

Judges 1:1-36

Introduction

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-book-of-judges/>

The Book of Judges was considered to be written by Samuel and covers about 300 years of Israel's history.

Judges begins shortly after Joshua's death and continues until Samuel's birth.

Israel starts out with a Theocracy, in which God governs through His Law and through instructions given through the High Priest to designated leaders like Moses and Joshua. "Judges" are later raised up because of Israel's rebellion or backsliding from that pattern.

Each of the major judges comes from a different tribe of Israel. The stories of the six major judges: Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson - involve cycles of sin and redemption. (A number of shorter stories about lesser judges are mixed in).

The cycle follows this pattern:

- The Israelites sin.
- God punishes them by sending an enemy to oppress them. They serve the enemy for a number of years.
- They cry out to God and pray for forgiveness.
- God sends a deliverer (judge) to free them.
- The judge conquers the enemy.
- There is a peaceful reign for some time before the cycle begins again.
- But with each cycle, the status of the Israelites deteriorates a little more and the moral lines are continually blurred by both the Israelites and the judges.

Each judge reflects some aspect of the great Deliverer/Messiah prophesied in **Genesis 3:15**.

But by the time of Samson's reign, the cycle is barely recognizable — and Samson himself is hardly a role model for the Israelite ideal.

By the end of the book, there is complete anarchy. As the final line states: "In those days there was no king in Israel; All the people did what was right in their own eyes" (**Judges 21:25**). "No king" means no ultimate authority, not even God. This leaves the Israelites ready for the stability of a monarchy that will soon arrive in the first Book of Samuel.

Women hold a prominent place in these stories. Many scholars see a parallel between the general decay in Israel and the treatment of women as the Book of Judges progresses.

Early on we find Deborah and Yael (**Judges 4-5**), who are both strong and courageous. But they are followed up by the daughter of Jephthah, who allows herself to be sacrificed due to her father's foolish vow (**Judges 11:35**); Delilah, who seduces and betrays Samson (**Judges 16:4-22**); and the most troubling of all — the gruesome fate of the unnamed concubine in **Judges 19**.

Possessing the Land

Judges 1:1-2 - "Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them? And the LORD said, Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand."

The Book of Joshua had for its heading, "Now after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord it came to pass." In the same way, the Book of Judges begins "Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass."

(The actual death of Joshua is described later in **Judges 2:6-10**, out of order chronologically. Most of the events narrated from here to **Judges 2:5** took place during Joshua's lifetime. It's possible that the initial phrase "after the death of Joshua" was retained after adding in this preface, a recitation and summary of what had already taken place up to that time. Some suggest that **Judges 17-21** was also added in later to the original manuscript).

"Who will go up" meaning which tribe. Josephus thought they asked Phinehas, who had taken over as High Priest from his father Eleazer. But if this describes earlier events, it would be Eleazer. The answer to this kind of question would usually be given by the Urim and Thummim, but it appears God also spoke directly to or through the High Priest here.

At the solemn investiture of Joshua, as the successor of Moses, Moses is directed to "set him before Eleazar the priest," who was "to ask consent for him after the judgment of Urim before the Lord: at his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in" (**Numbers 27:18-21**).

Moses and Joshua received direct revelations from God. But from this time forward "inquiring of the Lord" occurs with greater frequency (vid., **Judges 20:23**, **Judges 20:27**; **1 Samuel 10:22**; **1 Samuel 22:10**; **1 Samuel 23:2**, etc.), as well as the synonymous expression "ask of Elohim" in **Judges 18:5**; **Judges 20:18**; **1 Samuel 14:37**; **1 Samuel 22:13**; **1 Chronicles 14:10**.

In the wilderness, the pillar of fire and cloud acted as guides without the need for an inquiry. Along with these types of formal communications, one method has remained constant throughout the scriptures - prayer.

Consider the examples of prayer by Isaac and Rebekah:

- **Genesis 25:21-23** - "Later, Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. And the LORD heard his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived. But the children inside her struggled with each other, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So Rebekah went to inquire of the LORD, and He declared to her: "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."

It continues now for us, with the added help of the Holy Spirit and Jesus Himself interceding on our behalf before God:

- **Hebrews 4:16** - "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

The problems related in the Book of Judges come through the people's increasing lack of inquiry to God. Personal agendas replaced seeking God's will, fulfilling Joshua's prophecy in Joshua 23 and 24 that "You cannot serve the Lord!."

The Downfall of Adonibezek - Judges 1:4-7

Judges 1:4-7 - "And Judah went up; and the LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand: and they slew of them in Bezek ten thousand men. And they found Adonibezek in Bezek: and they fought against him, and they slew the Canaanites and the Perizzites. But Adonibezek fled; and they pursued after him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes. And Adonibezek said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me. And they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died."

AdoniBezok admits his punishment is just, since he had done the same to other kings.

But his disfigurement and mutilation are troubling.

See "Warfare and its Restrictions in Judaism"

https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/current/forums/lsr-Hez/kimlema_war.htm

According to Elicott's Commentary, "The cutting off of his thumbs would prevent him from ever again drawing a bow or wielding a sword." Later in history, Romans who desired to escape conscription as soldiers would cut off their thumbs.

This would be in harmony with one alternate translation of "*ḥērem*," which is "to remove from use" to "put beyond use" rather than simply to annihilate or "ban" or reserve as a sacrifice for God. Some think that in Arabic the word became the "*harim*" or the women's quarters, which were off limits or banned for use by other than the Caliph.

(For a closer look at the term "*herem*"

- See https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvzpv5pq.9?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents)

For instance, see **Jeremiah 25:9** - "Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the LORD, and Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them (*herem*), and make them an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations."

Many were killed, but others were taken back to Babylon in exile - i.e. "put beyond use" and driven out of the land. This is what Israelites were supposed to do to the Canaanites.

Also, the number 70 is a round number, and might just mean 'many.' Adonibezek's name is missing in the list of thirty-one city kings in **Joshua 12:9-24**. But the Rabbis see this instead as evidence that, since he subdued 70 other kings, the city kings that are listed must have been even greater than Adonibezek. (Yalk. on Judges, § 37, quoted from Sifre)

Rashi - "Seventy kings": From here you can learn [the extent of] the greatness and wealth of the kings of Canaan [mentioned in Josh. 12:7-24] since Adoni bezek was not even worthy of being counted among the kings of Canaan and [yet] it is so written of him [Sifre Deut. 33:17]

R. Yehoshua claimed that his biblical namesake Joshua took pains to prevent the disfigurement of fallen Amalekites, whereas David brought glory to Israel by giving burial to his enemies.

It is this consideration for the humanity of the enemy that forms the basis of Philo's explanation for the biblical requirement in **Numbers 31:19** of expiation or purification for those Israelites who fought against Midian.

Philo writes:

"For though the slaughter of enemies is lawful, yet one who kills a man, even if he does so justly and in self-defense and under compulsion, has something to answer for, in view of the primal common kinship of mankind. And therefore, purification was needed for the slayers, to absolve them from what was held to have been a pollution."

Exodus 17:13 in the Jewish translation - "Joshua *weakened* Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword."

Rashi says He decapitated their [the Amalekites'] strongest warriors, and he left over only the weak among them, but he did not slay them all. From here we learn that he did this according to the mandate of the Shechinah. — [from Mechilta]

But R. Yehoshua says: *He did not mutilate them*, but judged them with mercy. (Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael Chapter 17:13)

Sidebar: Amalek represents Israel's Implacable Enemy

- **Exodus 17:16** - "And he said, For there is a hand on the throne of the Eternal, [that there shall be] a war for the Lord against Amalek from generation to generation."

Rabbi Akiba declared that so long as the seed of Amalek exists, it is as if God's face is concealed (covered by His kanaf or the wing of His garment), but that when the seed of Amalek will be uprooted from the world, the face of God will be revealed.

Rashi - Heb. כִּי-יָד עַל כִּסֵּא יְהוָה. The hand of the Holy One, blessed be He, was raised to swear by His throne, to have a war and [bear] hatred against Amalek for eternity. Now what is the meaning of כִּסֵּא [as opposed to כִּסֵּא and also [why is] the Divine Name divided in half? [i.e., why is the Name יְהוָה used instead of יהוה-יהוה ?] [The answer is that] the Holy One, blessed be He, swore that His Name will not be complete and His throne will not be complete until the name of Amalek is completely obliterated. And when his name is obliterated, the Divine Name will be complete, and the throne will be complete, as it is said: "The enemy has been destroyed; swords exist forever (לְנֶצַח)" (Ps. 9:7); this [who they are referring to] is Amalek, about whom it is written: "and kept their fury forever (לְנֶצַח)" (Amos 1:11). "And You have uprooted the cities - their remembrance is lost" (Ps. 9:7) [i.e., Amalek's obliteration]. What does it say afterwards? "And the Lord (יְהוָה) shall sit forever" (Ps. 9:8); thus [after Amalek is obliterated] the Name is complete. "He has established His throne (כִּסֵּא) for judgment" (Ps. 9:8). Thus the throne is complete [i.e., thus the throne, here spelled with an "aleph," is now complete]. — [from Midrash Tanchuma, end of Ki Theitzei]

Dismemberment

King David may have buried his enemies, but he also produced a dowry of 200 Philistine foreskins, although it seems he was forced into it by Saul, who hoped he would be killed in the attempt.

- **1 Samuel 18:25–27** - "And Saul said, Thus shall ye say to David, The king desireth not any dowry, but an hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to be avenged of the king's enemies. But Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines. And when his servants told David these words, it pleased David well to be the king's son in law: and the days were not expired. Wherefore David arose and went, he and his men, and slew of the Philistines two hundred men; and David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full tale to the king, that he might be the king's son in law. And Saul gave him Michal his daughter to wife."

Later, David reacts with anger that leads to another incident of mutilation of the dead. See **2 Samuel 4:5** where Saul's son Ish-bosheth was assassinated by two of his own army-captains, Rechab and Baanah, who expected a reward from David because of this. David, however, refused to give any commendation for high treason; he had both killers hanged with their hands and feet cut off. The head of Ish-bosheth was buried in Abner's grave at Hebron (**2 Samuel 4:12**).

In neither of these incidents is the mutilation supported or endorsed by a command from God.

When the Philistines captured Samson, they gouged out his eyes (**Judges 16:21**). Nahash the Ammonite offers the following terms to end his siege of Jabesh-gilead: "On this condition I will make a treaty with you, namely that I gouge out everyone's right eye, and thus put disgrace upon all Israel" (**1 Samuel 11:2**). After Zedekiah's unsuccessful rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar, the victorious Babylonians "slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, then put out the eyes of Zedekiah; they bound him in fetters and took him to Babylon" (**2 Kings 25:7**, paralleled in **Jeremiah 39:7**). In these cases, dismemberment brings not only pain, but also shame, making it an especially potent weapon in degrading one's enemies.

Later, we find the Maccabees mutilating the dead body of the Seleucid general Nicanor:

- **1 Maccabees 7:47** - "Then the Jews seized the spoils and the goods left behind. They cut off Nicanor's head and his right hand, which he had arrogantly stretched out. They brought them and displayed them just outside Jerusalem."

Remember that the background for everything that happens in the driving out of the Canaanites is that their sin had become "full." It crossed over the line with God, who had been long-suffering.

Adonibezek had shamed and dehumanized these other kings, reducing them to begging like dogs at the king's knee, forcing them to crouch under tables to vie for scraps of food (**Judges 1:7**). He cut off their thumbs and big toes, parts of the body said to most clearly distinguish humans from the members of the animal kingdom.

Adonibezek's fate mirrored what he had done to others.

Rashi defended this action - "Just as they (Canaanites) ruled over each other, so shall we rule over them."

Malbim, chief rabbi of Bucharest in the 1800s, notes that Adonibezek *confessed* that his punishment was just. He asserts that Adonibezek died a natural death in Jerusalem, and this reflects how much Judaism values sincere repentance and confession of sin, even by its non-Jewish enemies.

Some rabbis connect Adonibezek's fate to an sort of antitype of the ritual of consecrating and anointing Jewish priests by covering the right ear, right thumb and right toe with blood (e.g., **Exod 29:20; Lev 8:23-24, 14:14, 17, 25, 28**)

Jesus and the Canaanite Woman

There may be some reference to the desperate and shameful posture of the 70

Canaanite kings in Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite woman:

- **Matthew 15:26-28** - "But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour."

Like Adonibezek, she acknowledges her position *vis a vis* Israel. Then Jesus elevates her above Pharisees and other unbelieving Jews by granting her a miracle of healing in response to her great faith.

Torture

In no other case do we find Jews mutilating their living, captured opponents, as they did to Adonibezek. The history of the Jews shows that they did not take this as a precedent, and they did not treat any other captives this way.

Torture is given no place in Jewish practice, although the punishment of "40 lashes less one" could be classified as torture.

Also, as we've already seen, Jewish law prevents a person from incriminating himself. He still needs two or three witnesses to confirm whatever he confesses to. Since one is not the owner of one's own life but God is (**Ezekiel 18:4**), one cannot confess about oneself, especially regarding a capital offense. *This prevents confessions being elicited by torture* or other violent means, as was standard practice in other contemporary cultures.

(There are some Talmud passages, however, that suggest some physical pressure or "hitting" can be employed to get a confession in some financial matters. It is unclear whether such methods were ever actually employed.)

Introduction of the "*lex talionis*" an-eye-for-an-eye laws in the Torah initially prevented even harsher punishments or death for some offenses, and then these later were replaced in rabbinical interpretation by fines.

Human Dignity

From these examples it appears that the Jewish view of human dignity, seeing man uniquely created in the image of God, prevented mutilation of the body while living, but not as much after death. Adonibezek's fate here seems to be an aberration, and was not expressly commanded by God.

The moral breakdown of Israel appears at the end of Judges with another dismemberment - the case of the Levite's concubine: "He cut her into twelve pieces, limb by limb and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel" (**Judges 19:29**). Her dismemberment reflects the final disintegration of Israel's moral cohesion in the time of

the judges.

Symbolic and Spiritual Dismemberment

Solomon threatens to "cut the baby in half" to settle a dispute. Jesus talks about cutting off or cutting up body parts four times (**Matthew 5:29–30, 18:8–9, 19:12, 24:45–51**) - i.e. plucking out an eye, becoming a eunuch, etc., becomes a spiritual image of "death to self," or going to the cross, because the dismemberment is either impossible or necessarily would lead to one's death. But these instances point to more symbolic acts. Jesus says, "it is better for you to enter life maimed or lame than to have two hands or two feet and to be thrown into the eternal fire" (Matt 18:8). Jesus Himself arises still with his wounds from the crucifixion (**John 20:27**). The Jewish understanding was, "They shall rise with their defects and then be healed" at the Resurrection (b. Sanh. 91b. See also Ecclesiastes Rabbah 1.4.2)

See "Dismemberment, Dualism, and Theology of the Body in the Gospel of Matthew" Biblical Theology Bulletin, 2014
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0146107914552229>

The treatment of Adonibezek can be seen as an indication of the direction Israel was heading, in which "every man did what he considered to be right in his own eyes." (Judges 21:25)

Caleb, Othniel and Achsah Again

This story is repeated from **Joshua 15:15-19**.

Achsah knows that water will be essential to achieving success, and so she asks for the resources (the springs) that are necessary to accomplish the task at hand. It is not hard to see how this text could serve as a pattern for prayer.

Chariots of Iron

Judges 1:19 - "And the LORD was with Judah; and he drove out the inhabitants of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron."

But the Egyptians also had chariots and God defeated them. In fact, they "sank like lead" into the Red Sea (**Exodus 15:10**). Israel had forgotten that God had said...

- **Deuteronomy 20:1** - "When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the LORD thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."

Later, God had no difficulty helping Deborah and Barak defeat the 900 chariots with iron-rimmed wheels commanded by Sisera (**Judges 4:12-16**).

Jebusites Remained in Jerusalem

Judges 1:21 - "And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem unto this day."

Rashi gives an excuse for this:

There was a section in Jerusalem called Jebuse, which was populated by the descendants of Abimelech who were not driven out because of the oath [which Abraham had sworn], until the coming of David. This was because his grandson was still alive and Abraham had sworn [**Gen. 21:23**] to him, his son, and grandson.

Ephraim Takes Bethel - Judges 1:22-26

Judges 1:24-25 - "And the spies saw a man come forth out of the city, and they said unto him, Shew us, we pray thee, the entrance into the city, and we will shew thee mercy. And when he shewed them the entrance into the city, they smote the city with the edge of the sword; but they let go the man and all his family."

Why include the story of the man who showed them the entrance?

Bethel's original name of Luz signifies a "nut" possibly from a large numbers of nut trees which grew near it; the Jews suggest the city was like a nut, no entrance into it but through a cave or some subterranean passage.

Rashi - They entered the city through a cave over which one hazelnut bush (לוז) stood at the entrance and one would enter through the bush into the cave.

Unlike the story of Rahab at Jericho, this man was forced to cooperate, did it for self-preservation, and then did not convert like Rahab did and join Israel, but left to start his life elsewhere. The story is included as a contrast, to show the degeneration and lack of faith beginning to set in during the time of the judges.

More Failures

Judges 1:27-28 - "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. And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute, and did not utterly drive them out."

Rashi - And Menasseh did not drive out: The Scripture tells of their shame; they began to betray the Holy One, blessed be He, Who commanded them, [**Num. 33:52**] "You shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land, etc."

Manasseh seems to have been sluggish, and not to have exerted itself at all, or made any attempts to drive out these people - *John Gill*

"Put the Canaanites to tribute" means they made a deal, agreeing to allow them to remain if they gave them tribute. They got something out of allowing them to stay. They were covetous.

The same failures happened with the tribes of Zebulun, Asher, Naphtali and Dan - Judges 1:30-36

Judges 1:30 - "Neither did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, nor the inhabitants of Nahalol; but the Canaanites dwelt among them, and became tributaries."

These were cities given to the Levites from Zebulun's territory. They probably thought, "Why fight for a place we'll just turn over to the Levites?" This was not just sloth, but a dismissing of God's special ministers - the priests and Levites. Instead they made a deal, and no doubt shared none of what they gained with the Levites.

Judges 1:32 - "But the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: for they did not drive them out."

This is a worse situation. The Canaanites possessed the land and the tribe of Asher dwelt among the Canaanites - apparently surrounded by them and not with the upper hand or receiving tribute. Perhaps they even gave tribute to the Canaanites, but that is not mentioned.

Judges 1:34-35 - "And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain: for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley. But the Amorites would dwell in mount Heres in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim: yet the hand of the house of Joseph prevailed, so that they became tributaries."

This is even worse yet. Previously in Joshua we saw that Dan just gave up and took land in the far north to emigrate there.

Apparently at some later time Ephraim joined forces with Dan and at least made the Canaanites pay tribute, but they were never able to occupy the fertile valley.

(However, the Hebrew could mean "the hand of the House of Joseph was made heavy and hung down" and did not prevail, and those remaining of Dan paid tribute to the Canaanites.)

Summary

The lesson from this (as we discussed previously in Joshua) is - Are we making a deal with the values and voices of the Canaanites in our own lives, instead of dispossessing them from our inheritance? Are we acting from our own agendas, or waiting on direction from God?

Like ancient Israel, we have seen God do amazing things - Lives turned around,

healings, victories over despair, addictions, depression, sin and circumstances that seemed to be overwhelming.

Don't give in to self-seeking now, do not settle for a truce, resist the temptation to negotiate with the old man Adam. Dispossess the Canaanites, and then POSSESS the land - receive the peace and rest God has promised us!

Next week - Chastised by the Angel of the Lord, the people repent.