

# Judges

## Lesson 1

### Preface

In their last meeting with Joshua before his death, the people of the Nation of Israel made an oath three times that they would serve the LORD. They promised to live under the LORD's covenant within the guidelines of the LORD's commands. The LORD had made it all so simple for them.

As their Eternal LORD, He had chosen Moses to be their first earthly leader. During his forty years in that position, Moses led them out of Egypt, delivered the LORD's covenant and commandments, taught them how to live as a holy and Godly nation in the LORD's will, and prepared them to work together to obtain their long-desired Promised Land.

Nearing Moses' death, the people were not ready to take the Promised Land without another earthly leader. The LORD chose Joshua, the faithful servant of Moses. A proven leader, he had led the nation against the armies of men such as Amalek, Sihon, and Og. Chosen by the LORD and commissioned by Moses, Joshua served the LORD by being the second earthly head of the nation of Israel. Joshua did not change a thing from the way Moses led the people. Moses relied on the LORD for direction, and so did Joshua. Neither made their own plans for the people; the LORD did. Neither made their own goals for the people; the LORD did. For both, they sought the LORD and led the people in His will, not in theirs.

Under Moses and Joshua, the LORD trained His people how to live without the need of an earthly leader. He was to be their Leader. He was to be their LORD. He was to be their King. He was to be their Savior. No longer did they need a human in between; they had full access to the LORD; they had full access to His desire; they had full access to His law; they knew how to live in the LORD's will. Moses and Joshua had trained them well. All the people had to do was live their lives according to the LORD's law written in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, and the LORD would bless them beyond all imagination. As an added benefit, He would also fight all earthly battles for them. They can never see defeat as long as they are faithful to Him. Could it be any simpler?

As we open to the first page of the Book of Judges, we find a nation without an earthly leader for the first time in ninety years. All they have is the LORD and His law to lead them. He is their Eternal Leader. They are His chosen people. Their eyes are to be on Him. He demands it. In His first two commands, He said to them, *You shall have no other god before Me. You shall not worship any graven image.* The people had lived with those commands for ninety years. It should have been ingrained in their hearts and souls. In these two commands, the people will fail Him. They will fail to serve Him fully in six cycles of great sin, and He will do as He promised through Moses and Joshua; He will allow His chosen people to experience defeat and control by foreign people, most of whom were still in the picture because they had disobeyed the LORD by failing to eliminate them from the Promised Land in the first place.

The book covers more than three hundred years of Israel's downfall without a leader. It begins in the same place where the book of Joshua left off, the death of Joshua. Tradition holds that the prophet Samuel was the writer of the entire text of Judges, being that he was the last true judge of Israel before King Saul was chosen. It was to Samuel that the LORD said, *"they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being King over them"* (1 Samuel 8:7b). It was probably Samuel who edited the record in the Book of Joshua, adding the portions that did not occur in Israel's history for years

after the death of Joshua. For example, the addition of Dan's acquisition of tribal land in the north near Mount Hermon where Dan's people became entirely devoted to a Canaanite god and a graven image (compare Joshua 19:47-48 and Judges 18:27-31).

As with the books of Deuteronomy and Joshua, Judges is a review of Israel's completed history. It seems to be divided into three sections. First, a review of the sin of Israel's downfall without a leader (1:1-2:10). Second, a review of the sequence of Israel's downfall without a leader (2:11-16:31). Third, a review of the sway of Israel's downfall without a leader (17:1-21:25).

Thus, the name of the Book is Judges. Why? With each cycle of sin, the people of Israel would need to be judged by an individual called by God to point them back to the LORD. As we will see, once judged, the people of that generation will be in obedience to the LORD until the judge dies. Then the following generation will forsake the LORD, repeating the same cycle of sin of worshipping false Canaanite gods.

We begin our study with a review of the sin of Israel's downfall without a leader that will, in reality, plague the nation of Israel until more than a thousand years after the Second Coming of the LORD. The LORD warned them; Moses warned them; Joshua warned them; they did not listen; they did not obey.

Jim Hastings

## Chapter 1

### I. A Review of the Sin of Israel's Downfall Without a Leader (1:1-2:10)

#### A. The Timing of the Sin of the Downfall (1:1a).

Our writer begins with the timing of the sin of the downfall of Israel in chapter 1, verse 1a. *"Now it came about after the death of Joshua"* (1:1a).

At the end of the Book of Joshua, we read about the last meeting where the people were with Joshua at Shechem. There, he encouraged them to swear to serve the LORD as they had been taught to do since the day they left Egypt, about ninety years before. They agreed. But he also warned them that they had not eliminated Canaanites from all the tribal areas, which was a task of obedience to the LORD's command. Each tribe was responsible for destroying the Canaanites living in their area. He sent them home to eliminate the Canaanites, and he returned to his home in Ephraim, where he eventually died at the age of one hundred and ten. Upon his death, the nation of Israel was without a national leader for the first time in ninety years.

#### B. The History of the Sin of the Downfall

##### 1. The Obedience of the Tribes (1:1b-36)

###### a) In the Tribal Victories (1:1b-17)

After recording the death of Joshua, the writer addresses the history of the sin of the downfall of Israel. He will remind us of the obedience of the tribes that led Israel in the tribal victories. He will also cover the disobedience of the tribes that will soon lead to the tribal failures. First, we come to a review of the tribal victories in verse 1b. *"...that the sons of Israel inquired of the LORD, saying, 'Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?'"*<sup>2</sup> *The LORD said, 'Judah shall go up; behold, I have given the land into his hand.'* (1:1b-2)

At first glance, it seems that the writer is giving new historical information never before addressed. But that is not the case. If you will remember from our study of the Book of Joshua, it is common for a Hebrew writer to cover a story several times in a row. With each pass, the writer adds new information to flush out the story's details little by little until the whole story is known. Simple details first. More complicated details with each pass. If we allow the book of Judges to flow fluidly

from the book of Joshua without a break, we will discover that the Scripture in the first part of this chapter is the fourth pass of the story of the victories of Judah, Simeon, and specifically, the conquest by Caleb against the sons of Anak in Hebron and Debir as recorded first in Joshua 11:21-22, second in Joshua 15:14, and third in Joshua 21:11-16. In this passage in Judges, on this fourth pass, we learn that the tribes of Judah and Simeon were to be the first to show the rest of the nation that a tribe could destroy the Canaanites in each tribal area. We also learn that it was the LORD's decision for Judah to lead, a detail not revealed until this review. In this verse, we learn that Joshua had died. At the end of this review of the sin of Israel's downfall without a leader, the writer will again tell us of the death of Joshua (2:8-9), finishing this pass through the story but also affirming that the writer intends to tell us that the Book of Judges was written after the death of Joshua; however, the details of the opening of Judges is a review of the events in the last years of Joshua's life.

#### (1) The Victories Over the Canaanites and Perizzites (1:3-4a)

We have already mentioned the addition of Simeon into the task with Judah. He is brought into the picture with the victories over the Canaanites and the Perizzites in verse 3. *"Then Judah said to Simeon his brother, 'Come up with me into the territory allotted me, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I in turn will go with you into the territory allotted you.' So Simeon went with him. <sup>4</sup> Judah went up, and the LORD gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hands,"* (1:3-4a).

The partnership of Judah and Simeon is not without its merits. When Joshua divided the land by lots to the tribes, Judah's lot was first. It was the largest section of land that would be given to any tribe. Simeon was among the last seven lots to be drawn after a survey was completed by order of Joshua. The surveyors were to divide the land into seven plots and deliver the survey to Joshua in Shiloh, where he would assign the plots to each tribe. In a strange and unexplained turn of events, Joshua divided the survey of the northern area into six plots and assigned them by lot. However, with the lot of Simeon, Joshua carved out his tribal plot in the midst of Judah's large plot.

The Canaanites who lived in Judah and Simeon's plot were primarily of the tribes of the Amorites and Hittites. In addition, north and outside of Judah's plot, Perizzites lived with that tribal name, descendants of Canaan. However, those Canaanites in that area, called Perizzites, were likely called that name because the Hebrew word for Perizzites is derived from a word that means *residents of an open country*. The land to the north of Judah's plot was clearly *open country*. But some of the land in Judah's and Simeon's plots would be considered *open country* also. Because of that, it seems that the name *Perizzites* is a reference to any Canaanites who live in areas that are considered *open country*. As such, it would explain their mention in this passage. Of course, the Amorites and Hittites living in the plots of Judah and Simeon were definitely Canaanite in heritage.

#### (a) The Victory Over the Bezekites (1:4b-7)

Continuing with new information in this fourth pass through the story of Judah and Simeon's victories over the Canaanites, we learn of the victory over the Bezekites in verse 4b. *"...and they defeated ten thousand men at Bezek. <sup>5</sup> They found Adoni-bezek in Bezek and fought against him, and they defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites. <sup>6</sup> But Adoni-bezek fled; and they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and big toes. <sup>7</sup> Adoni-bezek said, 'Seventy kings with their thumbs and their big toes cut off used to gather up scraps under my table; as I have done, so God has repaid me.' So they brought him to Jerusalem and he died there."* (1:4b-7)

Bezek lay in Judah's land three miles north of Gezer, where Joshua did not lead the troops in the southern campaign. Bezek's leader was called *Adoni-bezek*. *Adoni* means *lord*. He was the *lord of Bezek*. Catching him, and cutting off his thumbs and big toes, was not so uncommon among enemies. It was common for victors to use such mutilation to keep a man from ever being able to wield a sword, a bow, or spear. It was also a sign of deep humiliation associated with Bezek's

statement that he had “*Seventy kings*” in the same shape, whom he had mutilated, who ate scraps from his table. Notice that Judah and Simeon did not kill him on the road where they found him. They took him to Jerusalem, in the Amorite territory, where he died. It does not say they killed him. He must have died from an infection in his wounds.

(b) The Victory Over Jerusalem (1:8)

Arriving in Jerusalem, Judah and Simeon join in the victory over Jerusalem in verse 8. “*Then the sons of Judah fought against Jerusalem and captured it and struck it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire.*” (1:8)

At this point in the story, we must address the often-unknown details about the City of Jerusalem – in the next lesson.