

JUDGES SESSION #2

We are continuing our study of the Historical Introduction, still looking at the Response of Israel. As we get to verse 18 of chapter 1, this response now reveals **Judah's progressive FAILURE [1:18-21...]**

Also Judah took Gaza with its territory, Ashkelon with its territory, and Ekron with its territory. 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. ²⁰ 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.

- in vs. 18 only **3** cities are mentioned (Gaza, Ashkelon & Ekron), but there were **5** Philistine cities! The other 2 were Gath & Ashdod. So here already we see that Judah is only 60% successful.
- vs. 19 gives the impression that the reasons they had trouble conquering in the lowland areas was that the people there had chariots of iron
 - but the problem really was **not the iron chariots** (as we will see later)
(and remember that King David had his greatest victories without chariots at all)
...no; the real problem was **diminished faith** which led to diminished power
 - "the LORD was with Judah" ...**but**... !
 - this **compromise led to major trouble** later – these plains which the Canaanites controlled were in the center of the land, and divided Judah & Simeon from the other tribes ...this led to cultural division ...and then troubles... and eventually to a complete split into 2 kingdoms (Israel & Judah); but some of the seeds of this calamity were planted way back here in the time of Judges
 - also note the small but crucial difference between vs. 19 ("they could not drive out") and vs. 21 (they "did not drive out")
...this decline started with not trusting God to do what He promised ("they could not") and ended with them giving up ("they did not")
- there is another **contrast** noted in vs. 20 & 21 between faithful senior-citizen *Caleb* (he expelled/drove out the giants from Hebron) and the *Benjamites* (who could not drive out regular-sized people from Jerusalem!)

- the record now turns to *another set of tribes* and describes a similar 2-part response:

(3) **Joseph's initial FAITHFULNESS**

[1:22-25...]

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.

- the 'house of Joseph' refers to the tribes of Ephraim & Manasseh, from the two sons of Joseph, which are normally spoken of as **separate** tribes
 - but God refers to them as the **combined** tribe of "Joseph" especially when He wants to highlight their **faithfulness**, as He does here
- however, just as we saw with Judah & Benjamin, the response of the tribe of **Joseph** was also marked by **progressive FAILURE**

[1:27-29...]

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.

²⁹ Nor did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites who dwelt in Gezer; so the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them.

- did you notice that now the Bible speaks of them as Manasseh & Ephraim, not Joseph; we're looking at **failure** here, not **faithfulness**
- 5 cities were not conquered by Manasseh
 - 5 can be a number related to 'strength' (the 5 fingers of a hand, for example)
 - ...so perhaps a hint that the Canaanites retained a firm **grasp** on the land because they were "determined to dwell in that land" as vs. 27 puts it

- by the time we get to all the other tribes, it's all bad news!

...look at vs. 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.

Notice the **degrees of compromise** seen among God's people:

(i) First degree of compromise: Canaanites continue to **live among them**

- we saw this already in vs. 27-29 and here it is again in vs. 30
- this was a direct violation of God's command

(ii) Second degree of compromise: **Israel** lives **among** the **Canaanites**

[1:31-33...]

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.

- so now we see that Asher fails to conquer 7 cities (worse now than Manasseh)
- and Naphtali fails to conquer two cities which were **centers of idolatrous cults** of the Canaanites: Beth-Shemesh (a center for the worship of the Sun God) and Beth-Anath (known for worship of the Canaanite Fertility Goddess)

(iii) **Third degree of compromise:** it gets worse! The Canaanites **drive out** the *children of God* [1:34-36...]

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.

...notice that the Amorites persisted in living in the very area where Joshua had earlier defeated them thru God's miracle of having the sun stand still (in the valley of Aijalon)
– what a sad contrast with their former victory!
...and the Amorites even have their own border!

...the writer of the Book of Judges, who was probably Samuel, is carefully emphasizing the increasing **deterioration** involved in the story of God's people here

- G. Campbell Morgan comments that "Religious apostasy never begins with *intellectual* questioning; it begins with *toleration* for the things that are out of harmony with the holiness of God"

- it was true in Israel's day; it's true in our day too

Let's note 2 more aspects of their failure:

a) there was **spiritual** failure

- they compromised on God's command, revealing *partial* obedience not wholehearted obedience

- at the root of their spiritual failure was a lack of faith in the God who had led them this far so they simply didn't obey His command fully

- we could note 2 examples here:

* "they did not drive out...[this tribe & that group]"

* and in verse 6 we find them copying the pagan practice of mutilation rather than putting Adoni-Bezek to death

- another **partial** obedience as we see them beginning to draw their *standards* from the people around them

...b)and then secondly, there was a **materialistic** failure (vs. 28 tells us "they put the Canaanites under tribute" – they forced them to work as slaves)

- in other words, they valued *slaves* more than their covenant promise to God

We've seen the Lord's **Command**, and Israel's **response**. Now we turn to...

C. The Evaluation of the Lord [2:1-5...]

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.”⁴ 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.

Rather an appropriate conclusion to this opening introduction of Judges, isn't it?

- note the geographic movement here: the **Angel of the Lord** (by the way, this phrase refers to a **theophany**, an appearance of the Lord Himself – it's a phrase which appears 19 times in Judges, more than any other Bible book) the Angel of the Lord goes from "Gilgal to Bochim" (scholars are not sure of the location of Bochim but might have been near Bethel)
- the geographic movement may well have been “up” from the Jordan River valley to the central mountains, but the spiritual movement is the opposite: in the Book of Joshua, Gilgal was a place of victory & blessing; Bochim, by contrast, is a place of "weeping" and judgment
- **compromise** has already led to **catastrophe**
 - this first chapter of Judges is the most striking chapter in Bible about consequences of compromise & partial obedience
- God's **covenant** involved two fairly simple demands:
 - 1) make **no covenants** with the Canaanites
 - 2) do **not permit** any **Canaanite altars** to stand
- ...but the people did **not** obey the Lord
 - so God asks: “**Why** have you done this?”
 - ...God's questions in the Bible are designed to provoke self-examination; we have responsibility for our actions & God treats us as responsible persons
- a **major theme** in Judges involves these **2 sins** of God's people (which are summarized later in 3:6)
 - 1) **adulterous covenanting**
 - appendix #2 (chapters 19-21) deals with the Levites' failure to protect Israel from **adultery**
 - 2) **idolatry**
 - appendix #1 (chapters 17 & 18) deals with the Levites' failure to protect Israel from **idolatry**
- God predicted that the Canaanites would become “**thorns**” in their sides – a constant irritation & painful problem
- and their false gods would become “snares” under the feet of God's people, tripping them up
 - ...maybe we could hope that with enough tripping, perhaps Israel will be driven to its knees!
- but the use of the word “snare” in vs. 3 indicates that more than “tripping” would be involved
- this very likely refers to a *bird trap* still used in Palestine
 - the bird is attracted, it enters the trap, which triggers a spring which in turn knocks down or pierces the bird
 - ...so the reality is that the Canaanites would be the traps enticing Israel into the snare, where they would be pinned down by the false gods they have come to worship
- the snare of **idolatry** – will be explored in the history of **Gideon**
- the snare of **adultery** – will be explored in the history of **Samson**

- as God pronounces His evaluation, the people call the place “Weeping”
- ...but is this the weeping of true repentance? ...or is it more superficial; concerned with the consequences only?
 - When God confronts us with our sin, what kind of weeping results? – just a sorrow for consequences? Or a sorrow that turns us around in true repentance from disobedience to obedience?