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Judges 1:1 - 2:5



Judges - Steve Gregg

In this lesson, Steve Gregg discusses Judges 1:1 - 2:5, which details the Israelites' struggles to conquer and inhabit the land promised to them by God. Despite their initial victories, they failed to fully possess their inheritance due to factors such as the determination of the Canaanites to dwell in the land and the Israelites' disloyalty to God. Gregg highlights the importance of determination and loyalty in achieving success and emphasizes the consequences of going against God's plans.

Transcript

Let's turn now to the first chapter of the book of Judges and we can begin our verse-by-verse treatment. In the introduction I mentioned that the first two chapters and the first six verses of the third chapter make up the introductory section of the book. The actual stories of individual judges pretty much pick up at chapter three verse six.

But even this introductory section has more than one part because it would seem that the death of Joshua being reported twice and it marks the beginnings of two separate introductions. The book begins with the words, now after the death of Joshua. Interestingly, the book of Joshua began with the word, after the death of Moses.

So it really illustrates what we said earlier that the history of the world is really the biographies of important men. The history is marked by the death of a leader and the end of an era. So at the death of Moses, the story of Joshua began.

Now at the death of Joshua, these stories begin. Another turning point in history. It says, now after the death of Joshua, it came to pass that the children of Israel asked the Lord, saying, who shall be first to go up for us against the Canaanites to fight against them? Now, of course, we're talking about the ongoing conquest of the unbeaten cities and so forth that were left unconquered in the time of Joshua.

In the time of Joshua, the Israelites had secured the land and had been able to divide it among their tribes and claim it for themselves and so forth. But in most of these tribal areas, there were still some individual cities of Canaanites, which should have been driven out, but for some reason had not been. So when Joshua was old, he urged the

Israelites to complete the conquest and to drive out all the Canaanites.

So now he's died and they say, well, who's going to do this first? Now, I'm not sure why they had to decide who would do it first, since they all had their own tribal regions to manage. But maybe because there would be some help from various tribes toward the territory of one tribe at a time, so they could concentrate their efforts more and cooperate more. I'm not sure.

But they say, well, who should go up first? And they were actually inquiring of the Lord. That probably means they went to the priest Eliezer, although he died in the previous book, but he didn't die as early as Joshua did. He outlived him.

And Eliezer would have the Urim and the Thummim, which was something the priest could use to determine the will of God about certain choices, usually choosing between options. The Urim and the Thummim was useful. And so the Lord said or indicated somehow, possibly through the Urim and the Thummim, although it could have been a prophet, but inquiring of the Lord usually meant you went to the priest.

And the Lord answered, Judah shall go up. Indeed, I have delivered the land into his hand. So Judah said to Simeon, his brother, come up with me to my allotted territory that we may fight against the Canaanites.

And I will likewise go with you to your allotted territory. And Simeon went with him. Now, Simeon is called his brother because although these are actually tribes and the men, Judah and Simeon, were long dead.

Judah and Simeon were brothers in the full sense of having the same mother and the same father. All the tribes were brother tribes because they all were descended from Jacob. But they had come from four different wives of Jacob.

Simeon and Judah and four others had come from the same wife, from Leah. And therefore, Simeon is a brother nation and also a nearby one, because the territory of Simeon was actually enclosed within the territory of Judah. A rather unusual situation.

Usually, each of the tribes would have its own discrete area, but Simeon's tribe was contained within Judah. And so they were both interested in the conquest of the territory being complete. And so Simeon joined him and Judah agreed to help Simeon out too when it came his time to conquer the Canaanites in his territory.

Then Judah went up and the Lord delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hands and they killed 10,000 men at Bezek. Then they found Adonai Bezek, which means Lord Bezek, in Bezek and fought against him. And they defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites.

Then Adonai Bezek fled and they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs

and his big toes. Now that sounds kind of barbarous, barbarian, cut off a man's big toes and his thumbs. As it turns out, as we shall see, that's exactly how he had treated the people he had conquered.

And so he's kind of, it's an eye for an eye and tooth for tooth, I guess. Because Adonai Bezek said, 70 kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off used to gather their food under my table. As I have done, so God has repaid me.

Now, when he says God, he doesn't mean necessarily that he recognizes Yahweh. God is a generic term that all the nations use for their gods. And it's hard to know whether he was acknowledging that Yahweh was sovereign and had done this or simply the gods in general had repaid him.

There's a poetic justice in what happened to him that could be said to come from God or the gods or whatever he was thinking at the time when he used that term. And they brought him to Jerusalem and there he died. Now, why did they take him to Jerusalem? I don't know.

We also find later on that David took Goliath's head to Jerusalem. The Jews had Jerusalem within their territory, but they didn't have it conquered yet. So, I don't know if they took him and flew him, you know, before the walls of Jerusalem as something for the people of Jerusalem to see.

As if to say, okay, we've got him and we're going to get you eventually here. Like him, he's an example. Or what? I don't know exactly what taking him to Jerusalem accomplished.

There's not enough said to let us know. But cutting off the thumbs of a man, especially if he was a man of war, would make it impossible for him, of course, to wield a weapon. He couldn't hold a sword.

He couldn't use a bow and arrow. And therefore, he'd be harmless. Cutting off his big toes would mean that he'd be, although he could still get around on his feet somewhat, he couldn't maintain his balance very well.

He couldn't fight well. Couldn't run even. Probably couldn't run away in all likelihood.

So, it was also just a way of disfiguring him to show contempt and dishonor to him. But he had done the same thing to 70 kings in his lifetime and had captured them and brought them to his home. And they gathered the food under his table.

Like he had these kings groveling around without thumbs and big toes, eating the scraps that fell from his table. Apparently, that's the way of him humiliating them. And now he faces the same.

Now, the children of Judah fought against Jerusalem and took it. They struck it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire. Now, this is strange because the city was still unconquered in the days of David.

And later, in verse 21, it says, the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites from Jerusalem. It's not entirely clear how this, how Jerusalem was laid out. It's possible that Jerusalem is considered to include its suburbs around it.

Most of these cities had walls around their main city, but it was a fairly small walled area. Like I said, Jericho was a major fortified walled city, but it was only about six acres inside the walls. That's not very big.

But there would be suburbs around because the people of Jericho would not all live in that tiny little area. They would actually live mostly outside the walled cities and have their villages and their suburbs. And many times in the book of Joshua, we read that they conquered this city and its villages.

And they conquered this city and its villages. Maybe what they conquered in some of these cases is not the city itself, the walled city, but the population of the city outside the walls. In this case, though, it does say they set Jerusalem on fire.

But I don't know if we're to understand that the city actually burned down. If it did, it was rebuilt later on. It just says they set the city on fire.

Maybe that fire was put out before it was finally done. In any case, there was at least a partial or at least a temporary victory over Jerusalem. But Jerusalem remained a fortress against them for generations to come still.

Some of these cities that they conquered were conquered earlier in the days of Joshua. Now they're conquering them again. So it would seem that when Israel went through and conquered the land, they would get an initial victory over a place where they move along.

And, you know, anyone who had maybe escaped from them and they didn't pursue thoroughly would just come back and live in the city again. So the cities would be populated again, but weaker, smaller, you know, more humble because they really had been defeated. But it's hard to put together, you know, the chronology of what was going on in Jerusalem at any given time because they do defeat it and then they don't fully defeat it.

And then it's not defeated at all later on and has to be invaded. Although, of course, these things sometimes cover a period of hundreds of years. So there would be different conditions.

Jerusalem would be in different times. But this time they struck it and set it on fire. It

says, afterward, the children of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites who dwelt in the mountains in the south and in the lowlands.

Then Judah went against the Canaanites who dwelt in Hebron. And this story, of course, we already read in Joshua, chapter 15. It talks about how Hebron was conquered by the Judahite Caleb.

And so it says, the name of Hebron, formerly with Kirjath Arba, says, and they killed Shishai, Ahimon and Talmi. From there they went against the inhabitants of Debora. The name of Debora was formerly Kirjath Sifer.

Now, Debora was also conquered by Joshua. Debora was one of the five cities that had come against Gibeon when they made their alliance with Joshua. And so when Joshua and Israel went against them, they conquered this city among others.

But now apparently it has been re-inhabited. And so it's got to be defeated again. Then Caleb said, he who attacked Kirjath Sifer and takes it, to him I will give my daughter Aksa as wife.

And this story is told almost verbatim in Joshua 15, verses 13 through 19. So we've already covered it. Now it was so when she came to him that she urged him to ask her father for a field.

So she dismounted from her donkey and Caleb said to her, what do you wish? So she said to him, give me a blessing. Since you have given me land in the south, give me also springs of water. Then Caleb gave her the upper springs and lower springs.

That is, as I say, a repeat of something we said earlier. So we were told about this in Joshua chapter 15, but apparently by way of anticipation. This actually happened after Joshua died.

Verse 16. Now the children of Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, the Kenite, excuse me, Moses' father-in-law, went up from the city of Palms with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which lies in the south near Arad. And they went and dwelt among the people.

Now Moses' father-in-law was the priest of Midian. Jethro he's called, and he's called by other names as well. Um, but he was apparently of a race called the Kenites.

And although we don't read that Moses' father-in-law ever joined Israel permanently, yet apparently some of his offspring, some of his descendants did. So here we have in Israel, as part of them, a number of Gentile groups. The Kenites were Gentiles.

They were connected to Moses by marriage, but they were not Jewish by birth. And likewise, even Caleb is called a Kenite, which is not in Israelite. And some commentators

think that he was adopted into a family in Judah, or that he was a proselyte who came in at some point.

But we don't know. All we know is that there was some Gentile blood in Caleb. And then there were, these people were fully Gentiles, and yet they were all part of Israel.

Which shows you don't have to be Jewish to be part of Israel. And you can be part of Israel no matter what family you're born in, or what race you're born in, as long as you are compliant with the conditions of being in Israel, which in this case would be, of course, to keep God's covenant. And so they lived among Judah, and they helped Judah in these conquests.

Verse 17 says, And Judah went with his brother Simeon, and they attacked the Canaanites, who inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. So the name of that city was called Hormah. And also Judah took Geza with its territory, Ashkelon with its territory, and Ekron with its territory.

Now these are Philistine cities. There were five Philistine cities, and these are three of them. And these certainly were not permanently conquered by Israel, because they remained strongholds of the Philistines well into the later period of the judges.

So these references of them taking the cities and stuff, it's not clear exactly what degree of victory they had. They apparently had some kind of battle in which they got the upper hand and were declared the winners. But they did not permanently seize and inhabit these cities and take them from the Philistines.

Or it may be that they did seize them and inhabit them, but they left Philistines alive, and in later generations, the Philistines outnumbered them or overwhelmed them, so that the cities still were said to be controlled by Philistines at a later date. We know that they were not wiping everybody out at this time, as they had been told to do in Joshua's time. So once again, it's not clear in what sense these conquests of Geza and Ashkelon and Ekron, these Philistine cities, are said to have taken place, or what happened afterward that caused the Philistines to regain control of them.

That information is not given to us. So the Lord was with Judah, and he drove out the inhabitants of the mountains, but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the lowlands, because they had chariots of iron. Chariots don't work real well in mountainous country without good leveling of roads and so forth, but in the lowlands, chariots really have the advantage.

Foot soldiers and cavalry probably are more at an advantage in the mountainous areas, the rough areas. But where there's smooth ground that wheels can roll over, chariots are the strongest things, and if they're of iron, of course they can't easily be set on fire or penetrated with such projectiles as they had in those days. So a chariot of iron was like

the invincible vehicle of war.

Now it says that they could not drive out the inhabitants of the lowlands because of the chariots of iron. It's not because of the chariots of iron. It's because of their lack of faith.

Defeating chariots of iron is a possibility, even for them, because they had God on their side, and God said that he would give them the victory. In fact, the Ephraimites had complained to Joshua in his lifetime that some of the people, some of the lands that they were to inherit were occupied by enemies who had chariots of iron. But Joshua told them, no, the Lord will give you the victory, even over the chariots of iron.

He promised them that that would not be really a hindrance to them. This is in chapter 17 of Joshua, verses 17 and 18. Joshua spoke to the house of Joseph, to Ephraim and Manasseh, saying, you are a great people and have great power.

You shall not have one lot only, but the mountain country shall be yours. Although it is wooded, you should cut it down, and its farthest extent shall be yours. For you shall drive out the Canaanites, though they have chariots of iron and are strong.

Chariots of iron, according to Joshua, were not sufficient to stop them. They can do it even if their enemies have them. But what you have to have is God.

If your enemy has better weaponry than you have, then you've got to have something besides weapons. You've got to have something better than what they have. The Bible says, some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we will remember the name of the Lord our God.

And it even says in the scripture, a chariot is a vain thing, or a horse is a vain thing for safety, neither is any king saved by its great power. The military weapons that were opposed to Israel, or for that matter, later on, which Israel itself possessed, because Solomon had many chariots, those do not guarantee victory or safety or security. And that principle still is true.

I mean, it's a wise thing for a nation that's supposed to, you know, maintain a police presence or a military presence, to have some kind of military, but it's not necessary to believe that the nation that has the greatest military will also win the war. In the natural mind, that would seem to be the case, but really the question is whose side is God on. If you have God on your side, it doesn't matter what kind of weapons your enemy has.

So that's what Joshua told the people of Ephraim. Now we're reading about the people of Judah. They apparently needed to know that too.

Back in Joshua 11, there was a great victory over the coalition from the north, and Israel defeated them quite handily, but we're told that they had a great number of chariots and horses. In Joshua 11, it says, So they went out, they and all their armies with them, as

many people as the stand of a seashore multitude, with very many horses and chariots. That's the enemy.

Now Israel didn't have horses, and they didn't have chariots, but their enemy had many horses and chariots. And yet as you read further on down, we see that it was quite an easy thing for Israel to defeat them because God was on their side. So looking at the kind of weapons the enemy has is immaterial.

It's irrelevant to the question of what the prospects are. The prospects for victory have to do with what God wants to happen. And the faith of the people of God to trust him to do it.

I mentioned when we're in Joshua, and we talked about those who were unable to drive out Canaanites in their land, that it reminds me of the same in the Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of Matthew, that Jesus was unable to do many mighty works in Nazareth. It says, because of their lack of faith. That's in Matthew chapter 13, the very last verse, and also Mark chapter 6, verses 5 and 6. That God could do things, Jesus could do mighty works, but he couldn't do any there because their faith was not great.

And when people saw the chariots of iron, they were afraid, and their faith apparently melted, and then they couldn't do anything. God couldn't even do anything for them. So, it's like when Peter was walking on the water, he did so by faith, but when he saw the waves and the turbulence and stuff, he apparently his faith vaporized and then he sank.

So, sometimes seeing the opposition is the devil's way of getting us to stop trusting God. And that's what happened in these people's case, apparently. Interestingly, there's a pharaoh, Thutmose III, who actually lived hundreds of years before the time of Judges, but an inscription of his was found at Al-Karnak, where he talks about a war he fought against the Syrians, and he mentions he captured 900 chariots of iron from the Canaanites in that warfare.

So, it confirms from a different source that chariots of iron were present in the Canaanite forces, and that was what intimidated Joshua. I mean, not Joshua, but Judah, the tribe of Judah. Now, it says in verse 21, I guess we're not quite there, verse 20, and they gave Hebron to Caleb as Moses had said, then he expelled from there the three sons of Anak, which was a giant.

But the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who inhabited Jerusalem. So, the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day. The Benjamites actually lived in Jerusalem at this time, apparently, or maybe not.

But it says the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem. It doesn't mean the children of Benjamin are in Jerusalem, but rather, Jerusalem is in the midst of Benjamin, because the tribe of Benjamin and the tribe of Judah shared Jerusalem.

Jerusalem was on the border between the tribal boundaries of Judah and of Benjamin.

So, the Jebusites in Jerusalem live among the Benjamites, meaning in their region, I guess. It sounded like it was saying the Benjamites lived in Jerusalem too, but that was not the case at this early point. Verse 22, in the house of Joseph, of course, we know that means Ephraim and Manasseh, also went up against Bethel, and the Lord was with them.

So, the house of Joseph sent men to spy out Bethel. The name of that city formerly was Luz, as is very frequently noted in the book of Genesis. And when the spies saw a man coming out of the city, they said to him, please show us the entrance to the city, and we will show you mercy.

So, he showed them the entrance to the city. It must not have been the main entrance, because they wouldn't need to ask about that. It would be hard to find the main entrance to the city.

But there must have been access that was not known except to the locals, some secret tunnel or something, maybe a water conduit or something that you could get through. That's how Jerusalem was later conquered by Joab. But this local man knew what the insiders knew, and there was another way into the city that was not obvious to everybody.

So, he showed them the entrance to the city, and they struck the city with the edge of the sword, but they let the man and all his family go. And the man went to the land of the Hittites, which is further to the north, and built a city and called it named Luz, which is its name to this day. So, this man who was from Bethel, which was also in earlier times called Luz, he founded a new city and named it after the original name of his own hometown.

Verse 27, And it came to pass when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites under tribute, but did not completely drive them out. Nor did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites who dwelt in Gezer, so the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them. Nor did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitrin, or the inhabitants of Naholo, so the Canaanites dwelt among them and were put under tribute.

Nor did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Akkod, or the inhabitants of Sidon, or Alad, Akvid, Helba, Apik, or Rehob. So, the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, and the inhabitants of the land, for they did not drive them out. Nor did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh, or the inhabitants of Beth Anah, but they dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land.

Nevertheless, the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh and Beth Anah were put under tribute to them. Now, this is not what God told them to do. God told them not to make any agreement to keep the inhabitants of the land alive.

They were supposed to leave none alive, breathing, but they just didn't obey completely, you know? They were satisfied to put people under tribute. Maybe they were feeling like it was a little harsh to put people to death if they could be put to service. Maybe they felt like they would be more generous than God wanted to be toward these people, but God knew what he was talking about, because the survivors of the Canaanites are the ones who led Israel eventually into the kind of wrong religion that caused judgment to have to come upon them.

It's also possible that the Israelites kept them alive for labor so they could get a free workforce, you know? I mean, why kill these people when we can put them to work for us? And we can be lazy and have, you know, we can have our farms and our plantations run by these guys. We don't have to do all the work. Anyway, they didn't obey God, as God predicted would be a problem.

It did become a problem. Verse 34, And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountains, for they would not allow them to come down to the valley. Now, the tribe of Dan apparently was not even able to take a certain large territory of their land, because the Amorites there wouldn't allow them to.

And Dan apparently didn't have the faith to trust God to give him the power to do it. Now, one of those stories in the appendix is about the people of the tribe of Dan looking for a place to live. And they come by Micah's house and find his image there and his priest and so forth.

But that apparently takes place because the tribe of Dan was not able to really seize their inheritance from the Amorites. So they had to go looking for someplace else to live. And they ended up somewhere entirely different.

Verse 35, And the Amorites were determined to dwell in Mount Heres, in Ajalon, and in Sheolbim. Yet, when the hand of the house of Joseph became stronger, they were put under tribute. Now, the boundary of the Amorites was from the ascent of Akraben, from Phila and upward.

Now, as a result of all of these failures, which were due to lack of faith, God actually sent the angel of the Lord to rebuke these people publicly. Now, where he met them, I don't know. I mean, the tribes were scattered out throughout the whole land.

I'm not sure where they would have a meeting where they were all gathered. It could be at one of the festivals at the tabernacle in Shiloh, since all the nation was supposed to gather there three times a year for festivals. It may be that at one of those, the angel of the Lord appeared.

But the angel of the Lord is generally believed to be a theophany, an appearance of Christ, actually. Before his incarnation. There are two other seeming appearances of

Christ in the book of Judges besides this one.

In chapter 6, when someone appears who seems to be the angel of the Lord, appears to Gideon to commission him. And in chapter 11, I'm sorry, 13, not 11. Chapter 13, where it would appear to the angel of the Lord who comes and speaks to Manoah and his wife about their son who would be born, Samson.

So, there are three times when the angel of the Lord appears. There's here in chapter 2, verses 1 through 5. And then there's chapter 6, verses 11 through 18. And then chapter 13, verses 3 through 23.

These are the three times in the book of Judges that we have what appear to be a theophany. So, chapter 2 says, Then the angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim and said, I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your father. And I said, I will never break my covenant with you.

And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land. You shall tear down their altar, but you have not obeyed my voice. Why have you done this? Therefore, I also said, I will not drive them out before you.

But they shall be thorns in your side and their God shall be a snare to you. So it was when the angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice and wept. Then they called the name of that place Bochim, which means weeping, and they sacrificed there to the Lord.

Now, this appears to be the end of the first preliminary introduction, because the next one goes back to when Joshua is alive. The next verse, Joshua is still alive. So it seems to kind of start, it kind of goes back chronologically.

I'm assuming that these first five verses of chapter two belong to the previous section, because the angel of the Lord's word seemed to apply to what was described at the end of chapter one, namely that the people were not obedient. And so the angel of the Lord comes to rebuke them about that. And so that section ends with this rebuke from God and seeming repentance, at least weeping and offering of sacrifices by the people to the Lord.

So this is kind of what may have started off their career in the land after Joshua was dead. They tried a few times to conquer the land. There were some conquests.

Some of them may have been temporary. Some of them were incomplete. They were half-hearted.

They weren't really obeying God completely. They didn't destroy all the people. And God told them that if they didn't drive the people out, that there'd be two things that would be bad to them.

One is that verse three says, they, the Canaanites, will be thorns in your side, and their God shall be a snare to you. These are the two problems. The Canaanites themselves would give them trouble.

And this is so during the period of the Judges. Sometimes the Canaanites themselves rebel. Sometimes it was outside groups coming in against them.

But the point is that the Canaanites, by staying alive, kept alive a hope that they might recover some of their territory and therefore cause trouble to Israel that they wouldn't have caused if they were wiped out. But not only the Canaanites themselves, but their religion, their God, became a temptation for Israel. And that is even worse.

It is worse that Israel departs from God than that they had, you know, problems from pestering Canaanites, giving them trouble. And so God said he's doing that to them as a judgment for them not being obedient. And they weep, but their repentance is short-lived.

Like every time in the book of Judges, they get serious briefly about God and then go back to being bad again. Instead of taking the next section, because of the limits on our time, frankly, I might just summarize some of the reasons that the Bible itself gives, that Judges gives, especially, for God not driving all the Canaanites out when he had promised to do so. Obviously, he left that responsibly up to the Israelites primarily, and they dropped the ball a bit.

But there are five or six things that the Bible says are reasons that Israel failed to fully possess all of their inheritance in these cases. One of those things we saw in chapter 1, verse 19, was they were intimidated by the Canaanite chariots. The iron chariots were something that they just couldn't face.

So they were intimidated by the strength of the enemy's military. That made their faith disappear. It shouldn't have, but it did.

And so that's one reason Israel didn't fully possess the land. They were intimidated by the iron chariots in chapter 1, verse 19. A second reason is we're told a couple of times the Canaanites, not the Philistines, the Canaanites were determined to stay.

It says that in chapter 1, verse 27. At the end of verse 27, it says, the Canaanites were determined to dwell in that land. And in verse 35, it says in verse 35 of chapter 1, the Amorites were determined to dwell in Mount Herod, in Eidolon and Sheolim.

So the enemy was determined to resist them successfully. Now, of course, if the enemy is determined to resist you, what do you do? Lay down and die? No, you have to be more determined than they are. So the Israelites lacked equal determination to that which their enemies had.

They kind of maybe hoped that God would just put it in the hearts of the Canaanites just to lay down and die or just pack up and leave it here. We'll leave the lights on for you. Take over our city for us.

No, they wanted to stay. The Canaanites didn't want to go and they were going to put up a fight. Well, that doesn't mean they could win.

But Israel didn't apparently have an equal degree of determination to the enemy. It reminds me of what Jesus said in Matthew 11 about the powers of darkness against the kingdom of God and the determination that they have and the determination we need to have. In chapter 11 of Matthew, Jesus said in verse 12, Matthew 11, 12, And from the days of John the Baptist till now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force.

What he means there, I believe, is that the kingdom of God, which Jesus was planting and inaugurating and which his disciples were participating in, this kingdom was being resisted by forceful people. People determined to keep it from happening. Actually, he was talking about Herod, particularly at this point, who took John the Baptist out.

But there'd be others. The kingdom of God is going to suffer resistance from people who are violent and forceful. And the other statement, and the violent take it by force, I believe is referring to the response of us.

If we're going to take the kingdom, we have to meet the determination of the enemy with an equal or greater determination. The word violent there is a strange word because actually in the Greek, it means one who forces his way in. It's like one who's squeezing into a tight spot, determined to get in there.

Like when you're the last person getting into a full elevator. You know, you're not going to wait for the next one. You're going to get in there, even if it's already packed.

You're going to force yourself in there. That's what that word means. It was related to elevators in the Bible.

No, it wasn't really related to elevators. But it did have the meaning of forcing your way in, crowding yourself into some place that's hard to get into. That's the meaning of the Greek word violent there in the second instance, where it says the violent take it by force.

The kingdom of God is resisted by determined opposition and only the determined will take the kingdom in a positive sense, in the sense that we want to take the kingdom for ourselves. And that's what Israel did not do. Their enemies were determined not to be displaced.

That's the second reason why Israel did not take all the land. A third reason is they made

covenants with the Canaanites, which was, of course, disobedience. That's what the angel of the Lord says in verse 2 of chapter 2. He says, I told you, you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land.

You shall tear down their altars, but you have not obeyed my voice. So they made peace with the enemy when they weren't supposed to make peace with the enemy. Now, it's good to be a peacemaker.

But if your enemy is someone that's so dangerous and hostile that God himself says, don't make peace with them, then you'd better not make peace with them. As much as you love peace, you need to make war until those enemies are no longer there. But Israel took the easier route.

A fourth reason they didn't fully possess the land is that they transgressed God's covenant. That is, not only did they disobey in the matter of making covenants with others, but they didn't keep the covenant they had with God. They didn't stay loyal to him.

They worshiped other gods. And they didn't, I mean, they were sloppy about things. Sloppy about circumcision, sloppy about all kinds of things.

Remember, they had foreign gods among them that Joshua's getting rid of. It was foreign gods that are among you. They were covenant breakers.

They were not faithful to God. And we see that, for example, in chapter 2, verses 20 through 23, which we have not yet read. But it says in chapter 2, 20, the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel.

And he said, because this nation has transgressed my covenant, which I commanded their fathers, and has not heeded my voice, I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died. So one reason that they didn't get those nations out is because of their own transgression of God's covenant that he made with their fathers. A fifth reason, there's kind of two parts to this one.

God permitted kidnapping and murder to actually have some effect on Israel. In chapter 2, in verse 21, well, 21 and 22, it says, I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, so that through them, that is through the Canaanites, I may test Israel, whether they will keep the ways of the Lord. So just like God put a tree in the garden that was a test to Adam and Eve, and put a serpent in the garden to, you know, tempt them if they could be tempted.

It was a test. Their loyalty was being tested. So God left Canaanites in the land and their false religion.

He didn't want to, but because Israel did all these other things wrong, God said, okay,

I'm just going to leave them there. I'll make use of them. I'll use them to be a continual test of whether Israel will be resisting the false religions and will be loyal to me or not.

But there's another thing there too, and that is in chapter three, verse two. It says, this is only so that the generations of the children of Israel might be taught to know war, at least those who had not formerly known it. Now this is talking about the nations that were left in the land that shouldn't have been there because God left them there so that the later generations of the children of Israel could learn to make war.

Since they were not going to drive them all out, they're going to have wars to fight. So you might as well have some sparring partners nearby. So you can keep learning how to make war because you're going to have plenty of wars if you didn't do what God said.

So the presence of the Canaanites, although it was against the will of God for them to be there, was God exploited. He turned it to his purpose. Okay, you're going to leave the Canaanites here.

I'm going to use them to test you. I'm going to use them to keep your nation battle ready and battle trained because you're going to have a lot of regular wars here now. Now, there's one other reason that he didn't drive them all out at once.

And that was one that was not mentioned in Judges, but it was mentioned way back in Deuteronomy 7. God mentioned he would not drive out all the Canaanites at one time or in one year. It was going to be a more protracted thing, though he didn't intend for it to be permanent. After all, the conquest of Joshua took seven years.

That could have been long enough. But anyway, it says in Deuteronomy 7.22, it says, The Lord your God will drive out those nations before you little by little. You'll be unable to destroy them at once, lest the beasts of the field become too numerous for you.

Now, what I think that means is if all the Canaanites were driven out all at once, faster than Israel could actually settle in, reoccupy their cities and establish themselves there, then those cities would lay empty and would just go to feed and wild animals would inhabit them, jackals and stuff. I mean, the land would be, the human habitations would become shelters for wild animals. And that'd be problematic.

Although I don't know that conquering the wild animals would be harder than conquering warriors there in the future. But maybe it would be. Maybe a lion is a harder opponent to face than the average soldier.

But there were lions in those days in Israel. There aren't now, but there were. David met them, Samson met them, and so forth.

Lions are eradicated from that region now, but there were wild beasts that were dangerous in those days. In fact, God even sent lions in the northern region to punish

people in the days after the Assyrians had repopulated the area and the people were not serving God. It says that God sent lions among them to kill them.

And so it's interesting how lions, which we usually associate with Africa, were as far north as the Middle East in the jungle of the Jordan in those days. None there now. But God said that if he drove them out all at once, presumably that means you could defeat them, but you couldn't really settle in and occupy all these cities, too many of them.

And a lot of these would be wasted because before you could get around to your population growing to fill all these places, they would have gone back to wild animals and they'd be wild areas again instead of civilized. Anyway, these are the reasons that the Bible gives, and most of them are right here in the book of Judges, why when God promised them something, it didn't happen. It wasn't really his fault.

It was they who feared. They didn't believe. They didn't obey.

They compromised. They did what they shouldn't do. And this is going to be really the story of Israel's life throughout the Old Testament.

You're not going to really see very many times when they're doing much better. Judges, I think, is one of the most depressing books in the Old Testament, although it has colorful stories and colorful characters. It's just depressing to see that they never learned their lesson.

And yet the whole Old Testament is kind of that way, too. Because the books of the kings also have many times when the people should have known better, and they went the wrong way. So that's what we're made to brace ourselves for, some rather disappointing behavior, and yet some very patient behavior on God's part.

And so the book of Judges really will illustrate for us.