

Judges

Lesson 2

As we left off in the last lesson, the writer, probably Samuel, was still in the first section of the book which we have called *A Review of the Sin of the Downfall of Israel*. In this section, the writer develops two themes—first, *The Victories of the Nation of Israel*, second, *The Failures of the Nation of Israel*. We are still in the first section dealing with victories. We had come to chapter 1, verse 8 where the writer addresses the victory of Judah over the city of Jerusalem. Approaching Jerusalem, the tribe of Judah joined by the tribe of Simeon, took Jerusalem as recorded 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.

As previously mentioned, the city of Jerusalem mentioned here is not the complete city of Jerusalem where King David will live one day. This Jerusalem resides in the old land of the Amorites. Just northeast of this city is a ravine or valley. Across the valley begins the land of the Jebusites. Both are Canaanite tribes. At this point, Israel has taken the Amorite and Jebusite land. The Amorite land belongs to Judah, and the Jebusite land belongs to Benjamin. However, the great and mighty Jebusite Citadel just across the valley from Jerusalem has not been taken by Judah or Benjamin. It will be controlled by the Jebusite king for about three-hundred and fifty-seven more years, until the seventh year of David’s reign, when he conquers the citadel and makes it his capital along with the land of Jerusalem mentioned here in this passage. He will call his new city Jerusalem, ridding the city of the name Jebus. At this point in the story, Benjamin’s failure to take the Jebusite Citadel will be his disobedience before the LORD. The citadel was thought to be unconquerable, and Benjamin does not try to destroy its Canaanite inhabitants. Foolish! The LORD would have taken it for Benjamin if he tried.

(c) The Victory Over the Land (1:9-10)

Capturing Jerusalem, the writer takes us to the victory of the lands of Judah in the south in verse 9. “*Afterward the sons of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites living in the hill country and in the Negev and in the lowland.*”¹⁰ *So Judah went against the Canaanites who lived in Hebron (now the name of Hebron formerly was Kiriath arba); and they struck Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmai.*” (1:9-10)

This, too, is old news, victories that occurred before the death of Joshua, but after he dismissed the people to rid their tribal plots of all Canaanites. Five cities are mentioned here. Hebron is the most recognized. Caleb was promised that city by Moses when the twelve tribes returned with the report that the land was flowing with milk and honey. But Caleb, being the chief of the tribe of Joshua, will also lead the charge against Debir and Zephath. Both cities are important, not because of victories so much, but rather because of the people involved in the victories. Think of this as an introduction to important people who will rise to the top in Israel’s future stories.

(i) The Victory Over Debir (1:11-15)

(a) The Introduction of Othniel and Achsah (1:11-13)

In the victory over the land, we come to the victory over Debir and the introduction of Othniel and Achsah in verse 11. “*Then from there he went against the inhabitants of Debir (now the name of Debir formerly was Kiriath-sepher).*”¹² *And Caleb said, “The one who attacks Kiriath-sepher and captures it, I will even give him my daughter Achsah for a wife.”*¹³ *Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother, captured it; so he gave him his daughter Achsah for a wife.*” (1:11-13)

The writer has now introduced Othniel and Achash twice in Israel's saga between the contents of Joshua and Judges. It will not be the last. Why? Othniel is important to the future of Israel. He will be her first judge turn Israel back toward the LORD recorded in this book.

(b) The Gift to Othniel and Achash (1:14-15)

The writer also saw fit to repeat a story about Caleb's gift to Othniel and Achash in verse 14. *"Then it came about when she came to him, that she persuaded him to ask her father for a field. Then she alighted from her donkey, and Caleb said to her, "What do you want?"¹⁵ She said to him, "Give me a blessing, since you have given me the land of the Neger, give me also springs of water." So Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs."* (1:14-15)

(ii) The Victory Over Zephath (1:16-17)

The writer also sees fit to include the victory over Zephath here, and thereby, introduce the descendants of the Kenite into the storyline as friends of Judah in verse 16. *"The descendants of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up from the city of palms with the sons of Judah, to the wilderness of Judah which is in the south of Arad; and they went and lived with the people.¹⁷ Then Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they struck the Canaanites living in Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. So the name of the city was called Hormah."* (1:16-17)

Moses' father-in-law was Reuel. He was a priest of the tribe of Midian. His priestly name was Jethro. Jethro means *his excellence*. Reuel means *friend of God*. His daughter was Zipporah, who married Moses before he was called by the LORD at the burning bush. She gave Moses two sons.

As a Midianite, Jethro, and his daughter Zipporah, were distant relatives of Moses. Midian, Jethro's ancestor, the father of the tribe, was one of Abraham's sons through Keturah (Genesis 25:1-6).

The first time Moses led the nation to leave Mount Sinai and camp at Kadesh-barnea where the twelve spies were sent out, Jethro and his family joined Moses in the journey (Numbers 10:31-33). That short, one-year journey to Kadesh and back to Mount Sinai took almost a full year. Returning to Mount Sinai, Jethro and his family surely returned to his Midian home near the mountain.

Jethro was a Midianite, but he was also a Kenite, a branch of the Midianites. Some of this Kenite branch of the Midianites were evidently with Moses at the Plain of Moab and crossed the Jordan River on dry ground, and helped destroy the *city of palms*, another name for Jericho. As we find in this verse, these Kenites settled with the people of the tribe of Judah, moving as they moved and living as they lived. But not all of the Kenites joined the tribe of Judah. In chapter 4, we will meet Heber, with his wife Jael, who moved into the northern Promised Land instead of joining Judah in the south.

Much later, during the time of Jeremiah and 2 Kings, we will meet the descendants of these Kenites again through a man named Rechab. His tribe will be called Rechabites. One of his descendants will be called Hammath (1 Chronicles 2:55). His descendant will be named Jehonadab, who will join king Jehu in the ablation of Baal worship and the house of King Ahab. He also vowed that all Rechabites would never drink wine or plant vineyards (Jeremiah 35:6-7).

More can be found about the descendants of this Kenite group that joined the nation of Israel, but enough has been said to prove the point that they were ingrained in the life of the nation from the very beginning, starting with Moses' marriage to Zipporah and all the way to the fall of the Southern Kingdom in the days of Jeremiah.

With the tribes of Judah and Simeon, these Kenites marched to Zephath, three miles north of Gezer, and destroyed the Canaanites. Then, the town was renamed *Hormah*, which means *a place laid waste*. The town belonged to the tribe of Simeon (1 Chronicles 4:30).

While the nation was still under the direction of Joshua, these tribal victories were examples of Israel's obedience to the LORD. But the writer had a purpose in placing them first. He had the

unfortunate task of turning next to the disobedience to the LORD in their tribal failures. These failures will soon lead to a reprimand from the LORD. Israel will ignore the reprimand. Israel will forsake the LORD for idol worship. The LORD will send foreign nations to test Israel. The LORD will then send judges to protect Israel.

The Ten Commandments are relatively familiar to just about everyone in America. We have seen the title written on monuments, magazine covers, newspaper articles, and even frequently on social media sites. But that does not mean that everyone has heard them. Nor does it mean that everyone knows even one of the commandments in the list. However, the Nation of Israel was without excuse. The Ten Commandments were given to Israel when they gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai as the LORD provided for their every need. The Ten Commandments of the LORD for Israel were not ten suggestions. Israel was to keep every one of them to the letter. Along the way, the LORD gave other commands too. Twice, through Moses, the LORD delivered a command specifically concerning the Canaanites and what the Nation of Israel was to do with them. Let us read that command again.

“When the LORD your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Gergashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you,^{2a} and when the LORD your God delivers them before you and you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them.” (Deuteronomy 7:1-2a).

“Only in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, you shall not leave alive anything that breathes.¹⁷ But you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite and the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, as the LORD your God has commanded you,¹⁸ so that they may not teach you to do according to all their detestable things which they have done for their gods, so that you would sin against the LORD your God.” (Deuteronomy 20:16-18).

It was a command. It was not a suggestion. The LORD expected the Israelites to completely destroy every Canaanite, man, woman, boy, or girl that breathed. At this point in the story of the book of Judges, more than fifty years after the command was given, Israel had not fulfilled the command of the LORD. Canaanites still lived in the Promised Land. Israel had been controlling the land for more than fifty years by this time. The writer began this book with the tribal victories at the beginning of the conquest of the Promised Land, but it is now time for the tribal failures to be repeated. The book of Joshua, chapter 13, tells us of the failure to remove the Canaanites just a mere six years into the conquest of the Promised Land. The conquest was over, and Israel failed to ever remove them from the land. And so, in chapter 1, verse 18, we pick up with the history of the sin of the downfall of Israel in their tribal failures to rid the Promised Land of the Canaanites.

b) In the Tribal Failures (1:18-36)
 (1) The Canaanites in Judah (1:18-20)

Now we come to the tribal failure of destroying the Canaanites in Judah's land. Verse 18. “*And Judah took Gaza with its territory and Ashkelon with its territory and Ekron with its territory.¹⁹ Now the LORD was with Judah, and they took possession of the hill country; but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley because they had iron chariots.*

“*Then they gave Hebron to Caleb, as Moses had promised; and he drove out from there the three sons of Anak.*” (1:18-20)



Gaza is the southernmost city in the Gaza strip. Ashkelon is next moving north up the coast. Ekron is the most northeastern city in the strip. Just because Judah took the cities and their territories did not mean they destroyed the people. They did not. Why? This area belonged to the Philistines, not the Canaanites. What does that mean? To understand the difference, we must look into the background of the Philistines; they were not Canaanites. Philistines were people who emigrated to the Gaza Strip from southern Greece. They were descendants of Noah's son, Ham, through his son Mizram. Canaanites were descendants of Noah's son, Ham, through his son, Canaan. The origin of the Philistines is determined by what the prophets said about them. Amos 9:7 calls them "*the Philistines from Caphtor.*" Jeremiah 47:4 calls them "*the remnant of the maritime district of Caphtor.*" However, in Moses' genealogy found in Genesis 10:13-14 we read, "*Mizraim became the father of Ludim and Anamim and Lehabim and Naphtuhim*¹⁴ *and Pathrusim and Casluhim (from which came the Philistines) and Capthorim.*" Smith's Bible Dictionary states,

It has been generally assumed that Caphtor represents Crete and that the Philistines migrated from that island, either directly or through Egypt, into Palestine. But the name Caphtor is more probably identified with the Egyptian Coptos.¹

Therefore, Judah took the cities that belonged to the Philistines, but he did not kill them. Why? They were not Canaanites. They were Egyptian in heritage. The LORD's command did not tell Israel to kill those of Egyptian heritage. Be that as it may, Canaanites lived in the valley to the east of the three Philistine cities, and Judah failed to destroy them because of their iron chariot armies. For this, we can only assume that they did not try to take the Canaanites. Had they tried, the LORD would have fought for them, and they would have been successful. But they failed because they did not try. It will make the LORD angry, as we will see soon.

Once again, the writer tells us that, "*Then they gave Hebron to Caleb, as Moses had promised; and he drove out from there the three sons of Anak.*" The destruction of these people was told first in Joshua 11:21-22, Joshua 14:12-15, Joshua 15:13-14, and Joshua 21:11-16. Counting the four times this same writer spoke of this in Joshua, this insert in Judges makes the fifth time we have heard this story, each time with a little more detail added to the account. Uniquely, the heritage of these Anakim cannot be precisely determined. It is doubtful that they were of Canaanite heritage. According to Easton's Bible Dictionary, they are more likely "a Cushite tribe from Babel, and of the same race as the Phoenicians and the Egyptian shepherd kings."² Cush was the first son of Noah's son, Ham. Cush's brothers were Mizram – the second son, Put – the third son, and Canaan – the fourth son (Genesis 10:6). According to Joshua 11:21-22, some Anakim were left in Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod. However, after this insert in this verse, we will never hear of the Anakim again in the rest of God's Word. This race of long-necked people disappears from the history books altogether. We do not know what happens to those in Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod.

(2) The Canaanites in Benjamin (1:21)

Next, we come to the Canaanites in Benjamin's tribal area. Verse 21. "*But the sons of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem; so the Jebusites have lived with the sons of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.*" (1:20-21)

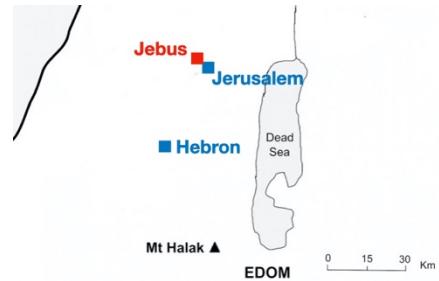
The LORD gave strict orders concerning the Jebusites in Deuteronomy 20:16-18. We mentioned this passage at the beginning of this lesson: therefore, may we highlight the part that

¹ Smith, W. (1986). "Caphtor" In *Smith's Bible Dictionary*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² Easton, M. G. (1893). "Anakim" In *Easton's Bible dictionary*. New York: Harper & Brothers.

belongs to the Jebusites as the LORD says, ‘*But you shall utterly destroy them, … the Jebusite, as the LORD your God has commanded you....*’ (Deuteronomy 20:16-18).

In Joshua 15:8, we learned that the border between the tribal area of Judah and Benjamin ran through a valley that separated Jerusalem into two parts, the old Melchizedekian home in the city of peace was called Jeru-Salem in Abraham’s day, and the old Jebusite Citadel was across the valley in Benjamin’s tribal land. In Joshua 15:63, we were told that Benjamin could not drive the Jebusites out of the citadel. As of Judges’ writing, at least four hundred years later, the Jebusites still controlled the citadel and will continue to do so until the seventh year of King David, when he will finally capture the citadel and make it his home, and incorporate it into his city of Jerusalem. The citadel’s other name was Mount Zion. The story of the origin of the Jebusite citadel in Jerusalem is found in Ezekiel chapter 16. Benjamin failed to take the city for her own. The Canaanites remained only in that portion of Benjamin’s land. It is pure disobedience to the command and will of the LORD.



Locations of Jebus and Jerusalem