

Judges Chapter 1- John Karmelich

1. I want to begin by discussing the book of Judges first, as that'll lead well into a discussion of this first chapter. First, let me tease you with the lesson title, "The price we pay when we fail to live as God desires". Yes, I believe there's nothing we have to do to be saved, other than believing Jesus is God, died for our sins and He's in charge of our lives. My point is when we fail to live as God desires as Christians, we're not only a bad witness for Him, but it harms us as His way of living is the best way to live, period. OK, I'll eventually get back to that thought. First as promised I want to discuss the book of Judges itself as that background will help a lot with Chapter 1. Here goes:
2. This book covers a huge span of history, roughly 350 years. It isn't a pure chronological book. It's a bunch of stories that occurred to Israel during that time period. Most scholars consider this the "dark ages" of Israel's history. It covers the time after the Israelites first came into that land all the way to the first Israel kings. Again, that's about 350 years of history within the land of Israel!
3. Let me discuss the word "judges". It's misleading. It's not like court judges or even rulers. It's the people who God called to rescue the Israelites out of trouble during this long time period. Think of them as God lead "Superhero's". Realize none of them were anywhere close to a perfect person. They had faults and God used them in mighty ways despite their faults. So why call it "judges" if they weren't leaders or "court-like" judges? Because God used them to judge groups who were harming His people. It's about God "judging" bad behavior within His land.
 - a) Which reminds me: It always struck me as strange that the God who created the universe in effect says about the land of Israel. In effect, He says, "That is mine, no messing with it." Stop and think of all the nations and empires that have come and gone over all of the millenniums and the fact that the Israelites are still standing! If you ever want proof of the fact that Israel is "God's land" consider all the miracles that sustained them through the millenniums. In human history, no nation has ever been conquered, scattered and came back together again to be a nation. Except for Israel and it occurred twice!
 - b) Anyway, God had a plan to bring the Messiah into the world through the Nation of Israel. So despite all of their disobedience to God, He still persevered them and He made specific people into judges in the sense that they acted out judgment against Israel's enemies.
 - c) In effect, God had a "dilemma". He can't tolerate disobedience from His own people as He wants us to be a good witness for Him. At the same time, God can't "end that nation" as a single entity because of the promise that the Messiah would come from that nation while it was a nation. Therefore, God had the dilemma of "How do I punish them for not living as I desire while still persevering them?"
 - d) Speaking of not behaving, a warning: This is not called the "Dark Ages" of Israel's history for nothing! This book would get a "Hard R" rating if it were a movie. Some of the most gross and disgusting things one can imagine occur in this book. Most of those bad things stem from the Israelites failure to live as God desired. There's a verse stated twice in this book that summarizes Judges very well. To paraphrase it, "Everybody did pretty much whatever they felt like doing and didn't care otherwise". That's idea's based on the verses Judges 17:6 and Judges 21:25.
4. OK, I'm way overdue for one of my "Why should I care speeches". Lets say you're a Christian and it is your desire to live a life pleasing to God. Why should I focus on the negative here? Because temptation comes to all of us, no matter how long we've been a believer or how close we stick to our beliefs. Let me explain by talking about the people living in the land of Israel before they did conquer it. The Israelites lived in slavery for hundreds of years. They weren't used to having lots of stuff. Those living in the land of Israel were financially blessed. The locals were known as the Canaanites. Tell me if this sounds familiar: They worshipped deities that said if one honors them they would be blessed financially. They'd be famous. They had all sorts of perverted sexual sins and their god deities were "turned on" by those sins. You can see how it was tempting to them.

- a) God came along and effectively said to the Canaanites, "This is My land, and I decide who can live here!" Then it is a matter of telling the Israelites in effect, "That's not the best way to live life. That's why I gave all of a set of laws to live by, which is not like how the locals are living". The reason God wanted the Israelites to wipe out every last man, woman and child living there, is the locals had "gotten to a point of no return". It's kind of like having to shoot a horse as that is the most humane way to handle that much pain!
 - b) Here's another question to consider. God said He'd drive out the local inhabitants "little by little". (Exodus 23:30.) Obviously, God is God, and if He wanted to, He could "snap His fingers" and everyone there would be dead. So what's the deal? God wanted His people to wipe them out themselves so they'd learn that His way of living is superior to how the locals were living. It was also hard work and it's easy to compromise on how God wants us to live. It's tempting to want, power, stuff and lots of cheap sex. It is tough to have the discipline to live as God desires. There were practical reasons for "little by little" too. If the locals got wiped out too fast, then wild animals would expand too quickly.
 - i) OK here's the "why we should care" part: Just as God desired the Israelites to wipe out those people, so God wants to work in your life and my life to wipe out the sin that we deal with. Yes, it's a life long battle. No, we'll never be perfect. Still it's His desire we live as a witness for Him, therefore, we battle our sin natures in order to be that type of witness.
 - c) Bottom line, the Israelites failed to live as God desired during the time of judges so God is going back and forth between punishing them and bringing judges in to preserve them in spite of their sins. The same way He preserves us despite our failure to live as He desires.
5. Time to finish my "who, what when where and why's". I've already beaten the why's to death and we know it takes place in the land of Israel. Jewish tradition is Samuel wrote it. He was the spiritual leader of Israel before the first king (Saul) came in and there's no mention of any king, be it Saul or the second King David. The years were roughly 1,400 BC to 1050 BC. Saul was made king around 1,050BC. My years are approximate but you get the idea. Anyway, it was a dark time in Israel's history. Again the book isn't an exact chronological history, but a "diary" of what went right and wrong during that time period with a big emphasis on what God's people did wrong as if to tell us, "Beware we can suffer the same fate if we too fail to be a witness for Him with our lives." That's the purpose of this book in a nutshell!
 6. Believe it or not, we actually made it to Chapter 1. To explain, first I need to discuss the last book of the bible before this one: "Joshua". He was a personal assistant to Moses. Joshua was only one of two people who came out of Egypt that actually got to enter the Promised Land along with the children of those who came out of Egypt. Realize about 1.2 million people actually came into that land, so it's roughly an equal number of people who died in the wilderness prior to that event happening. The other man who made it through all of that is mentioned in this chapter. Joshua did die before this book started but the other guy, Caleb is still around and is one of the few bright spots in this chapter. The one thing Joshua didn't do is appoint a new leader. We don't know why, but the bible tells us that the Israelites were ignoring God after Joshua and his fellow leaders died off. I suspect but can't prove Joshua thought, "Maybe they've got to learn the hard way". Anyway, the only reason Israel even survived as a nation for almost four hundred years is the "superhero" judges that came on the scene during this time period to rescue the Israelites despite the failures of those judges let alone the Israelites themselves.
 7. That leads back to my lesson title: "The price one pays when we fail to live as God desires ". Most of Chapter 1 lists the failure of the Israelites to obey God's command to wipe out the inhabitants of the land. It's not all bad, but for the most part it's bad news! A few of the verses do describe Israel's victories and they give us clues as to how "gross" the locals had become in the lifestyle they had of "It's all about me!" OK then, hope you've got an empty stomach, as the gross aspects of this book are about to begin! If nothing else, think of this book as "Learn from mistakes of others or else we will (no exception) suffer the same consequences". OK then, let's begin:

8. Chapter 1, Verse 1: After the death of Joshua, the Israelites asked the LORD, "Who will be the first to go up and fight for us against the Canaanites?" ² The LORD answered, "Judah is to go; I have given the land into their hands."
- a) This book comes right after the book of Joshua. Both this verse and the book of Joshua do mention his death. We can speculate all day why Joshua didn't appoint a new leader, but the simple fact is, he chose not to. The good news is at least the Israelites did what's right and sought God. It's probably something like, "OK God, our leader is dead, we know it is Your intention that we finish conquering this place, so how do we start?"
 - b) Keep a few things in mind. The previous generation, led by Joshua had the specific job of conquering that land. Apparently by Judges Chapter 1, that job wasn't finished. Joshua's life span in the last few verses of that book was stated at 110 years old. My simple point is Joshua spent decades living in Israel and the "clean up" operation of wiping out the locals wasn't done. As I said in the introduction, God didn't "snap His fingers" and wipe out all living there. He wanted the Israelites to destroy them completely. It's God's way to show us the life long battle we have with sin! Anyway, we're now with the next generation after Joshua and the job isn't done yet! If there's a lesson here, it's the fact that every generation will always have to battle sin. It'll exist in this world until the day Jesus makes a new one!
 - c) All of that lead to Verse 1. God wanted all the Israelites to wipe out every inhabitant there in that land. It's not a matter of killing all nonbelievers. This command was only for those people living in that land as an illustration of "incurable sin" must be wiped out as we can not defeat it based on our own willpower. In Joshua's day the command was to wipe out all of them. Therefore, Verse 1 is the first of many compromises we'll read in this book. It is saying, "Hey God, you divided us Israelites into 12 tribes. We get that. Therefore which one should lead the effort to wipe out the locals?" In a sense, the Israelites are asking who should lead us since Joshua didn't appoint the next leader!
 - d) That leads to the next question, why "Judah"? They are one of the 12 tribes. It's now been hundreds of years since a man named Jacob had 12 sons that became those 12 tribes. We assume they all got married and the tribes began. It's now hundreds of years later, and those 12 tribes are thousands of people. Based on the count in the book of Numbers, there were roughly 1.2 million Israelites. Anyway, Judah is one of those tribes. A different tribe was called to be priests. I'd argue God wanted Judah to lead as a prophetic clue that the Messiah would come through that tribe!
 - e) Yes God wanted all the Israelites to work to wipe out the locals, but God is saying that He wants Judah to be the "leader" as again, I believe it is symbolic of the fact Jesus descended from that tribe and became Israel's long promised Messiah, He will lead true believers to a victory as they conquer the "incurable sin influence" that existed in this world!
 - f) So who was to "lead" among the tribe of Judah? We don't know the text doesn't say. We do know the oldest leader still alive is a man named Caleb. Time for a refresher on who is Caleb. Let's begin by saying he's been around for awhile. When the Israelites came out of Egypt, (prior to the 40 years of wandering the desert), Moses picked two spies to go check out the land of Israel. Only two of those 12 spies brought back a good report. One of them became the next leader of Israel, Joshua. The other was Caleb. Realize he's also part of the Messianic line that lead to King David and eventually Jesus. Anyway, here is Caleb, who's lived through the Exodus in Egypt, saw the Red Sea part, saw everyone he knew die off in the desert for forty years, saw the Jordan River stop so the Israelites could cross that river into dry land. Then if that's not enough for one life, we get the impression he also fought the locals and lead a lot of the conquering of the land. While he's not named as either one of the leaders or even a judge, by default of what he's been through he's an old "big shot" and at the least a leader in the tribe of Judah.
 - i) By the way, he'll be one of the few bright spots in this chapter. I'll just say that he ended his life as a great witness for Jesus. More on Caleb later in this chapter!

- ii) In the meantime, it's time for the tribe of Judah to carry out God's order. In Verse 3 I will argue is where the first of many compromises occur in this book:
9. Verse 3: Then the men of Judah said to the Simeonites their brothers, "Come up with us into the territory allotted to us, to fight against the Canaanites. We in turn will go with you into yours." So the Simeonites went with them.
- a) Back in the book of Joshua, the land of Israel was divided up by the 12 tribes. Judah was a large tribe and got a lot of territory. Simon in comparison was a much smaller tribe. They had an area that was essentially surrounded by Judah's tribe. It seems logical for Judah to ask Simon to help them. Some scholars argue the tribe of Judah did the right thing as they asked for help. Personally I disagree and I'll explain:
 - b) My view is when God tells us to do something, we should do exactly what He tells us and not compromise on it, even if it's painful or difficult to do so! For example if you believe God is leading you to do some specific project, God will make it possible for you to do it. He may ask for you to get help or He may make it obvious to just go at it yourself. All we can do is "trial and error" to figure out His will! God's will is stated in His word. Then we are to make the best decisions we can by obeying those rules. We're free to do whatever it is we desire after that. The challenge is to use the gifts God's given us and use those gifts to make a difference for Him! That's usually where the obedience comes into play!
 - c) Meanwhile, back in Judges Chapter 1, it's a little easier. God specifically said in Verse 2, He wanted the tribe of Judah to be the example to the rest of the tribe and go conquer the section of land allocated to them and yes, wipe out every last man, woman and child who is living there. Isn't that cruel? Yes. Again, it was done as to teach us that we're never to compromise with sin, but to make every effort to wipe that sin from our lives! Remember that people are both the "pawns and the prizes" in God's plan for redemption. In this case the Israelites were to be used as pawns to carry out His command to wipe out every living person in that land, period!
 - d) With that understood, time for the specifics of what happened when the tribe of Judah as well as the tribe of Simeon started battling the locals living in the land of Israel.
10. Verse 4: When Judah attacked, the LORD gave the Canaanites and Perizzites into their hands and they struck down ten thousand men at Bezek. ⁵ It was there that they found Adoni-Bezek and fought against him, putting to rout the Canaanites and Perizzites. ⁶ Adoni-Bezek fled, but they chased him and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and big toes.
- a) First the good news. Judah won.
 - b) Next the better news. When we get to heaven, God's not going to ask, "You want to get to heaven, name the tribes the Israelites conquered and the kings they defeated!" I'm willing to bet the only question we must deal with on judgment day is "Did we believe Jesus did die for all our sins and what did we do with all that information? Therefore, as we read all of these details about names of people and places in the land of Israel many thousands of years ago, don't panic if you can't pronounce them or remember them. What we must get is that the Israelites obeyed God's command (even with a compromise) and He gave them the victory over the locals living there!
 - c) Realize the 10,000 men the Israelites struck down wasn't all that there was as we'll read of Caleb taking on more later in a matter of verses. Apparently the Israelites were successful here. So did the Israelites fail or succeed here and why do we get this detail? The Israelites did do what God requested which was for Judah to lead the fight. I think we got this fact as an example of getting a victory when we do what God asks us to do.
 - d) OK then, time for the interesting part: When the Israelites captured the leader (king) of the 10,000 men, they cut off his thumbs and big toes! Yes, it's weird and gross. I warned you the book of Judges gets a "Hard R" rating and we're literally just getting warmed up in the book. Realize by cutting off those things that king can't shoot a bow and arrow or walk in any easy matter. Let's just say there was a practical reason for it, but that's just the start!

- e) I'm willing bet the Israelites also killed him, but I suspect they wanted him to suffer first. We'll read why they did this in the next verse. Speaking of which:
11. Verse 7: Then Adoni-Bezek said, "Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off have picked up scraps under my table. Now God has paid me back for what I did to them." They brought him to Jerusalem, and he died there.
- a) God's principal of appropriate punishment is laid out in the chapter right after He gave the Ten Commandments. For those who've heard the expression, "eye for an eye", yes that is biblical (See Exodus 21:24 as an example.) I bring it up here as this king apparently was guilty of cutting off his enemies fingers and toes, so the Israelites practiced what God said to them by cutting off his big toes and fingers. It's mentioned here as the king himself says he deserved that punishment as "that's what he dished out and now he's being repaid for his sins". In effect this wicked guy is testifying of God's justice! As I said, I'm sure that this king was wiped out by the Israelites as that was God's command. The point is before he is killed in effect he testified of God's justice.
- b) By the way, if you think it's gross that this guy used his enemies toes and fingers to scrape the food off the floor, in effect "that's nothing" compared to what's coming up later in this book. As I said, Judges gets a "Hard R" rating, and truthfully that's only a PG-13 comment in compared to what's coming up soon. All I'm saying is "get used to this" as it's going to be a part of this book for many chapters to come!
- c) OK then, time to move on to another story of this conquering:
12. Verse 8: The men of Judah attacked Jerusalem also and took it. They put the city to the sword and set it on fire.
- a) If one studies the history of the city of Jerusalem over the millenniums, one discovers it's been conquered and destroyed many times. A reason scholars believe Samuel (the author of most of 1st and 2nd Samuel) wrote this book because when David became king, it was shortly after the death of Samuel, David conquered Jerusalem as it was in foreign hands. Here, about 400 years before David, we're also seeing the Israelites conquering Jerusalem!
- b) I've had a joke for years that in effect, the bible is a "tale of two cities". That's because the bible spends a lot of time discussing the origin, life and destiny of the cities of Jerusalem as well as the city of Babylon. Jerusalem is where God Himself will rule the world from in some future Day. It's God's "eternal city". I'm convinced the desire to conquer it by nations other than Israel is demonic, simply because Satan "knows his bible" and realizes that is where Jesus will rule the world from one day, so therefore Satan is doing whatever he can to delay that event. That's why many times in history that city has been conquered. What is amazing about that city is it has no great rivers or no natural resources. Yet God says in effect "That's my city and don't mess with it".
- i) The other city mentioned a lot throughout the bible is the city of Babylon. Much of it is still around today although it has a different name today. It's not significant a city today, but given it's history, I personally suspect it will "rise again" one day.
- ii) The reason that city is so prominent, is it's where the first organized effort to rebel against God occurred (Babel tower). It symbolizes all efforts to rebel against God. Near the end of Revelation, its ultimate destruction is described. That's why I'd argue it will be prominent again one day and yes God Himself will destroy it!
- c) The reason I get into all of that here, is we're reading here of the first time of the Israelites conquered that city. Obviously it won't be the last. For example the Babylonians wipe it out as did the Romans later in history. When it was under Muslim control for centuries it was a "nothing" of a town. All I'm saying is Jerusalem has had many a rise and fall and it's now in Jewish hands since 1967. As to the future, only God knows the date of His return, so I don't worry about the future. I just know that city is "His city" and I wouldn't want to be in the shoes of those who mess with it, either in the future or in the past.
- d) OK enough of the Jerusalem history, lesson, time for a new topic.

13. Verse 9: After that, the men of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites living in the hill country, the Negev and the western foothills.¹⁰ They advanced against the Canaanites living in Hebron (formerly called Kiriath Arba) and defeated Sheshai, Ahiman and Talmai.
- a) One of the things I keep emphasizing as I teach the bible is I'm convinced God's not going to require we pass a bible trivia contest on judgment day. God is interested in how we've used our lives to make a difference for Him, not memorize the former names of places the people who've lived in Israel millenniums ago. My point is as you read of all these cities, I don't want you to panic if you can't pronounce these cities or forget their names.
 - b) Yes some people love geography and history, and if that's your cup of tea, I'm sure we can learn lots of interesting little facts about those places. The big picture here is the Israelites were obeying God (at least the men of the tribe of Judah were) as they did conquer those who lived in Israel as God commanded them to do.
 - c) Let me pause again to discuss the idea of destroying nonbelievers. God never called those Israelites to destroy all nonbelievers "around the world". This was a specific judgment on the people living in Israel at that time. It was God using the Israelites as His instrument of judgment. It's God saying, "That's My land and your on it!" In fact, God made a promise of this judgment roughly 500 years earlier to Abraham (Genesis 15:16.) The related point is the fact that the people living there in effect are being used as an example of what will be the destiny of people who chose to ignore God all of their lives!
 - d) OK, this is all interesting ancient history, why should we care? Assume you're talking to devout Christians who already believe in God. We already grasp the fate of people who chose to ignore God. The point for you and me is God wants us to fight the desire to sin all our lives. That desire never goes away. The same way God wanted those Israelites to wipe out those who would turn His people from living as He desired, so He desires of us to "wipe out" and constantly battle whatever would turn us away from Him.
 - i) Let me explain that better. Our natural desire is to worry about the future. We see others with great power, great influence, great fame and they seem to have all that they need. God's saying to us, trusting Him is the greatest way to live. Yes He still wants us to provide for ourselves and work hard, but the point is trusting Him is the best way to go through life. By having the Israelites wipe out those who would tempt them to turn from God, so He desires we turn from any and all things that'd keep us from living as He desires. No He doesn't want us to kill nonbelievers, but to be a witness to them! What we're "killing" is the desire to want what God never intends us to have! It's simply the idea that living as God desires we live is the best way to live life, period.
 - e) Meanwhile, we left the Israelites busy conquering that land. We're about to read another positive story before we get into all the "compromises with sin" that's the bulk of the book of Judges. With that warning about what's coming up, it's time to return to a hero within the book of Exodus, Joshua and now Judges, the story of Caleb and his family. Remember that Caleb is part of the tribe of Judah so it's relevant to God's order for Judah to lead that effort to conquer that land. OK enough rambling, let's get onto the story itself.
14. Verse 11: From there they advanced against the people living in Debir (formerly called Kiriath Sepher).¹² And Caleb said, "I will give my daughter Acsah in marriage to the man who attacks and captures Kiriath Sepher."¹³ Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it; so Caleb gave his daughter Acsah to him in marriage.
- a) You'd think by this point in Caleb's life, he'd be thinking about retirement. It is now more than 50 years since Moses asked Caleb, Joshua and 10 others to spy out the land. He is the only person still alive at this point who's seen the Exodus and the Red Sea crossing. You'd think he'd be thinking, I did my part, I'll let others do the heavy lifting. If nothing else, it's an example that God can never stop using us. We may retire from work, but as far as God is concerned, we're never done being a witness for Him until our end.

- b) I was thinking about the fact that Caleb was old at this point and I suspect he's about 100. If I was told I'd get his daughter as a prize, I'd be curious what she looked like and ponder her age. Yes he may have had her late in life, but it did cross my mind. Also keep in mind the fact that Caleb was a leader and God give him some good land for his work. The point is there may be a financial benefit for marrying his daughter. Whatever the reason, she's a "desirable prize". For whatever reason she was desirable, Caleb thought I'll use that fact as a motivation for other Israelites to live as God desires. That's why he encourages others as Caleb says, "Whoever conquers this town will get my daughter as a prize". In that culture marriages were arranged by the parents, so the daughter had to go along with the deal! If she was going to marry a conqueror, who still honors God, it'd be a good thing for her!
 - c) The next thing that's strange in our culture is the idea that the "winner of this contest" was Caleb's nephew. That means Caleb's daughter married her first cousin. Keep in mind the "gene pool" wasn't corrupt enough yet where marrying a cousin wasn't an issue. What we should notice is "Old Man Caleb" used what asset he had (his daughter) as his motivation tool to get others to also do what God called them to do, which is conquer that land!
 - d) Speaking of Caleb's daughter, she inherited her father's "hoospa" (guts) as we'll read next in this chapter:
15. Verse 14: One day when she came to Othniel, she urged him to ask her father for a field. When she got off her donkey, Caleb asked her, "What can I do for you?" ¹⁵ She replied, "Do me a special favor. Since you have given me land in the Negev, give me also springs of water." Then Caleb gave her the upper and lower springs.
- a) Try to picture this scene. The area that Caleb's daughter's husband conquered is located in a "desert" part of Israel. As one who's been to Israel, hot weather is the norm. What she is referring to is the fact there is no fresh water source where she was to settle down. To ask for a water source is a big deal in a place as dry as Israel. Give her credit for guts! Picture her saying, "Hey Dad, first thanks for giving me this piece of real estate as a wedding gift, but if you really love me, throw in a fresh water source!" As a father of girls, I know how hard it is to resist their requests! Anyway, Caleb said, "If that's what you want, forget the cost, it's a done deal!" (That's how I picture it.)
 - b) Yes this story is a small bit of bible trivia, but it's a great example of how this whole family trusts in God, obeys what He commanded (did the conquering) and gets rewarded in this life for that effort!
 - c) With that said, we're ready to move on to the next little story:
16. Verse 16: The descendants of Moses' father-in-law, the Kenite, went up from the City of Palms with the men of Judah to live among the people of the Desert of Judah in the Negev near Arad.
- a) Here's a "whatever happened to that guy" verse. Back when Moses lead the Israelites to wander through the desert, among the "guests" was Moses father in law, who belonged to a group called the "Kenites". Apparently this man brought some of his extended family on that journey and they're still hanging around with the Israelites! I suspect this is here as a reminder to be a witness to others around us. Here's the descendants of someone who is a "bible trivia" question and not Israelites. If nothing else, this is here as a reminder that we are to be a good witness to others who desire to serve the same God and live among us!
 - b) In effect this is a reminder that Christianity is not meant to be an exclusive club of, "I'm in you're not and that's your problem!" God wants us to be a good witness even to those who are not part of our family and here is the family of a man who hasn't been mentioned for a handful of books now to say in effect, "They're still around and the Israelites let them be a part of their family even long after Moses was dead!"
 - c) OK then, we still have a few verses left to discuss how the tribe of Judah obeyed what was commanded by God which was to conquer the territory assigned to them by Joshua. God wanted this tribe to be an example to the other tribes, so He asked them "to take the lead" in this job and we read of Caleb leading and even non-Israelites being a part of this!

17. Verse 17: Then the men of Judah went with the Simeonites their brothers and attacked the Canaanites living in Zephath, and they totally destroyed the city. Therefore it was called Hormah.¹⁸ The men of Judah also took Gaza, Ashkelon and Ekron--each city with its territory.
- a) Here we get the last of what was conquered. Realize all these verses cover a good period of time. Within this chapter, we're reading of the Israelites conquering a whole bunch of cities and wiping out every inhabitant of those cities.
 - b) As I mentioned, the tribe of Simeon was much smaller and their territory was essentially a part of Judah's area. Verse 18 mentions three cities that by the time of King Saul were the territory of an enemy called the Philistines. This verse is another proof that "Judges" was compiled about the time of the first king, when the era of judges was ending.
 - c) I suspect these verses are here as another example that God loves obedience! There are a lot of bible verses that essentially say, "God wanted somebody to do this and they did it!" It is a way of saying God loves obedience and here's another example! The fact that David had to conquer places like the "Gaza strip" and Jerusalem after it was done is a clue of the downhill spiral we'll read about through the book of Judges! In a sense, we're starting a book that's teaching us about the importance of "sticking at it". Here we're reading of the obedience of the Israelites, yet down the road, they'll have to do the same thing again. If nothing else, this is a reminder that sin is a lifelong battle and just because we conquered it once, that never means we're done battling that issue.
 - i) OK since you're getting all theological here, how do we have that life long victory? The secret has nothing to do with willpower, but trusting in His power over what we must battle all our lives! If we don't bad consequences come.
 - ii) Speaking of such things, the rest of this chapter is essentially a lesson in the danger of "failing to keep our eye on the ball". The rest of the chapter is essentially one of failure as the Israelites got their eyes off God and onto their problems. We're about to read of the failure of the Israelites for the rest of the chapter as they compromise with what God called them to do.
 - iii) Enough intro, let's get to it.
18. Verse 19: The LORD was with the men of Judah. They took possession of the hill country, but they were unable to drive the people from the plains, because they had iron chariots.
- a) Let me start here by explaining what is an "iron chariot". It was the "tank" of that culture! It was a four wheeled chariot pulled by a team of horses. People could shoot arrows while it was moving or just run over people! It's a force to be reckoned with but it's only good in a "plain" setting as opposed to going up and down steep hills!
 - b) The first thing this tells us is the local inhabitants didn't say "We give up, kill us now!" We read of them doing their best to fight back and resist just as sin always tempts us! Those in the land fought back with whatever weapons they had and were effective.
 - c) The next thing to realize is that if God said to conquer that land, it means He would make it possible to do so. This is the first of many examples in this book of the Israelites getting an eye off of God and onto the problem at hand!
 - d) So does this mean we go attack things bigger than us because God's there? The way I look at life is if God says to do something He'll make it possible. Yes it requires ingenuity and teamwork, but if God says "Do this", do we really think that task is impossible? This is the first of many failures in this book because the Israelites "Took their eye off the ball!"
19. Verse 20: As Moses had promised, Hebron was given to Caleb, who drove from it the three sons of Anak.
- a) The good news of the book of Judges, is it's not all bad news. Every time we read of Caleb it's a good thing. He's an example of the benefit of doing what God desires even if others around us are refusing to do so. While most of the spies brought bad reports, Caleb is the one who said, "We can win despite the odds". He survived to see the conquering of Israel because he was willing to trust God despite the odds because God never loses in the end!

- b) Hebron was a city within Israel and that became Caleb's home base while he was there.
 - c) That leads to a quick discussion of what was "Anak". Short version is this was a group of tall people. These were the "basketball players" of that day! Anak's were a big reason why the Israelites of the previous generation were afraid to go conquer the land of Israel. Here we read of Caleb himself, an old man at this point in his life, leading a conquest of three of the "big dudes" living in the place that God promised to Caleb to live! I admit he's a great bible character to study even though he doesn't get a lot of text. Caleb's impressive as he is always taking action to show his trust in God. Of all those within the Messianic line, I'd say Caleb is one of the most impressive.
 - d) OK enough good news, time for the bad news!
20. Verse 21: The Benjamites, however, failed to dislodge the Jebusites, who were living in Jerusalem; to this day the Jebusites live there with the Benjamites.
- a) First you know how endlessly fascinated I am with the clues about when this was written. It was the Jebusites that David had to conquer to take Jerusalem in his day. That's why the text says, "to this day". It refers to the time of the prophet Samuel, and King David. Both of them lived around the same time.
 - b) Let's back up to consider the bigger picture here. God commanded the tribe of Judah as a leader to conquer the land of Israel. I'm sure the other tribes "got wind" of their victories. In spite of that, we'll read from Verse 21 to the end of the chapter of all the other tribes as they fail to do likewise! So why is that? Again, it's the classic example of focusing only on the problem and not the "power source" that can help us overcome our problems.
 - c) There's an old expression that goes, "living the Christian life is not hard, it's impossible!" It is only possible by trusting in His power to live that life. I like the illustration of pushing a car up a hill and then realizing "Wait a minute, this car has an engine, why am I pushing?"
 - i) So how do we conquer problems that are huge! How did the Israelites conquer say soldiers with "iron tanks"? How did they conquer cities with big walls and gates?
 - ii) Of course they had to trust God. Realize, "God gave us a brain and He expects us to use it!" If there is a will, there is a way. If there is a God who says He expects us to defeat the sinful influences of our lives, He proves us with intelligence to figure out how to do it. Does it involve trial and error? Of course. It is possible to have a victory over whatever outside and inside forces want to make us a bad witness for God. It starts with a desire to live as He desires. Then we do the footwork, and yes it can be done.
 - d) Meanwhile, we're reading examples of people who "got their eye off the ball" (I know that should be my lesson title!) and failed to do what God called them to do. The good news is it's not all bad news. This chapter is a mixed-bag of obedience and lack of it, to show how the Israelites started to go down the path of doing whatever they felt like doing.
 - e) Anyway, time for a quick "good news story" in the midst of a lot of bad news:
21. Verse 22: Now the house of Joseph attacked Bethel, and the LORD was with them.²³ When they sent men to spy out Bethel (formerly called Luz),²⁴ the spies saw a man coming out of the city and they said to him, "Show us how to get into the city and we will see that you are treated well."²⁵ So he showed them, and they put the city to the sword but spared the man and his whole family.²⁶ He then went to the land of the Hittites, where he built a city and called it Luz, which is its name to this day.
- a) From here to the end of the chapter we're going to get a "tribe by tribe" report on how the Israelites did as far as doing what God called them to do. The short version is they failed to complete this task and compromised on living as God desired. Consequences will be a major topic of this book as there are always consequences when we fail to live as a witness for God. That'll be an underlying lesson of the rest of this chapter, and the rest of Judges for that matter. Before I get into the specifics of these verses, let me take a brief moment to explain the "twelve tribes of Israel" a little better. It'll help to understand this text.

- b) To explain the nation of Israel, one starts with the first man God called Abraham. At one point in his life he had a grandson named Jacob. That grandson had twelve sons from the four women of his life (Two wives, two concubines). No, God doesn't approve of that, but it is what it is and God used it. Each of those 12 boys married that became the 12 tribes of Israel. The book of Judges begins about 400 since those 12 half-brothers lived. As I stated earlier, I estimated based on statistics in the book of Numbers there were about 1.2 million descendants of the 12 brothers and that's what we're reading about here.
- c) That discussion leads us back to these verses. We're done talking about the tribe of Judah and these verses move on to discuss the descendants of another tribe the text calls Joseph for short. The city of Bethel was already famous going back to the time of Jacob (again the father of the 12 brothers). It was where Jacob "wrested with God", back in Genesis 32. We are now 400 years later in this book. Joseph's descendants (technically two of the 12 tribes that are together called Joseph) inherited the territory that includes this city.
- d) With that said, this story give a strange tale of a local resident who showed the Israelites a secret passage in the city (I visualize a medieval castle with a hidden stairway), but we do not know the specifics. The story focuses on the man who showed the Israelites the way into the city. Then the story mentions the fact that this man who escaped left Israel to go build a city with the family he escaped with. OK, the big question, why is this here?
 - i) The negative view is that God ordered the Israelites to wipe out every last person living there. The lack of trust in God and the dependence upon one of the enemy to do this meant that it "came back to harm them" as the guy who escaped went on to start a new city.
 - ii) A quick word about the Hittites. They were a large race of people that were spread all over the Middle East at that time. Eventually that nation died off and became a part of other nations. The Hittites were not the nation that God called to wipe out. That group was called the Canaanites.
 - iii) That leads to the positive view. Because this man was a foreigner to Israel, we was used by the Israelites to help defeat their enemies. They asked for his help, he did it and not only was his life spared, but also his family and they escaped. This does remind us a little of the spies who helped hide Joshua's spies in Jericho. That event was a relatively short time span before this event. My point is the Israelites figured if Joshua could spare and reward those spies, they could do the same. This also is a proof that God didn't want the Israelites to kill all nonbelievers. This judgment is a specific thing on the people living in Israel back then.
 - iv) OK there's the positive and negative views of what happened. You decide.

22. Verse 27: But Manasseh did not drive out the people of Beth Shan or Taanach or Dor or Ibleam or Megiddo and their surrounding settlements, for the Canaanites were determined to live in that land.²⁸ When Israel became strong, they pressed the Canaanites into forced labor but never drove them out completely.

- a) From here to the end of the chapter, we're going to read brief comments "tribe by tribe" of how the Israelites failed to do what God commanded them to do. I wouldn't worry about all the details of all these cities, but focus on the big picture: Failing to do what God asked them to do, wipe out every person living in that land! It's like the Israelites were thinking, why should we kill all these people when we could just capture them and make them our slaves? God specifically called the Israelites to wipe them out as they were His instrument of judgment. The issue is God didn't want His people to live like them, and by wiping out every last living being, it'd prevent the temptation to live like them or let their children be an influence on their own children. The obvious underlying issue has to do with avoiding compromising with sin! Notice the Canaanites were defeated because they became slaves of the Israelites. Again the issue, is compromising with what God calls us to do so neither us nor our descendants have to face the consequences.

- b) OK time for the big question: What does God call us to do? Obviously we don't get a big sign across the sky saying kill everyone around us! That was a specific judgment on one specific group of people to say, "This is God's land He decides who lives here!" For us it's much easier than we think. It's a matter of living within the frame work of God's laws as we make the best decisions we can within that "frame work". Then we're free to live as we desire within those guidelines. If it's our desire to live a life as a witness for God, then we make the best decisions we can knowing that it is our desire to please God. Ok enough of the good news, time to get back to the failings of these tribes. Time for another story:
23. Verse 29: Nor did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites living in Gezer, but the Canaanites continued to live there among them.³⁰ Neither did Zebulun drive out the Canaanites living in Kitron or Nahalol, who remained among them; but they did subject them to forced labor.³¹ Nor did Asher drive out those living in Acco or Sidon or Ahlab or Aczib or Helbah or Aphek or Rehob,³² and because of this the people of Asher lived among the Canaanite inhabitants of the land.³³ Neither did Naphtali drive out those living in Beth Shemesh or Beth Anath; but the Naphtalites too lived among the Canaanite inhabitants of the land, and those living in Beth Shemesh and Beth Anath became forced laborers for them.
- a) We get the same story effectively repeated over and over again in these verses. Here we have most of the tribes listed and the fact they failed to kill all the Canaanites living there at that time. Notice again the pattern of making the Canaanites into slaves. That shows us the Israelites were powerful enough to defeat them, but didn't follow through all the way with what God commanded them to do!
- b) So why be so tough on them? Why kill all the non-soldiers in this group! What's so horrid about letting them live even if it was as slaves? The issue isn't God being pro-slavery, this is about compromising with what God calls us to do. I recently heard something that got me to think differently about God. It is, "If the bible said God demands we stand on our head for an hour a day, who are we to question it?" The question is do we believe God is God or not? It's one thing to believe God exists. It's another to be obedient to Him even if we don't like the commands or don't understand why He requires us to do "this or that"!
- c) Let me use a controversial topic as an example. The bible clearly teaches homosexuality is a sin. If it wasn't for the bible I'd say, "They're not bothering me, why should I care?" It is also a matter of realizing that we shouldn't expect nonbelievers to live like Christians. God calls us to be a good witness to others by showing them love. The Holy Spirit is capable of convicting people of sin without our help. Most nonbelievers know what Christians think of that issue. Our job is to show them love and let God work in their hearts. I'm saying all of this here because we're reading of the Israelites compromising with how God expected them to live. The point when the Israelites started to let them live, it came back to haunt them for many hundreds of years. The Israelites ended up following their religious ideas as they turned from God. The Israelites saw the financial success of the locals and that is the temptation "in a nutshell" to turn to other Gods.
- d) Bottom line, the Israelites failed to do what God called them to do and that's why Judges is called the "Dark Ages" in Israelites history. Yes that same lesson applies to us which is why we study this book to begin with. In the meantime, I left the last tribe and the final verses of this chapter for last to show even more the dangers of compromise.
24. Verse 34: The Amorites confined the Danites to the hill country, not allowing them to come down into the plain.³⁵ And the Amorites were determined also to hold out in Mount Heres, Aijalon and Shaalbim, but when the power of the house of Joseph increased, they too were pressed into forced labor.³⁶ The boundary of the Amorites was from Scorpion Pass to Sela and beyond.
- a) Time for some quick background: When Joshua was alive, he allocated territory within the land of Israel to each of the 12 tribes. All the tribes we read about so far, were able to conquer their territory but compromised with God by making slaves of the inhabitants.

- b) The exception to this fact was a tribe called Dan. They failed to wipe out the Canaanites in their territory so the tribe of Dan settled further northward. The text mentions a nation by the name of the Amorites. They were among the Canaanites living there. The semi-good news is another tribe did defeat the Amorites but again the Israelites compromised as that group became a bunch of slaves instead of God's requirement for a death sentence.
 - c) Time for another quick lesson on the danger of compromise, and then I'll wrap this up for a week. The tribe of Dan was the first and only tribe to not conquer their territory. When God gave that command that also means He gives us the ability to carry it out! When the tribe of Dan got their eyes off of God and onto their enemies, that's when they failed to do as God called them to do. For what it's worth, the tribe of Dan became the first of those 12 tribes to go into idolatry. God gave them a "slap in the face" in Revelation Chapter 7: All the tribes of Israel are listed except for "Dan". I'm sure some from "Dan" will be in heaven. It's just the bible's way of saying when you fail to do what God calls us to do, it is noticed!
25. What I hope you get out of this lesson isn't all the details about the failures of the 12 Israel tribes that occurred thousands of years ago. What I do hope you get is the idea that God demands our obedience. There is a price to be paid when we fail to live as He desires. Even if that isn't enough motivation, realize the consequences affects others around us and our children as well. No God doesn't punish children for parent's sins, but children often suffer the consequences of what their parents do. (Think of alcoholic's children as an obvious example!)
- a) As I said earlier, God doesn't "sky write" go kill this group! Instead He gives us a big set of rules to live by. Christians aren't required to say obey the 10 Commandments in order to be saved. The issue isn't salvation, it's being a good witness for God. The idea is God's way of living is the best way, period! It's my old, "now what" question. That is now that we're saved, "now what"? The answer is to use our lives as a living witness for God. How we live is a big part of it.
 - b) By the way that doesn't mean we have to eat Kosher and go to church on Saturday. What I mean is for example, we try to put other's needs as priority over our own. We pray and ask God to guide our lives. We think of our lives in terms of "Is this pleasing to God?" If we live that way, then we avoid the mistakes we're reading here.
 - c) What I love to teach people is the idea of what do you enjoy doing, what gifts to you have and how can you combine that to make a difference for God? That's what makes our lives worth living when we think that way. Am I perfect? Of course not. That doesn't mean we don't stop trying to do the right thing. That's plain common sense.
26. Ok, that's enough guilt bashing for one lesson. Trust me "Judges" will have plenty of that. There's a lot to learn from this book, and as usual, I hope God blesses our time as we go through it. With that said, it's time for the closing prayer.
27. Heavenly Father, as people who trust that Jesus is God, died for our sins and is charge of our lives, help us to use our lives as a witness for You. Help us to rely upon Your power to do what it is You've called us to do. Make it obvious to us the specific calling for our lives as we use the most valuable thing You've given us, our time, to make that difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.