

Judges

Chapter 1

Israel Fights the Remaining Canaanites

After the death of Joshua, the Israelites asked the LORD, “Who will be the first to go up and fight for us against the Canaanites?”² The LORD answered, “Judah is to go; I have given the land into their hands.”³ Then the men of Judah said to the Simeonites their brothers, “Come up with us into the territory allotted to us, to fight against the Canaanites. We in turn will go with you into yours.” So the Simeonites went with them.⁴ When Judah attacked, the LORD gave the Canaanites and Perizzites into their hands and they struck down ten thousand men at Bezek.⁵ It was there that they found Adoni-Bezek and fought against him, putting to rout the Canaanites and Perizzites.⁶ Adoni-Bezek fled, but they chased him and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and big toes.⁷ Then Adoni-Bezek said, “Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off have picked up scraps under my table. Now God has paid me back for what I did to them.” They brought him to Jerusalem, and he died there.⁸ The men of Judah attacked Jerusalem also and took it. They put the city to the sword and set it on fire.⁹ After that, the men of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites living in the hill country, the Negev and the western foothills.¹⁰ They advanced against the Canaanites living in Hebron (formerly called Kiriath Arba) and defeated Sheshai, Ahiman and Talmi.¹¹ From there they advanced against the people living in Debir (formerly called Kiriath Sepher).¹² And Caleb said, “I will give my daughter Acsah in marriage to the man who attacks and captures Kiriath Sepher.”¹³ Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother, took it; so Caleb gave his daughter Acsah to him in marriage.¹⁴ One day when she came to Othniel, she urged him to ask her father for a field. When she got off her donkey, Caleb asked her, “What can I do for you?”¹⁵ She replied, “Do me a special favor. Since you have given me land in the Negev, give me also springs of water.” Then Caleb gave her the upper and lower springs.¹⁶ The descendants of Moses’ father-in-law, the Kenite, went up from the City of Palms with the men of Judah to live among the people of the Desert of Judah in the Negev near Arad.¹⁷ Then the men of Judah went with the Simeonites their brothers and attacked the Canaanites living in Zephath, and they totally destroyed the city. Therefore it was called Hormah.¹⁸ The men of Judah also took Gaza, Ashkelon and Ekron—each city with its territory.¹⁹ The LORD was with the men of Judah. They took possession of the hill country, but they were unable to drive the people from the plains, because they had iron chariots.²⁰ As Moses had promised, Hebron was given to Caleb, who drove from it the three sons of Anak.²¹ The Benjamites, however, failed to dislodge the Jebusites, who were living in Jerusalem; to this day the Jebusites live there with the Benjamites.²² Now the house of Joseph attacked Bethel, and the LORD was with them.²³ When they sent men to spy out Bethel (formerly called Luz),²⁴ the spies saw a man coming out of the city and they said to him, “Show us how to get into the city and we will see that you are treated well.”²⁵ So he showed them, and they put the city to the

sword but spared the man and his whole family. ²⁶ He then went to the land of the Hittites, where he built a city and called it Luz, which is its name to this day. ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ When Israel became strong, they pressed the Canaanites into forced labor but never drove them out completely. ²⁹ Nor did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites living in Gezer, but the Canaanites continued to live there among them. ³⁰ Neither did Zebulun drive out the Canaanites living in Kitron or Nahalol, who remained among them; but they did subject them to forced labor. ³¹ Nor did Asher drive out those living in Acco or Sidon or Ahlab or Aczib or Helbah or Aphek or Rehob, ³² and because of this the people of Asher lived among the Canaanite inhabitants of the land. 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. ³⁴ The Amorites confined the Danites to the hill country, not allowing them to come down into the plain. ³⁵ And the Amorites were determined also to hold out in Mount Heres, Aijalon and Shaalbim, but when the power of the house of Joseph increased, they too were pressed into forced labor. ³⁶ The boundary of the Amorites was from Scorpion Pass to Sela and beyond.

1:1–3:6 An introduction in two parts: (1) an account of Israel's failure to lay claim completely to the promised land as the Lord had directed (1:1–36) and of his rebuke for their disloyalty (2:1–5); (2) an overview of the main body of the book (3:7–16:31), portraying Israel's rebellious ways in the centuries after Joshua's death and showing how the Lord dealt with her in that period (2:6–3:6). See Introduction: Literary Features. (CSB)

1:1–36 Judah is assigned leadership in occupying the land (v. 2; see 20:18). Her vigorous efforts (together with those of Simeon) highlight by contrast the sad story of failure that follows. Only Ephraim's success at Bethel (vv. 22–26) breaks the monotony of that story. (CSB)

1:1 *After the death of Joshua.* The book of Judges, like that of Joshua, tells of an era following the death of a leading figure in the history of redemption (see Jos 1:1). Joshua probably died c. 1390 B.C. The battles under his leadership broke the power of the Canaanites to drive the Israelites out of the land. The task that now confronted Israel was the actual occupation of Canaanite territory (see notes on Jos 18:3; 21:43–45). (CSB)

asked the LORD. Probably by the priestly use of Urim and Thummim (see notes on Ex 28:30; 1Sa 2:28). (CSB)

Urim and Thummim are objects placed in the breastpiece of the high priest. Their exact nature is unknown. They were used, however, to determine the will of the Lord (Ex. 28:30; Lev. 8:8; Num. 27:21). (Lutheran Bible Companion – Volume 2)

go up. The main Israelite encampment was at Gilgal, near Jericho in the Jordan Valley (about 800 feet below sea level), while the Canaanite cities were mainly located in the central hill country (about 2,500–3,500 feet above sea level). (CSB)

1:2 *Judah is to go.* See 20:18. Judah was also the first to be assigned territory west of the Jordan (Jos 15). The leadership role of the tribe of Judah had been anticipated in the blessing of Jacob (Ge 49:8–12). (CSB)

1:3 *Simeonites.* Joshua assigned to Simeon cities within the territory of Judah (Jos 19:1, 9; see Ge 49:5–7). (CSB)

1:4 *Canaanites.* See note on Ge 10:6. (CSB)

Perizzites. See note on Ge 13:7. (CSB)

into their hand. The Lord was behind the victory. (TLSB)

Bezek. Location uncertain. Saul marshaled his army there before going to Jabesh Gilead (1Sa 11:8). (CSB)

Lit, “pebble.” Possibly an early, and belittling, reference to Jerusalem. (TLSB)

1:5 *Adoni-Bezek.* Means “lord of Bezek.” (CSB)

“Lord of pebble,” possibly mimicking the names of two former kings of Jerusalem: Melchizedek (“King of Righteousness”; Gn 14:18–20) and Adoni-zedek (“Lord of Righteousness”; Jsh 10:1–2). (TLSB)

1:6 *cut off his thumbs and big toes.* Physically mutilating prisoners of war was a common practice in the ancient Near East (see note on 16:21). It rendered them unfit for military service. (CSB)

Body mutilation to humiliate the victim and incapacitate him, as well as to inflict fear on other rulers. Such cruelty was common in the ancient Near East; it is troubling to see the men of Judah and Simeon practice it here. As time went by, the Israelites acted and thought less as the Lord’s covenant people and more as Canaanites. (TLSB)

1:7 *Seventy kings.* Canaan was made up of many small city-states, each of which was ruled by a king. “Seventy” may be a round number, or it may be symbolic of a large number. (CSB)

they. Israelites. (TLSB)

under my table. Humiliating treatment, like that given to a dog (see Mt 15:27; Lk 16:21). *God has paid me back.* See note on Ex 21:23–25. (CSB)

1:8 *attacked Jerusalem.* Although the city was defeated, it was not occupied by the Israelites at this time (see v. 21). Israel did not permanently control the city until David captured it c. 1000 B.C. (2Sa 5:6–10). (CSB)

captured it. This conquest of Jerusalem was only temporary. In v 21, the Benjaminites were unable to drive the Jebusites out of Jerusalem, as archaeology confirms. A stepped-stone structure built in the northeast part of the old city dates to this period and could be the work of Jebusite defenders. The city remained a pocket of resistance for more than three centuries, until David captured it as his capital city (2Sm 5:6–7). (TLSB)

1:9 *hill country.* Rocky hills running like a spine north to south through the land.(TLSB)

Negeb. Desert region extending south from Jerusalem toward the Sinai Peninsula. (TLSB)

lowland. Shephelah, the gentle hilly region sloping from Jerusalem to the flat coastal plain along the Great Sea. (TLSB)

1:10 *Kiriath Arba.* See note on Jos 14:15. (CSB)

Hebron’s alternate name, meaning “City of Four,” probably referring to an original federation of four cities. (TLSB)

1:11 *Debir.* See note on Jos 10:38. (CSB)

Also called *Kiriath-sepher*, “City of the Book,” located c 10 mi S of Hebron. (TLSB)

1:12-15 *Achsah.* Women often go unnamed in OT, but Achsah is named as a strong, independent woman. (TLSB)

1:12 *Caleb.* He and Joshua had brought back an optimistic report about the prospects of conquering Canaan (Nu 14:6–9). (CSB)

daughter ... in marriage. Victory in battle was one way to pay the bride-price for a girl (see 1Sa 18:25). (CSB)

1:13 *Othniel.* First major judge (see 3:7–11). (CSB)

1:14 *she urged him to ask her father for a field.* Well within Achsah’s right to request; an illustration of the boldness with which a daughter could approach her father. (TLSB)

1:15 *upper and lower springs.* They probably still water the local farms near Hebron. (CSB)

Achsah wanted a reliable source of water in this semiarid climate. (TLSB)

1:16 *Moses' father-in-law.* See note on Ex 2:16. (CSB)

Arad. C 10 mi E of Beersheba (traditional southern boundary of the land) and 20 mi S of Hebron. Archaeologists discovered a small temple or shrine within the fortress, the design of which agreed in many ways with biblical descriptions of a sanctuary. The priestly names Pashhur and Meremoth (cf Jer 20:1; Ezr 8:33) were found on potsherds near the temple, which was in use for centuries. (TLSB)

1:17 *men of Judah ... Simeonites.* Judah was fulfilling her commitment (v. 3). (CSB)

Zepthath. “Watchtower”; Canaanite city in the region of Judah. (TLSB)

Hormah. New name may be a description instead of a proper name. (TLSB)

1:18 *Gaza, Ashkelon and Ekron.* Three of the five main cities inhabited by the Philistines (see map below). (CSB)

These cities, along with Gath and Ashdod, were the five major Philistine cities, controlling the Great Sea coast in southwest Canaan. (TLSB)

1:19 *unable to drive the people from.* Israel failed to comply with God’s commands (Dt 7:1–5; 20:16–18) to drive the Canaanites out of the land. Five factors were involved in that failure: (1) The Canaanites possessed superior weapons (v. 19); (2) Israel disobeyed God by making treaties with the Canaanites (2:1–3); (3) Israel violated the covenant the Lord had made with their forefathers (2:20–21); (4) God was testing Israel’s faithfulness to obey his commands (2:22–23; 3:4); (5) God was giving Israel, as his army, the opportunity to develop her skills in warfare (3:1–2). (CSB)

iron chariots. Wooden vehicles with certain iron fittings, perhaps axles. (CSB)

They had iron axles and perhaps iron plates over their structure. (TLSB)

1:20 *As Moses had promised.* See Nu 14:24; Dt 1:36; Jos 14:9–14. (CSB)

Anak. See note on Nu 13:22. (CSB)

Anakim were already in Canaan when the Israelites arrived, said to be descended from the Nephilim (Gn 6:1–4) and regarded as very powerful. (TLSB)

1:21 *Benjamites ... failed to dislodge.* See note on v. 8. Jerusalem lay on the border between Benjamin and Judah but was allotted to Benjamin (Jos 18:28). (CSB)

Beginning of a litany of the failure of the tribes to complete Israel’s conquest of the land. (TLSB)

Jebusites. See note on Ge 10:16. (CSB)

1:22 *house of Joseph*. Ephraim and West Manasseh. *Bethel*. See note on Ge 12:8. There is archaeological evidence of a destruction in the 13th century B.C. that may reflect the battle mentioned in this verse. (CSB)

Ephraim, one of two tribes descended from the sons of Joseph. (TLSB)

1:23 *Bethel*. “House of God”; strategically located 12 mi N of Jerusalem at the border between Benjamin and Ephraim. (TLSB)

spy out. See note on Nu 13:2. (CSB)

1:24 *we will deal kindly with you*. A covenant agreement, violating the Lord’s prohibition against making covenants with the peoples of the land (Dt 7:2). Luther: “To be sure, the Jebusite and the Canaanite will always live in our midst,” but we must not allow them to rule us (AE 10:381n). These verses serve as a warning to “coarse, lazy Christians” who fail to appreciate spiritual matters and “become sluggish and secure” (AE 38:131). (TLSB)

1:25 *spared the man*. Cf. the treatment of Rahab (Jos 6:25). (CSB)

1:26 *land of the Hittites*. A name for Aram (Syria) at the time of the conquest (see note on Ge 10:15). (CSB)

The Hittites flourished along the southern coast of present-day Turkey two centuries earlier; these were probably remnant groups that migrated into Canaan after the Hittite Empire disbanded. (TLSB)

1:1–26 After the optimistic, faith-filled account in Jsh, Jgs 1 introduces the disappointing next phase of Israelite history. Despite the sinful disappointments of our life histories, Jesus knows our weaknesses and forgives our neglect of His promises. Daily, we return to our Baptism to drown our sinful nature with its evil desires and to put on our new nature, which is righteous and pure. The righteousness of Jesus replaces our unrighteousness. • Thank You, Lord, for rescuing us from our own worst enemies—our sinful flesh and the “Canaanites” that surround us. Amen. (TLSB)

1:27–36 List of failures in the conquest. Archaeology has confirmed the persistent presence of Canaanites in many of these places. Adoni-bezek had lost his fingers and toes, his freedom, and finally his life (vv 5–7), but the Canaanite traitors at Bethel were allowed to remain alive and flourish. The Israelites generally permitted the Canaanites to live as their slaves or simply to live among them. Dan was entirely pressed out of its tribal allotment by the Amorites. (TLSB)

1:27–29 See Jos 17:16–18. (CSB)

1:27 *Beth-shean*. Strategic crossroads at the junction of the Jezreel and Jordan valleys. (“Beth-shan” in 1Sm 31:10, 12; 2Sm 21:12.) (TLSB)

Taanach. 17 mi W of Beth-shean.

Dor. On the coast of the Great Sea, just south of Mount Carmel. (TLSB)

Megiddo. Also located at a strategic crossroads. (TLSB)

1:28 *forced labor*. See note on 1Ki 5:13. (CSB)

Having endured forced labor and slavery in Egypt, the Israelites then inflicted slavery on some of the Canaanite peoples. This went against God's command in Dt 7:2. (TLSB)

1:29 *Gezer*. In Ephraim's allotment, c 20 mi NW of Jerusalem, guarding an important east-west trade route. (TLSB)

1:30 *Kitron ... Nahalol*. West of the Sea of Chinnereth. (TLSB)

1:31 More Canaanite city-states were allowed to remain in Asher than in any other tribal allotment. (TLSB)

Sidon. A center of Canaanite shipping and trade, this entire region was vulnerable to religious influence by other peoples. (TLSB)

1:33 *Beth Shemesh*. Location unknown. The name means "house of the sun(-god)." There was also a Beth Shemesh in Judah (see note on v. 35). (CSB)

Beth Anath. Means "house of (the goddess) Anath" (see note on 3:31). (CSB)

"House of the sun." *Beth-anath*. "House of [the goddess] Anath." Both names reflect pagan worship practiced in those cities. (TLSB)

1:34 *Amorites*. See note on Ge 10:16. (CSB)

confined the Danites. Joshua had defeated the Amorites earlier (Jos 10:5–11), but they were still strong enough to withstand the Danites. For this reason a large number of Danites migrated northward a short time later (see ch. 18). (CSB)

Dan received an allotment along the coastal plain west of Judah but seems never to have gained control of its land. Being driven out by the Amorites, Dan faced additional resistance from the Philistines along the coast. An account in the epilogue tells how Dan moved to the northernmost point of the land, beyond the Sea of Chinnereth (18:27–29). (TLSB)

1:35 *Mount Heres*. Means "mountain of the sun(-god)"; probably the Beth Shemesh in Judah, which is also called Ir Shemesh, "city of the sun(-god)" (Jos 19:41). (CSB)

1:36 *boundary of the Amorites*. Their southern boundary (see Jos 15:2–3). (CSB)

1:27–36 The various tribes of Israel allow the Canaanites to remain in the land, which creates a powerful temptation for Israelites to adopt their culture and worship their gods. How history repeats itself! Yet God in His mercy never abandons us. • Forgive us, Lord, for indifference to Your will. Help us to love what You command, turn to You for mercy, and seek to conform our lives to Your holy will. Amen. (TLSB)