

Judges

Lesson 5

The nation of Israel was clearly accustomed to having the judges among them to handle all the legal issues. The court could be as formal as at the gates of the city, or as informal as under a patch of palm trees. The judges already had their marching orders from the LORD. They were to judge the issues among the people in accordance with the LORD's covenant and His commandments.

When we complete the book of Judges, we will be able to look back and see that some of the judges were part of the normal system put in place by the LORD and Moses. However, we will also find a few who arrived on the scene outside the normal process of selection of the judges. But at first, the judges "raised up" were probably those selected in the normal course of the changing of the guard in the courts.

From what the LORD did in "raising up" the judges, we come to what Israel did in responding to the judges. Verse 17. *"Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they played the harlot after other gods and bowed themselves down to them. They turned aside quickly from the way in which their fathers had walked in obeying the commandments of the LORD; they did not do as their fathers."* (2:17)

Here we see that this new generation of Israel "did not listen to their judges." Even without a national leader, the LORD had a system in place to keep the Nation of Israel on the right path. The organized system of judges and priests was all that was needed to keep the people in the center of the LORD's plan. After the death of Joshua, and the elders and judges who served with Joshua, it did not take long for the people to turn "*aside quickly from the way in which their fathers had walked in obeying the commandments of the LORD.*" The nail in the coffin is in the last part of the verse – "*they did not do as their fathers.*" The influence of the regular judges was lost. Nevertheless, among the regular judges, some would rise to the top to deliver Israel.

With the judges in place or not, as stated in this passage, Israel "*played the harlot after other gods and bowed themselves down to them.*" A blatant disobedience to the commandments of the LORD who saved them out of Egypt, and elected them to be His people, His nation, His way by which the Savior would come to the world.

b) The Regard of the Judges (2:18)

(1) The LORD Protected Israel (2:18a)

Leaving the responsibility of the judges, the writer takes us to the regard of the judges. In that, the LORD protected Israel. Verse 18a. *"When the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge;"* (2:18a)

When we step back and look at this verse, it seems clear that the writer is recording on paper the stories found in the book of Judges after the entire set of stories are complete. He is not writing during the events of this book. If he was, how could he make the statement that once the LORD's judge was in place, the people were delivered until the death of the judge? Furthermore, this verse is a summary of a review of all the judges selected by the LORD. No writer lived during the lives of all the judges for that span was more than three hundred years at the least. The writer had to be drafting the original book after all that transpired in the book was complete. Nevertheless, in this verse we see the promise that the LORD protected Israel during the days of the judges.

(2) The LORD Pitied Israel (2:18b)

Then the writer tells us that the LORD pitied Israel in verse 18b. *"... for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them."* (2:18b)

Let us break down what is being said in this verse another way. Breaking the commandments of the LORD is a sin. Sin always ends up in suffering. Suffering always ends up in affliction. Affliction

always comes from oppression. Oppression always results in groaning. Groaning is always heard by the LORD. In the case of Israel, the LORD had pity for them. It was all their fault, but He still had pity. We must not use the wrong definition for this word “*pity*.” Do not associate it with *a feeling of sympathy aroused by sorrow or the suffering of others* as we define the word today. The word means to stir up a *disposition of mercy, a quality of being merciful out of kindness, or generosity of spirit*, but surely out of sympathy. Sympathy is a feeling; kindness or generosity is an action. The LORD was moved to kindness and generosity. Because the two are actions, the verse is telling us that the LORD is going to do something about the sin of Israel against Him. He would use the judges to complete His acts of kindness and generosity to check the cycle of the sin of idolatry.

With the death of Joshua, as well as the leaders of Israel who saw the mighty works of the LORD, the writer tells us how the cycle of the sin of idolatry commenced. Quickly the LORD checked the cycle of sin in Israel as He began to raise the influence of some of the judges in the nation to bring the people in line. But that did not help. The cycle of the sin of idolatry continued in the nation.

1. The Cycle of the Sin of Idolatry Continued (2:19-3:6)

a) The Cycle of the Sin of Idolatry Grows Stronger (2:19)

As the cycle of the sin of idolatry continues in Israel, the cycle of the sin of idolatry grows stronger. Verse 19. *“But it came about when the judge died, that they would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them and bow down to them; they did not abandon their practices or their stubborn ways.”* (2:19)

The writer announces the problem in Israel which will plague the nation until the time of the Tribulation – outright rebellion against the LORD. He said to them at Mount Sinai, *“you will have no other god … you will not make any graven image.”* Yet, Israel had followed other gods, Canaanite gods. They have bowed to other gods.

b) The Anger of the LORD Burns Greater (2:20-23)

(1) The Nation of Israel Transgressed (2:20)

And so, the anger of the LORD burns greater as the Nation of Israel transgresses. The writer tells us in verse 20, *“So the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He said, ‘Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers and has not listened to My voice…’”* (2:20). The writer tells us the reason for the anger of the LORD – His covenant and commandment has been ignored.

(2) The Nation of Israel Tested (2:21-22)

Because the Nation of Israel transgressed the covenant and commandment, the writer tells us of the Nation of Israel tested. Verse 21. *“I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, in order to test Israel by them, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk in it as their fathers did, or not”* (2:21-22). The nation that ignored the covenant and commandments of the LORD will no longer have the power of the LORD fighting to protect it. Israel will be on its own. Notice the last portion of the sentence, *“whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk in it as their fathers did, or not….”* What does that mean? It means that the LORD knows that some the people of the nation will follow the covenant and the commands of the LORD, but the majority will not. Therefore, all the people will experience the testing of the nation by the LORD. The nation as a whole will taste the bitter pain of having Canaanites and their gods in the land.

(3) The Nation of Israel Thwarted (2:23-3:6)

From the Nation of Israel transgressed, to the nation of Israel tested, we come to the nation of Israel thwarted. Verse 23. *“So the LORD allowed those nations to remain, not driving them out quickly; and He did not give them into the hand of Joshua.”* (2:23) In this verse, we find an interesting clue concerning the Canaanites that might be glossed over too quickly if it were not for the rest of the Holy Writ that we have the privilege to own and hold in our hands today. Let us set the scene. As we have mentioned

many times in the study of the book of Joshua and in this study of the book of Judges, under the direction of Joshua, Israel's leader, all of the Canaanites were ordered by the LORD to be destroyed upon encountering them during the campaigns to take the Promised Land. In his last days, Joshua ordered the completion of the deaths of all Canaanites; however, the tribes failed to complete the job before the death of Joshua. Furthermore, some of the people of the tribes of Israel began to fall into the Canaanite religious trap which the LORD tried to protect them from in the beginning. Now, with some Israelites bowing to the gods of Canaan, the LORD will allow the Canaanites to remain in the land and "*will not drive them out quickly.*" With the rest of the Scriptures, we know that the LORD will eventually drive them out, killing every last one of them. He will do it Himself when He comes to redeem the Promised Land and the world for His own kingdom at the Battle of Armageddon. Listen to the last words of the prophecy of Zechariah concerning His coming. Zechariah 14:20-21.

In that day there will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, "HOLY TO THE LORD." And the cooking pots in the LORD's house will be like the bowls before the altar. Every cooking pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holy to the LORD of hosts; and all who sacrifice will come and take of them and boil in them. And there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts in that day.³

And so, the Canaanites will be destroyed by the LORD, but, "*He did not give them into the hand of Joshua.*" Because the Nation of Israel did not complete the order of the LORD concerning the Canaanites during the days of Joshua, the Nation of Israel will be plagued by the Canaanites until the LORD completes the task Himself, far in the future, even in our future, passed the years we live in – 2021 AD.

Chapter 3

(a) The Tribal Nations Who Will Test Israel (3:1-4)

With the turn to Chapter 3, our writer sees fit to specify the nations that the LORD will use to test Israel. He begins in verse 1 of chapter 3. "*Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to test Israel by them (that is, all who had not experienced any of the wars of Canaan; only in order that the generations of the sons of Israel might be taught war, those who had not experienced it formerly).*³ *These nations are: the five lords of the Philistines and all the Canaanites and the Sidonians and the Hivites who lived in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal-hermon as far as Lebo-hamath.* ⁴ *They were for testing Israel, to find out if they would obey the commandments of the LORD, which He had commanded their fathers through Moses.*" (3:1-4)

Four groups are mentioned who will be used by the LORD to test Israel. First, we see the "*five lords of the Philistines.*" These lords will be the major leaders of the five major cities in the area we know today as the Gaza Strip. Those cities have already been mentioned in the books of Joshua as Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath. The cities are also mentioned together in 1 Samuel 6:17-18. The Gaza Strip is on the west coastline of Israel by the Mediterranean Sea. Its southern border is attached to the far east border of Egypt. Its eastern border is with the tribal areas of Judah and Simeon in the south of the Promised Land.



Five cities of the five Philistine Lords

³ *New American Standard Bible, 1995 Edition: Paragraph Version.* (1995). (Zec 14:20–21). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

The second group is the Canaanites. The whole area was filled with Canaanites when Israel crossed the Jordan River to take the land. However, through the story in Joshua we learned that it was the Canaanites in the tribal areas of Dan and Manasseh that were not removed from the land. These Canaanites were those who lived on the western coastline next to the Mediterranean Sea, north of the Gaza Strip.

The third group were the Sidonians. For those who have spent any time in the rest of the Bible, and in World History, you have probably heard of Tyre and Sidon, two major city ports in the land of Lebanon that were famous in the shipping trade industry of the day. Sidon was first settled by descendants of Canaan and was fully established at the time of this story in Judges as a market sea port. Some of the Sidonians had moved twenty miles south to establish a better port in Tyre by this time, but, Sidon was still the predominate city, and the inhabitants of Tyre were relocated Sidonians. Therefore, because the cities are not mentioned, only the heritage of the people involved, the Sidonians of both major port cities were more than likely included in the LORD's mind of those who would test Israel. The Canaanite Sidonians in Lebanon, had the power and sway to cause great consternation for the Israelites.

The fourth group is the Hivites who controlled two areas of that was supposed to be included in the Promised Land. The first was to the far north in Mount Lebanon mountain range. The second was in the tribal allotments of Manasseh and Ephraim. However, the Hivite area spoken of this passage is further defined as the group in the Mount Lebanon area.

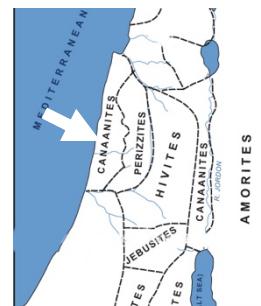
Where is Mount Lebanon? Mount Lebanon is not just one mountain. It is a mountain range that runs parallel to the Mediterranean Sea. It is about one hundred miles in length. It runs almost the full length of the country of Lebanon from north to south.

Where is Mount Baal Hermon? Baal Hermon is a city on the western side of the Mount Lebanon range. To the east of the city is a smaller mountain range. One mountain in that range is next to the city of Baal Hermon and it is called Mount Baal Hermon.

Where is Lebo-hamath? The word "Lebo" means *the entrance*. Therefore, Lebo-hamath is the entrance to a place called Hamath. It is the principal city in upper Syria, northern Lebanon. All the people living in Lebanon are descendants of Noah, through Ham, through Canaan. These were Canaanites that were supposed to be killed by the Israelites because Lebanon was supposed to be part of the Promised Land. It was not fully taken. The northern border of the Promised Land stopped at Baal Hermon. This was a disobedient act on the part of Israel; therefore, the LORD would use these Canaanites to test Israel living in the Promised Land just south of Lebanon.

Why would the LORD use these Canaanites living to the north outside of the Promised Land to test Israel? The answer is in the writer's words. "*They were for testing Israel, to find out if they would obey the commandments of the LORD, which He had commanded their fathers through Moses.*"

With that, the writer has described the foreign tribes that the LORD will use to test Israel.



Location of the Canaanite tribal area on the west coast of the Promised Land



Two locations of the tribal areas of the Hivites



The Outline of the Country of Lebanon. The Mount Lebanon mountain range can be seen running parallel to the Mediterranean Sea.

(b) The Canaanite Nations Who Will Test Israel (3:5-6)

Next, the writer identifies the foreign tribes living in the Promised Land who the LORD will use to test Israel. Verse 5. *"The sons of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and they took their daughters for themselves as wives, and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods."* (3:5-6)

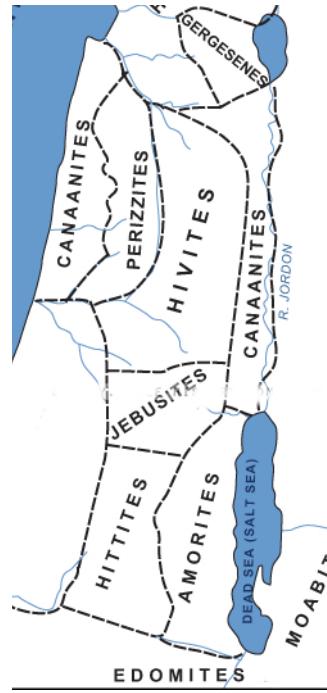
We have used maps to visualize the locations of the foreign tribes that the LORD will use to test Israel that live outside the conquered Promised Land. Now we will do the same for those foreigners living among the Israelites inside the conquered Promised Land. They are the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. With the map in view, it is easy to see that these six foreign tribes are basically living in the midst of all the tribes of Israel living on the west side of the Jordan River. It is interesting that all of these tribes were in the part of the Promised Land taken under the leadership of Joshua. No foreign tribes lived in the Promised Land on the east side of the Jordan River taken under the leadership of Moses. Moses had completed his work. All the foreigners on the east side had been totally destroyed according to the command of the LORD.

The LORD allowed these foreign tribes to infest and test the Nation of Israel long enough that Israel became accustom to them being among them. We know that because our writer had told us, *"and they [Israel's people] took their daughters for themselves as wives, and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods."* There we have it. The writer has confirmed it. Israel had done exactly what the LORD told them not to do. Israel had done exactly what the LORD knew they would do if Israel did not destroy all the Canaanites and their descendants living in the boundaries of the Promised Land, and in the boundaries of the land what was supposed to be taken for the Promised Land, but was not. What was the LORD's instructions to them? Here it is once 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).

In verse 18 we have the LORD's prophecy that has been fulfilled by the disobedient Israelites. *"...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."* Not only did these Canaanites teach the Israelites their detestable things, the Israelites married into the Canaanites and the Canaanites married into the Israelites. No wonder the anger of the LORD burned against Israel. It could have all been avoided if Israel had been faithful in obeying the LORD. Rather, Israel, like a foolish child, warned and warned by his parents, would metaphorically find the only puddle within hundreds of miles and step in it.



Israel had failed the test. The cycle of Israel's downfall begins. Cycle one starts with the Mesopotamian takeover of the northern part of the Promised Land. Enters from the northeast, Cushan-rishathaim – the Mesopotamia King.