

Judges

Chapter 1

The Continuing Conquest of Canaan

1 After the death of Joshua, the people of Israel inquired of the LORD, “Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?” **2** The LORD said, “Judah shall go up; behold, I have given the land into his hand.” **3** And Judah said to Simeon his brother, “Come up with me into the territory allotted to me, that we may fight against the Canaanites. And I likewise will go with you into the territory allotted to you.” So Simeon went with him. **4** Then Judah went up and the LORD gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand, and they defeated 10,000 of them at Bezek. **5** They found Adoni-bezek at Bezek and fought against him and defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites. **6** Adoni-bezek fled, but they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and his big toes. **7** And Adoni-bezek said, “Seventy kings with their thumbs and their big toes cut off used to pick up scraps under my table. As I have done, so God has repaid me.” And they brought him to Jerusalem, and he died there. **8** And the men of Judah fought against Jerusalem and captured it and struck it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire. **9** And afterward the men of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites who lived in the hill country, in the Negeb, and in the lowland. **10** And Judah went against the Canaanites who lived in Hebron (now the name of Hebron was formerly Kiriath-arba), and they defeated Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmai. **11** From there they went against the inhabitants of Debir. The name of Debir was formerly Kiriath-sepher. **12** And Caleb said, “He who attacks Kiriath-sepher and captures it, I will give him Achsah my daughter for a wife.” **13** And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, captured it. And he gave him Achsah his daughter for a wife. **14** When she came to him, she urged him to ask her father for a field. And she dismounted from her donkey, and Caleb said to her, “What do you want?” **15** She said to him, “Give me a blessing. Since you have set me in the land of the Negeb, give me also springs of water.” And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs. **16** And the descendants of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up with the people of Judah from the city of palms into the wilderness of Judah, which lies in the Negeb near Arad, and they went and settled with the people. **17** And Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they defeated the Canaanites who inhabited Zephath and devoted it to destruction. So the name of the city was called Hormah.^[a] **18** Judah also captured Gaza with its territory, and Ashkelon with its territory, and Ekron with its territory. **19** And the LORD was with Judah, and he took possession of the hill country, but he could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain because they had chariots of iron. **20** And Hebron was given to Caleb, as Moses had said. And he drove out from it the three sons of Anak. **21** But the people of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem, so the Jebusites have lived with the people of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day. **22** The house of Joseph also went up against Bethel, and the LORD was with them. **23** And the house of Joseph scouted out Bethel. (Now the name of the city was formerly Luz.) **24** And the spies saw a man coming out of the city, and they said to him, “Please show us the way into the city, and we will deal kindly with you.” **25** And he showed them the way into the city. And they struck the city with the edge of the sword, but they let the man and all his family go. **26** And the man went to the land of the Hittites and built a city and called its name Luz. That is its name to this day.

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. (CSB)

inquired of the LORD. Probably by the priestly use of Urim and Thummim. (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 shall go.* 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 *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. 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.* (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.* Hebron's alternate name, meaning "City of Four," probably referring to an original federation of four cities. (TLSB)

1:11 *Debir.* 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 *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)

Zephath. "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 *he could not drive out*. 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)

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

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

1:20 *Anak*. 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 *people of Benjamin ... did not drive out*. 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)

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)

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 *let 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. (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)

Failure to Complete the Conquest

27 Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean and its villages, or Taanach and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Ibleam and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages, for the Canaanites persisted in dwelling in that land. **28** When Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but did not drive them out completely. **29** And Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer, so the Canaanites lived in Gezer among them. **30** Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, or the inhabitants of Nahalol, so the Canaanites lived among them, but became subject to forced labor. **31** Asher did not drive out the inhabitants of Acco, or the inhabitants of Sidon or of Ahlab or of Achzib or of Helbah or of Aphik or of Rehob, **32** so the Asherites lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land, for they did not drive them out. **33** Naphtali did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh, or the inhabitants of Beth-anath, so they lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land. Nevertheless, the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and of Beth-anath became subject to forced labor for them. **34** The Amorites pressed the people of Dan back into the hill country, for they did not allow them to come down to the plain. **35** The Amorites persisted in dwelling in Mount Heres, in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim, but the hand of the house of Joseph rested heavily on them, and they became subject to forced labor. **36** And the border of the Amorites ran from the ascent of Akrabbim, from Sela and upward.

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 *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. (CSB)

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*. 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. (CSB)

Beth Anath. Means “house of (the goddess) Anath.” (CSB)

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

1:34 *pressed the people of Dan.* 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 *border 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)