

The Tribe of Judah Settles its Tribal Land

Judges 1:1-15

Judges 1:1-15 - *“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?”² And the LORD said, “Judah shall go up. Indeed I have delivered the land into his hand.”*

³ 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. ⁴ Then Judah went up, and the LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand; and they killed ten thousand men at Bezek. ⁵ And they found Adoni-Bezek in Bezek, and fought against him; and they defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites. ⁶ Then Adoni-Bezek fled, and they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and big toes. ⁷ And Adoni-Bezek said, “Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off used to gather scraps under my table; as I have done, so God has repaid me.” Then they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died.

⁸ 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. ⁹ And afterward the children of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites who dwelt in the mountains, in the South,^[a] and in the lowland. ¹⁰ Then Judah went against the Canaanites who dwelt in Hebron. (Now the name of Hebron was formerly Kirjath Arba.) And they killed Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai.

¹¹ From there they went against the inhabitants of Debir. (The name of Debir was formerly Kirjath Sepher.)

¹² Then Caleb said, “Whoever attacks Kirjath Sepher and takes it, to him I will give my daughter Achsah as wife.” ¹³ And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother, took it; so he gave him his daughter Achsah as wife. ¹⁴ Now it happened, when she came to him, that she urged him to ask her father for a field. And she dismounted from her donkey, and Caleb said to her, “What do you wish?” ¹⁵ So she said to him, “Give me a blessing; since you have given me land in the South, give me also springs of water.”

And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs.”

Background Notes

The book of Judges covers the history of the nation of Israel from time of the Conquest until the time of the Kings, a period of about 350 years. You will remember that after the children of Israel came out of Egypt, they wandered in the wilderness for forty years because of their unbelief. Finally, under the leadership of Joshua, they crossed the Jordan River, conquered Jericho, and entered the Land of Promise. God had given them the Land, but they still had to go in and conquer the enemy. The seven-year conquest of the Promised Land took place around 1400BC. The account of the Conquest is found in the book of Joshua.

The Conquest broke the backbone of the enemy's power, but it didn't eliminate the enemy completely. In the second half of the book of Joshua the Land was divided up among the twelve tribes of Israel. Each tribe was then responsible to drive out the remainders of the enemy that still existed in its territory. Unfortunately, this is where Israel failed, and the various tribes didn't drive out the rest of the enemies. The book of Judges is the sad account of how Israel's enemies, both inside and outside the Land, were able to control Israel - rather than Israel controlling the enemies.

The time of the Judges is not a highlight in Israel's history. In fact, this time period is sometimes called "the dark days of the Judges." However, there were some bright moments during these dark days - and several Judges actually made it into Hebrews 11, the great biblical chapter on **faith!**

Doctrinal Points

1. Godly beginnings do not guarantee godly endings.

Although the time of the Judges began in a godly way, it didn't end up in a godly way. The period of the Judges was downhill all the way. This is clear when we compare the first and the last verses of the book of Judges. Look at Judges 1:1-2 – *"After the death of Joshua the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, "Who shall be first to go up for us against the Canaanites to fight against them?" And the LORD said, "Judah shall go up. Indeed I have delivered the land into his hand."* That's a good way to start, by asking the Lord for direction. So there was a godly beginning to the time of the Judges.

Now let's read the last verse of the book. Judges 21:25 - *"...everyone did what was right in his own eyes."* That's a far cry from asking the Lord for guidance, isn't there? Everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.

So godly beginnings do not guarantee godly endings. This was true in the time of the Judges, and it is true today. Our country had godly beginnings, but look at the situation across our country now. Ungodliness characterizes much of our nation - from high government officials down to the average person on the street.

Godly beginnings don't guarantee godly endings in the Church either. Many churches that began as Christ-centered evangelical powerhouses are now spiritually dead. This doctrinal point should be a warning to all of us. I'm sure you know individuals who were once godly members of your church or fellowship, but are no longer walking with the Lord. Godly beginnings do not guarantee godly endings.

2. Godly individuals do not guarantee godly communities.

This fact also characterizes the story of the Judges. There were godly individuals in the Land at the time of the Judges, but the surrounding culture continued to go downhill. We read about two well-known godly individuals in Judges 1: Caleb (v12) and Othniel (v13).

Caleb, along with Joshua, was one of the faithful spies back in Numbers 13. In the midst of people who were characterized by unbelief, Caleb was strong in faith. Godly Caleb conquered the city of Hebron and expelled the enemy (v20). Caleb was 85 years old at the time he conquered Hebron - but he was still strong in faith and courage and ability (Joshua 14)! How many of you are over 80? Caleb is a godly model for you to follow! In fact, he's a great model for **all** of us to follow, whether we're over 80 or not!

The other godly individual mentioned in Judges 1 is Othniel, who became Caleb's son-in-law. Othniel took up Caleb's challenge and drove the enemy out of Kirjath Sepher. In Judges 3 we will learn that Othniel became the first Judge in Israel, and the Lord was with him. So Othniel and Caleb are examples of godly individuals.

Although the godly lives and example of Caleb and Othniel affected many of the people, the nation as a whole continued to slide downhill into ungodliness. Sadly, this is true today as well, because godly individuals don't guarantee godly communities. So don't be discouraged if your godly life and lifestyle doesn't seem to be stemming the tide of ungodliness all around you. We have the responsibility to shine as lights in this world, even when the world continues to turn a blind eye to the Lord.

Furthermore, your testimony is probably more effective than you realize! Even though your witness may not be converting the whole community, it's amazing how effective your godly testimony can be - just like Caleb and Othniel and some of the other godly Judges. Remember - godly individuals don't guarantee godly communities.

Practical Applications

1. Don't think your hardened, unbelieving neighbor doesn't know when God is speaking.

Who is my "neighbor"? By "neighbor," I mean all the unbelievers with whom you have close contact: your boss, your colleague at work, your teacher or fellow student, your relatives, or your actual next door neighbor. Some of them may be quite hardhearted unbelievers, right? But they know when God is speaking, even though it may not appear that way.

Look at the case of Adoni-Bezek (v5-7). He was a hardhearted unbeliever who cut off the thumbs and big toes of seventy kings! In those days victorious military conquerors sometimes cut off the big toes and thumbs to make a man helpless when it came to military action. You can't handle weapons and you can't run if you have no thumbs or big toes.

Now, however, Adoni-Bezek was caught, and the "eye for an eye" law was applied to him. Look at what this hardened unbeliever said: "*Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off used to gather scraps under my table; as I have done, so God has repaid me. Then they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died*" (v7). Adoni-Bezek realized that **God** was involved in his fate when he said, "*as I have done, so God has repaid me.*"

This is also true today. Don't think that your hardened, unbelieving neighbors don't know when God is speaking. They may realize that God is speaking through an accident, or a loss of property, or serious illness. In times of war or severe

natural disasters, even hardened unbelievers are may be open to hearing what God is saying, because some of them finally realize that God is been speaking.

In tines of crisis, Christians need to be aware of opportunities to speak for God. Don't think that your hardened, unbelieving neighbor doesn't know when God is speaking!

2. Don't be reluctant to ask God for specific blessings.

In verse 15 Achsah asked her father, Caleb, for a specific blessing: *“So she said to him, “Give me a blessing; since you have given me land in the South, give me also springs of water.” And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs.”*

Water is vital, if land is to be productive, and Achsah received from her father the specific blessing she requested.

Here's the spiritual lesson: we can come to our heavenly Father and ask Him for **specific** blessings. Achsah asked for water to make her land fruitful, and God loves to give us blessings that will make us more productive and fruitful in the land of spiritual blessing! I challenge you to ask God for a specific blessing that will make you more productive in the land of blessing that God has given you.

God loves to answer that kind of prayer! Don't be reluctant to ask God for specific blessings.