plain examples of the truth of *temporal* salvation. **NEH 9:27 c/w 2KI 13:5**.
 1. Scripture commonly speaks of God saving people in a temporal or natural sense. **EXO 14:30; 2CH 32:22**.
 2. Understanding this helps us to better divide the word of truth concerning salvation: not every salvation is the eternal salvation which God alone works by Jesus Christ for sinners. **ACT 2:40; 1CO 15:1-2; 1TI 4:16**.
 - D. There is a concentration of the names of some of these judges in the roll call of faith. **HEB 11:32**.
 1. Those judges/saviours were flawed (some seriously) men of faith, yet not forgotten by God.
 2. Let this be a comfort when our own faith is colored with spots of the old man and weakness.
 3. Also, some "...out of weakness were made strong..." (**HEB 11:34**). Downturns and weaknesses in our faith can be put behind us if we are converted out of negative postures. **LUK 22:31-32; 2TI 4:11; PHM 1:10-12**.
 - E. Samuel was at the end of this line of special judges who exercised special rule and leadership and he appointed his sons as judges. **1SAM 7:15; 8:1**.
 - F. These judges admirably directed and saved Israel in their faithful exercise but the people demanded the false perception of security from a king other than God. **1SAM 8:4-7**.
 1. God rules, judges and saves His church by the words of King Jesus as He delivered them to us via His apostles' writings. **1JO 4:6**.
 2. Making commentators, church fathers, church confessions, popes, come-lately "prophets," academic accommodators, etc. to determine our creed and conduct is little different than Israel demanding a king like the nations.

- G. Ruth lived during the time of the Judges. **RUTH 1:1.**
- H. This book shows a pattern of highs and lows in which Israel fared well for a season after a judge delivered them but then afterwards fell back into bad old habits which led to their overthrow and great trouble. **JDG 2:11-19.**
 - 1. This should remind us that we need some type of magistracy to put us to shame as needed (c/w **JDG 18:7**), and a church without a devoted preacher, or who neglect regular consultation with the words of the heavenly king given in the scriptures, or who forsake the assembling of themselves together for service and preaching, are very likely to drift back to the shore of their former bondage (or worse).
 - 2. Not every church is an ant-church. **PRO 6:6-8 c/w PHIL 2:12.**
 - 3. Sometimes it doesn't take very long for a church to drift when the minister must be on other business. **GAL 1:6.**
 - 4. Bugs can keep it together without a king. **PRO 30:27.**
 - 5. NOTE: Unlike those judges who died leaving a vacuum (**JDG 2:19**) our Judge is very much alive to judge His churches. **REV 1:17-18; 2:1.**
 - a. Men stray into folly when they think they are not being actively judged. **EZE 8:12.**
 - b. Avoid the mentality of **2PE 3:3-4; ECC 8:11.**
- I. The character of this period is summed up in **JDG 21:25.**
 - 1. Contrast this with **DEUT 12:8.**
 - 2. Again, we can assume no such mentality as **JDG 21:25** because there is a Living King now over "...the Israel of God" (**GAL 6:16**).
 - a. Those who do not think the church presently has a king are missing a saving truth that could keep them from the snares of false prophets and from subjugation to spiritual powers that deceptively conquer their minds and influence their policies.
 - b. True religion is not left up to individual taste but rather the things which Jesus has commanded. **MAT 28:19-20.**

III. **Judges 1.**

- A. Joshua had died without appointing a successor but at least the children of Israel were yet willing to proceed with Canaan's conquest and sought God's direction. **vs. 1-3.**
 - 1. This was proper protocol. **NUM 27:21.**
 - 2. A lack of inquiry of God had earlier been costly. **JOS 9:14.**
 - 3. A church's efforts in evangelism should likewise be according to the commands and guidelines of Scripture.
 - a. We should go to God about men when considering going to men about God.
 - b. There are some fields that might be assumed to be white unto harvest but the time may not be according to the Spirit. Is there a reasonably plain call? **ACT 16:6-10.**
 - 4. Judah was chosen to go first, even as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, Jesus Christ, first engaged the powers of darkness and overcame them and so animates us to be "...more than conquerors through him that loved us" (**ROM 8:37**).
 - 5. The great tribe of Judah asking Simeon to join him may remind us that in the church the more feeble members are necessary. **1CO 12:21-22.**
 - 6. It may be that faithful Caleb (of Judah, **NUM 13:6**) was still vigorous and participated in the action, perhaps even in a leadership role. **JOS 14:11 c/w JDG 1:19-20.**
- B. The venture was successful. **vs. 4-8.**

1. Though victory was in hand, they didn't let Adonibezek escape. This is wisdom useful to us in fighting against the lusts of the flesh. Unaddressed lusts can infect character and gain strongholds. **JAM 1:14-16 c/w GAL 5:9; ROM 7:23.**
 2. The treatment of Adonibezek is curious.
 - a. A charge of cruelty might be levelled against Judah but the cutting off of his thumbs and great toes was not far akin from the law of Israel's justice system which demanded equal retribution (**DEU 19:21**) and Adonibezek basically acknowledged the justice of the matter.
 - b. Their charge from God was to utterly destroy the devoted nations and make no covenant with them or show mercy to them. **DEU 7:1-2.**
 - c. NOTE: to win against sin it must be mortified, not just hobbled (a making provision for the flesh to fulfil its lusts). **COL 3:5-10; ROM 13:14.**
 3. In overcoming Adonibezek, Judah had essentially also overcome seventy other kings under his mastery. Sometimes overcoming the main weakness is the path to victory over lesser issues. **JAM 3:2.**
 4. NOTE: The Canaanites were not living in peaceful harmony with one another before the conquerors got there. This is a common false assumption about the pagan lands that were overcome by Christian-influenced civilization.
 5. **v. 8** seems to refer to earlier action against Jerusalem in Joshua's time.
- C. **vs. 9-20** further set forth the ventures of Judah and Simeon. They were very successful but consider **v. 19.**
1. The last phrase, "...because they had chariots of iron" is not a valid reason but their excuse. They should have been operating under the divine promise of **v. 2.**
 2. The enemy had chariots of iron but God has chariots of fire. **PSA 68:17; 2KI 2:11.**
 3. The Egyptians' chariots were rendered useless by God. **EXO 14:25.**
 4. The more recent victory in Joshua's day should have inspired them. **JOS 11:4-9.**
 5. Distrust in God's promises and power is not uncommonly a partner with willing compromise and complacency in our battles.
 - a. Battle-fatigue or the cares of this world crowd out the effect of the word. **LUK 8:14; 2TI 4:3-4.**
 - b. There is no dart of the enemy that applied faith cannot resist and overcome. **EPH 6:16; 1PE 5:8-9 c/w 1CO 10:13.**
 - c. "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?" (**GAL 5:7**).
- D. The rest of this chapter presents various quasi-conquests of the tribes of Israel over the Canaanites.
1. The Jebusites (**v. 21**) were never fully overcome until David (**1CH 11:4-8**). Some powers are especially problematic. **MAT 17:21.**
 2. The lingering Canaanites that were not driven out were made tributaries: they no longer had absolute mastery.
 3. In our warfare against sin, we will not have complete victory until our vile bodies are changed: the lusts of the old nature will have to be kept under power until they are eliminated. **ROM 7:21-25; 1CO 9:27 c/w PHIL 3:20-21.**
 - a. For now, we continue the resistance effort and occupy until Christ comes. **LUK 19:13.**
 - b. The elements of our nature can at least now be made serviceable to us as long as we have power over them (and not vice-versa). **1CO 6:12; ROM 6:12.**
- E. "The conquest of Canaan was very partial. Israel dwelled among the ancient inhabitants of

the land, much as the Normans did among the Anglo-Saxons, whom they found in England; and the mixture of the two peoples was the beginning of moral degeneracy and decline in the chosen race. Wherever there was the old-time faith in God, as in the case of Caleb, the land was cleared of the Canaanite; but where God was *out*, the Canaanite was *in*.

So it is in the life of the soul. It is intended that the whole should be yielded to Christ, that no evil passion should reign, that no besetting sin should enthrall. But how often Christian people give up the fight! They say that the old Adam is too strong for them, and settle down to a joint-occupation. Let us not yield to reasoning like this! The Lion of Judah can break every chain. By faith in Him we can be more than conquerors! The Holy Spirit strives with the flesh, so that we may not do as otherwise we would. Only give Him the right of way! Sin shall not reign in your mortal body!”

(F.B. Meyer Commentary on JDG 1:16 – 2:5)

IV. **Judges 2.**

- A. This chapter consists of three sections:
 1. **vs. 1-5** deal with a relatively current corruption.
 2. **vs. 6-10** is a summary review of events following Joshua’s death.
 3. **vs. 11-23** is a general historical overview of the time of Judges and of idolatry.
- B. The angel from Gilgal reproved the whole nation in his message. **v. 4.**
 1. This angel may have been the LORD Himself inasmuch as he said, “...I made you to go up out of Egypt...” (**v. 1**). God had spoken to Joshua at Gilgal, and near there appeared to him as the captain of the LORD’s host. **JOS 5:9-10, 13-15.**
 2. They were reminded that God would never break his covenant with them. **v. 1.**
 - a. This was a two-party mutually-binding covenant which required their obedience. **EXO 19:5; LEV 26:14-39.**
 - b. When God would turn them over to oppressors, it was not because He broke the covenant. They did. **DEU 31:16-17.**
 - c. Their breach justified God’s breach with no fault to Himself. **c/w NUM 14:34.**
 - d. We should recognize and be thankful that our eternal salvation rests not on our compliant faithfulness which fails but on God’s faithfulness. **ROM 3:3-4 c/w 2TI 2:13, 17-19 c/w 1PE 1:3-5.**
 3. They had made league with unbelieving idolaters and their tokens, a problem that has ever plagued the church. **1CO 10:20-22; 2CO 6:14-18.**
 4. Because they had chosen the false peace of compromise over the prescribed duty of victorious expulsion, God justly let the Canaanites abide to trouble Israel. **v. 3.**
 - a. Canaanite gods/religion ensnared Israel to do as Canaanites. **NUM 33:55-56 c/w PSA 106:34-36.**
 - b. This should remind us to personally make no peace with our sins lest God turn us over to them in judgment. **ROM 1:24-26; 2TH 2:10-12.**
 5. The rebuke produced the desired result of humility (although short-lived). **vs. 4-5 c/w 2CO 7:10; JAM 4:9.**
- C. Compare **JDG 2:6-10** with **JOS 24:21-31.**
 1. In his closing days, Joshua oversaw Israel’s binding of themselves by covenant to always serve the LORD.
 2. Joshua added that covenant to the book of the law of God (**JOS 24:26**) which thing must have been done under divine direction in view of **DEU 4:2.**
 3. The great stone set up by the sanctuary would stand as a witness to their own sworn

- promise to ever serve the LORD. **JOS 24:26.**
- a. This underscores the solemnity of sworn allegiance to God.
c/w **LUK 9:62; 14:26-33.**
 - b. Every time saints assemble for worship, they should ponder that they made a promise to Jesus Christ to not forsake Him. **HEB 10:25-27.**
 - c. The book of the law itself was a witness against them. **DEU 31:26.**
 - d. We also have multiple witnesses against us to warn us of sin and judge us when we sin: Scripture, the Spirit of Christ within us, conscience.
4. With this closing word, Joshua could with clear conscience say that he was pure from the blood of all men, having clearly informed them of their duty.
c/w **ACT 20:26-27.**
 5. “And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua...” (**JDG 2:7**). This is not to say that they were flawless but at least their religious service was to the one true God.
 6. Another generation arose “...which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel” (**v. 10**).
 - a. This underscores the challenge of generational continuity of true religion, especially where the precepts of true religion are not impressed upon the next generation who enjoy the current fruits of true religion but have no appreciation of the former great cost and great deliverance.
DEU 6:4-12 c/w PSA 78:1-8.
 - b. With the conquest of the land of milk and honey came great prosperity and Israel would become like the Laodicean church of **REV 3:17.**
 - c. “Everything in the world can be endured, except continual prosperity.”
(Johann Wolfgang von Goethe)
- D. **vs. 11-23** set forth Israel’s ugly decline into idolatry via their indulgence of their idolatrous neighbors whose carnal religion catered to human lust.
1. They forsook the LORD for Baal and Ashtaroth (**v. 13**), male and female deities of the Canaanites and Phoenicians.
 - a. This form of dualism was widespread throughout the world, assuming there must be male-female deities as there are male-female in all life on earth.
 - b. These deities were deemed to be moved by sympathetic magic through the idolatrous customs of their adherents which tended towards gross licentiousness in imitation of father sun’s fertilizing light and heat upon mother earth.
 2. They provoked God to anger and He delivered them into the hand of their oppressors until His “nevertheless” moment (**v. 16**) gave them relief according to His mercy and His name’s sake, not their righteousness.
c/w **PSA 106:7-8, 13, 21, 43-45.**
 3. “After Joshua’s death, little was done for a long time against the Canaanites: Israel indulged them, and grew familiar with them, and therefore God would not drive them out any more, Jdg 2:21. If they will have such inmates as these among them, let them take them, and see what will come of it. God chose their delusions, Isa 66:4. Thus men cherish and indulge their own corrupt appetites and passions, and, instead of mortifying them, make provision for them, and therefore God justly leaves them to themselves under the power of their sins, which will be their ruin. *So shall their doom be; they themselves have decided it.* These remnants of the Canaanites were left to prove Israel (Jdg 2:22), *whether they would keep the way of the Lord or not*; not that God might know them, but that they might know

themselves. It was to try, (1.) Whether they could resist the temptations to idolatry which the Canaanites would lay before them. God had told them they could not, Deu 7:4. But they thought they could. “Well,” said God, “I will try you;” and, upon trial, it was found that the tempters' charms were far too strong for them. God has told us how deceitful and desperately wicked our hearts are, but we are not willing to believe it till by making bold with temptation we find it too true by sad experience. (2.) Whether they would make a good use of the vexations which the remaining natives would give them, and the many troubles they would occasion them, and would thereby be convinced of sin and humbled for it, reformed, and driven to God and their duty, whether by continual alarms from them they would be kept in awe and made afraid of provoking God.” (Matthew Henry Commentary)

Judges 3.

- A. This chapter begins the details of the repetitive roller-coaster pattern of sin, bondage, crying, deliverance, rest and return to corruption. We see here three judges/saviors: Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar.
- B. The closing verses of **JDG 2:20-23** are here given more details (**vs. 1-4**), a typical pattern of God’s communications to us in Scripture, adding line to line, here a little, there a little. **ISA 28:10.**
 1. It is specified that a purpose of God here “...was to teach them war, at the least such as before knew nothing thereof” (**v. 2**).
 2. As Christians, we are at constant war with the devil, the flesh and the world. We are fools to think otherwise. **EPH 6:10-18.**
 3. We are best equipped to fight the battle with knowledge of the truth of Jesus Christ. **EPH 4:11-15.**
 - a. God’s people may be destroyed through lack of knowledge (**HOS 4:6**), lack of knowledge about our salvation and its power based on God’s promises, lack of knowledge about sin and its auxiliaries, lack of knowledge of doctrinal truth which sets Satan’s lies in sharp relief, etc.
 - b. The unlearned and unstable are easier prey. **2PE 3:16.**
 - c. The first and most important step is accepting God’s word as God’s word. **1TH 2:13.**
 - d. Truth can not only make us free (**JOH 8:32**) but keep us free. We should not be overcome because of ignorance of Satan’s devices (**2CO 2:11**) which are plainly exposed in the Scriptures. Overcoming him and his allies is directly owing to familiarity with and implementation of God’s word. **1JO 2:14.**
 - e. Fight the good fight of faith by knowledge, strategy and implementation. Know the truth about Christ and Satan’s devices, devise a strategy for avoiding risk and/or fighting lies with truth, and DO. This is faith in action. **JAM 2:21-22.**
 4. Churches need the occasional hiccup to hone their spiritual senses and “separate the men from the boys.” **MAT 18:7; 1CO 11:19.**
 - a. Handled properly, these hiccups can be both sanitizing and instructive.
 - b. Handled improperly, or not handled at all, is a certain path to the withdrawal of God from the program or the arousing of His wrath. **JOS 7:11-13; REV 2:4-5.**
 5. NOTE: the choicest and brightest of God’s people may well be hobbled by something which God leaves in them as a reminder of their place in His program.

GEN 32:24-32; 2CO 12:7-9.

6. NOTE ALSO: Those lusts and sins which we are not thoroughly disgusted with in ourselves (and we are indifferent to them as long as they are not exposed) can easily become our masters and undo us, and they that are the servants of lusts have ever so many masters. DO NOT assume that a spiritual/moral weakness you struggle with is greater than the power of Christ in you to overcome it or at least bear it strongly until the day of full deliverance. **1CO 10:13; 1JO 5:3-4.**
7. The five lords of the Philistines were later the *golden emerod club* (**1SAM 6:16-17**) an example of stupid, superstitious ignoramuses running a land (or a megachurch).
- C. “And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites...” (**vs. 5-11**).
 1. This wording sounds as if Israel was the one living by permission: this is not the attitude of conquest!
 2. Christ has fitted us with His Spirit and given us His word for victory. Do not let the fact of your native wretchedness with which you have to live con you into thinking that you through Christ are not the master of your personal realm. Be a “can do” believer. **PHIL 4:13 c/w ROM 7:21-25.**
 3. Their mingled relationships with the remnant of the devoted nations which were supposed to be “off-limits” to them did not help them in their weakness but rather facilitated their further fall to where God became their enemy. **PSA 106:34-42.**
 4. Israel was auctioned off to Chushan-rishathaim (*Cush of double-wickedness*). **v. 8.**
 - a. It took them eight years to cry to God whereas it took them eighteen years to cry to God later (**v. 14**). Life under Chushan-rishathaim was rough.
 - b. Stubborn sin will drag punishment out to ridiculous extremes. **PSA 78:34.**
 5. God in mercy raised up Othniel who had earlier shown himself valiant. **JDG 1:12-13.**
 - a. Othniel was not only a good warrior but a good leader. The land had rest for forty years while he lived. **v. 11.**
 - b. But then...
- D. After Othniel’s death, they sinned themselves again into oppression. **vs. 12-30.**
 1. God then did not just raise up an oppressor, He strengthened him against Israel. **v. 12.**
 - a. Moab had been earlier “off-limits” to Israel (**DEUT 2:9**) but was now empowered to punish Israel.
 - b. This reminds me of a saint who by scriptural instruction knows that he cannot impose law upon someone else’s liberty (such as wine consumption) but then himself ends up being overcome by the very liberty he was to permit.
 2. Eglon means “calf-like” and in this case a fatted calf. **v. 17.**
 3. Moab got Ammon and Amalek on his side and a three-fold cord is not quickly broken (**ECC 4:12**) so Israel was oppressed for eighteen years before they finally cried unto the Lord. **vs. 14-15.**
- E. God raised up Ehud of Benjamin, a left-handed man from a tribe that had no shortage of left-handers. **vs. 15-30 c/w JDG 20:16.**
 1. This left-hander became God’s right-hand man. c/w **PSA 80:17**
 2. Ehud’s tactics of deception were justified by God and the mission, and what he did he did with all his might, *heartily as unto the Lord*. **ECC 9:10; COL 3:23.**
 3. In a cautious sense, we may be justified in “deceiving” a gainsayer by letting his own foolish argument hang himself out to dry, sometimes publicly, in hopes that he will see the error of his ways. **2TI 3:7-9; 1CO 15:12-13, 29.**

4. Two of the components of Christian victory are boldness and confidence, like Ehud had. **ACT 4:13; PHIL 1:6.**
 5. Ehud's forwardness and boldness inspired others. **vs. 27-29 c/w PHIL 1:14.**
 6. Some of the most inspiring moments of Christian experience occur when saints see a brother standing against great pressure.
 7. The land rested for eighty years, a notably long season. Would to God that every saint upon conversion would hold fast in the rest of Jesus Christ for that long or more. **PSA 71:17-18.**
- F. Shamgar had but one tool/weapon and he used it effectively (**v. 31**). One faithful man with a Bible which pricks the heart can get great victories without seminaries, computers, denominations, etc.