

Don't Judge Me, Lead Me: The Book Of Judges

Judges 1:27-36

"From Conquest To Compromise"

It has been said that the pathway to hell is paved with good intentions. And from our passage today in the Book of Judges, we might also add that the pathway to epic spiritual failure is paved with partial obedience.

And so it goes, we begin our walk with God through Jesus with fire and fervour. But before long we stray off the path of righteousness to revisit some of the worldly attractions we so fondly remember from the past. Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel and reminded them of their history, how God led them from their ancestors' worship of other gods, through the Exodus from Egypt, victories over enemies, and the gift of the promised land. He emphasized that God had provided for them, delivering them from danger, giving them victory, and granting them cities and lands they did not labor for.

Predictably, the Israelites—in all their well-intentioned bravado—amen their godly, fearless leader:

Joshua 24:16

Then the people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods!"

Joshua 24:24

And the people said to Joshua, "We will serve the LORD our God and obey him."

Amidst their supposedly wholehearted affirmations of Joshua's warnings and exhortations, they were nothing but agreeable.

Today on the Teaching Room, we follow the slippery slope the Israelites slip down time and time again, God's grace in the midst of their compromise, and perhaps we see a bit of ourselves in the Israelites—namely our tendency to stray from the path of righteousness through our own varying degrees of sin, self, and worldliness.

Judges 1:27

(KJV) Neither did Manasseh drive out the inhabitants of Bethshean and her towns, nor Taanach and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Dor and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Ibleam and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Megiddo and her towns: but the Canaanites would dwell in that land.

(NIV) But Manasseh did not drive out the people of Beth Shan or Taanach or Dor or Ibleam or Megiddo and their surrounding settlements, for the Canaanites were determined to live in that land.

Did you catch that? The Canaanites were "determined to live in that land." Folks, that's it. The supposed enemy loved the promised land too and their stubborn will would be done because God allowed them to stay in order to punish Israel. Regarding Beth Shan, it was located at the eastern end of the Jezreel Valley, served as a vital hub along the Via Maris highway.

Settlement dates back to the Chalcolithic period, with continuous habitation. It was expanded during the Hellenistic period and became part of the Decapolis cities. Excavations suggest it survived the Sea Peoples' attacks, remaining under Egyptian control until Solomonic times when it was added to Israelite territory.

Looking ahead to Judges 2, we see clearly God's long-term strategy for chastising the Israelites:

Judges 2:20-23

Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and said, "Because this nation has violated the covenant I ordained for their ancestors and has not listened to me, I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died. I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the LORD and walk in it as their ancestors did." The LORD had allowed those nations to remain; he did not drive them out at once by giving them into the hands of Joshua.

Beloved, it is not as if God does not make clear to the Israelites—and to us today—His will through His unchanging Word. Listen to Deuteronomy 7:1-6:

Deuteronomy 7:1-6

When the LORD your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you—and when the LORD your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy. Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your children away from following me to serve other gods, and the LORD's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you. This is what you are to do to them: Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire. For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

And in the New Testament, in the context of 1 John—the context of our love relationship with God—we may do well to heed this warning:

1John 2:15-17

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

*QUESTION FOR MEDITATION: Do you agree with the statement: "God makes His Word clear to us so that we may obey it"? Why or why not? Do you think we should rely on someone else—a teacher or preacher—to make clear to us the Word of God? Or is our Teacher the Holy Spirit sufficient for our daily learning of and living out the Scriptures?

*STUDY POINT: Make a list of all the ways the Israelites compromised in their obedience to God in Judges Chapter One. Provide Scripture references to back up your findings. How

might the outcome of their present and future lives in the promised land be different if their obedience had been complete?

Judges 1:28

(KJV) And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute, and did not utterly drive them out.

(NIV) When Israel became strong, they pressed the Canaanites into forced labor but never drove them out completely.

Why did the Israelites have to press the Canaanites into forced labour as tax paying vassals to the state? Because the Canaanites were still alive!

But set aside for a moment the forced labour bit here. The point the writer is emphasizing is “[they] never drove them out completely.” Beloved, can you see the application here to our own lives? Whether it’s lust, pride, covetousness, hatred, unforgiveness—a little sin is too much. Or to say it Scripturally:

Galatians 5:9

A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.

*QUESTION FOR MEDITATION: Given the Scripture above, what areas of sin in your walk with God have you kept hidden for too long? What consequences do you think you have suffered as a result of this cover up?

Ask God to prepare you physically, emotionally, and spiritually to confront and confess these stubborn sins and let God begin the healing process He is so willing to bless you with.

Judges 1:29

(KJV) Neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer; but the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them.

(NIV) Nor did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites living in Gezer, but the Canaanites continued to live there among them.

But the Canaanites continued to live there among them. Hmm, where have we heard this before?

At this point, I want to share this passage with you:

Romans 2:6-8

God "will repay each person according to what they have done." To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.

Note carefully that these verses do not assume that we will obey perfectly but rather we pursue God and His Word persistently. Even with the Israelites, whose motives we might question, God stays true to His love for them and covenant promises to them. Likewise, He is truly Father God to us—bringing correction when we need it—crediting to our account everything we are in Christ Jesus, the Son in Whom He is well-pleased (Matthew 3:17).

*QUESTION FOR MEDITATION: Recall a few times in your walk with God when you were aware of His loving, but sometimes painful, correction. How did you respond at the time? How would you respond now?

*STUDY POINT: Locate six passages in either Old or New Testaments in which you could see God's strong correction of the Israelites. Note the degree of severity of the punishments compared to the crimes against God themselves. And was there a change in behaviour of the Israelites as the result of God's chastisement?

Now, in these next six verses, we see more of the slow, steady deterioration of Israel's conquest into compromise. A lot of it!

Judges 1:30

Neither did Zebulun drive out the Canaanites living in Kitron or Nahalol, so these Canaanites lived among them, but Zebulun did subject them to forced labor.

Kitron, designated to Zebulun, is believed to be situated in the northwestern part of the Jezreel Valley. While some propose locations in the Acco Plain to align with Canaanite military strategies, current evidence favors its placement in the Jezreel Valley.

Judges 1:31

Nor did Asher drive out those living in Akko or Sidon or Ahlab or Akzib or Helbah or Aphek or Rehob.

As a point of context: Asher's territory, located on the Plain of Acre, bordered Zebulun and Naphtali to the east and extended northward to the Phoenician ports of Tyre and Sidon. Egyptian records mention several towns in this area, including Helkath, Acshaph, Mishal, Allammelech, and Kanah. Identified sites include Cabul, Ebron, Ummah, and Rehob. Control over Tyre and Sidon was likely nominal, with Israel possibly exerting influence over surrounding villages at times.

Judges 1:32

The Asherites lived among the Canaanite inhabitants of the land because they did not drive them out.

Stating the obvious? Perhaps, but remember this verse states one of the predominant themes woven through the Book of Judges—namely, the consequences of spiritual compromise.

Judges 1:33

Neither did Naphtali drive out those living in Beth Shemesh or Beth Anath; but the Naphtalites too lived among the Canaanite inhabitants of the land, and those living in Beth Shemesh and Beth Anath became forced laborers for them.

Beth Shemesh was located—as discussed in Joshua 21:16—in the northeastern Shephelah bordering Philistia. The exact location of Beth Anath remains uncertain; however, Safed el-Battikh in the upper Galilee region is currently the most probable candidate. Scholarly speculation and Egyptian history seem to indicate it lay along the route between Hazor and Tyre.

Judges 1:34 T

he Amorites confined the Danites to the hill country, not allowing them to come down into the plain.

This verse, perhaps more than any other in today's passage, reveals the hideous living conditions of the Israelites in their own promised land. Their enemies literally have dominion over significant patches of their land!

This ethnic group the Amorites predate the formation of Israel in Canaan. Their significant cultural and linguistic impact extended to Mesopotamia and Syro-Palestine, contributing to the development of Hammurabi's Babylon and maintaining cultural identity into the early Iron Age. The Amorites were also known as the Amurru, and widely populated areas of Mesopotamia post-2000 B.C. Mentioned in texts from Mari and administrative documents of Hammurabi, they were listed in Egyptian records as a kingdom during the fourteenth century B.C. Their control over Transjordan might have been linked to conflicts between Egypt and the Hittite Empire, notably during the battle of Kadesh around 1290 B.C. The arrival of the Sea Peoples around 1200 B.C. further destabilized the region. In the Bible, "Amorites" refers to the kingdoms of Sihon and Og, as well as the inhabitants of Canaan. (See Numbers 21:21, Numbers 21:33; Genesis 15:16; Deuteronomy 1:7).

Judges 1:35

And the Amorites were determined also to hold out in Mount Heres, Aijalon and Shaalbim, but when the power of the tribes of Joseph increased, they too were pressed into forced labor.

Aijalon, allotted to Dan, likely corresponds to Yalo, located five miles east of Gezer. Its strategic position on a major road into the hill country is noted in the El Amarna texts and Saul's campaigns (1 Samuel 14:31). As for Shaalbim, situated in Dan's territory, it's identified with Selbit, three miles northwest of Aijalon. It was later included in Solomon's administrative district and may have functioned as a fortress, similar to Aijalon, guarding the passage through the Valley of Aijalon.

Judges 1:36

The boundary of the Amorites was from Scorpion Pass to Sela and beyond.

Scorpion Pass refers to the Neqb es-Safa, southwest of the Dead Sea, possibly used by the Egyptians for travel to copper-mining areas near the Arabah and Eilat. Regarding Sela, its exact identification remains uncertain, but its association with the Scorpion Pass suggests a location southwest of the Dead Sea. Some suggest Petra or modern Sela', yet excavations haven't uncovered deposits earlier than the ninth century B.C. for these sites.

So, now that we have observed the dismal spiritual state of the Israelites because of their idolatry and intermarriage and compromise, do we fare any better as believers in 2024?

Absolutely, yes! We have Jesus! He fulfilled for us all righteousness (Matthew 3:15).

~ Reverend Darren McClelland