

# COMMENTARY

## I. OVERVIEW (1:1—3:6)

1:1—3:6

The book of Judges begins with the introductory statement *and it was after the death of Joshua* (1:1). However, the death and burial of Joshua is also later recorded in 2:6-9, in wording very similar to Josh 24:28-30. It has long been recognized that Judges has two introductory passages, 1:1—2:5, added by the last editor/writer at the end of a long editorial process, and 2:6—3:6, part of the work of the Deuteronomistic Historian (DH, see the Introduction). This is not unlike the beginning of the book of Isaiah with its two introductory superscriptions at 1:1 and 2:1. The passage recorded first, 2:6—3:6, is the work of the DH who edited the stories of the judges to reflect the theology of Deuteronomy. It begins with the account of Joshua's death and burial and the raising up of the next generation, which was ignorant of the works of Yahweh. It concludes with a list of the nations that were left in the land. God's purpose for leaving them was to test Israel to see if the people would be faithful to the covenant. The closing state-

ment, however, describes how the Israelites violated the covenant by intermarrying with the other peoples.

The first chapter describes the tribes' failure to conquer the land. Moving geographically from south to north, the story moves from the success of Judah to the increasing failure of the northern tribes. In the final section (2:1-5) God indicted the tribes for failing to obey the commandments of the covenant and refused to drive out the other nations. This left the conquest unfulfilled.

The first introduction comes from the hand of the final redactor who also edited some of the accounts of the judges and added the concluding stories (chs 17—21) (see the Introduction). This final editing imparted a unity to the entire book through the use of catchphrases and words, parallel actions, and overarching literary themes. The obedient and successful tribe of Judah is contrasted with the northern tribes, which slowly incorporated Canaanite culture and beliefs in a downward spiral of disobedience to the covenant. The success of Judah is specifically contrasted with the failure of Benjamin. Judah conquered the city of Jerusalem and burned it (1:8), but Benjamin could not maintain control of the city by dislodging the Jebusites from it (1:21). Judah took the lead not only in the conquest (1:1-2) but also in the war against Benjamin (20:18). The ascendancy of Judah over Benjamin foreshadows the David/Saul conflict in 1 Samuel where the Benjamite house of Saul was displaced by the Judean David (Sweeney 1997, 517-29). Some of the other parallels include the notes that the Levite who joined the migration of the tribe of Dan (17:7), and the concubine who was abused by the men of Gibeah both came from the Judean town of Bethlehem (19:1). Dan was unable to take possession of its inheritance (1:34) and had to relocate to the north (ch 18). Two women in the book rode donkeys, Achsah the daughter of Caleb dismounted one (1:14) and the body of the presumably dead concubine was loaded on one (19:28). The significant theological word *hesed* (loyalty, steadfast love) appears only in 1:24 and v 35 of the late editorial addition of 8:33-35. These types of literary ties help integrate the total work so that in its final form, even though it contains various voices from different time periods, it speaks more as a harmonious whole.

Each introduction describes the downward movement of Israel, which brought to an end the conquest (2:1-5) and placed the covenant in jeopardy (3:1-6). With the death of Joshua the story of Israel turns from one of obedience and success to one of disobedience and failure.

# A. A Geography of Failure (1:1—2:5)

## BEHIND THE TEXT

This passage contains several instances of intertextual exegesis, borrowing material from Josh 14, 15, and 17 and adapting it to form subtle changes in the passage for theological purposes. The changes serve the interest of highlighting the successes of Judah in contrast with the failures of the “house of Joseph,” a term that appears in vv 22 and 35 to frame the account of the conquest by the northern tribes. The passages borrowed include the following:

1. In Josh 14:6, 13-15; 15:13-15 Caleb conquered the city of Hebron and drove out the sons of Anak. In Judg 1:10 Judah conquered Hebron and killed Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmi. In v 20 Caleb was given the city and drove out the sons of Anak.

2. In Josh 15:15-19 Caleb gave his daughter Achsah as a wife to Othniel, his younger brother. In Judg 1:11-15 Othniel is identified as the nephew of Caleb, the son of his younger brother Kenaz. This makes Othniel a member of the faithful generation who began the conquest under Joshua and who continued to serve God after Joshua’s death (Judg 2:7).

3. According to Josh 15:63 Judah was not able to drive the Jebusites out of Jerusalem, but in Judg 1:21 the failure was attributed to Benjamin.

4. In Josh 17:16 the tribe of Joseph excused their failure to take the cities of the valley because the Canaanites had chariots of iron. In Judg 1:19 Judah is excused for not conquering the inhabitants of the valley because they had chariots of iron.

5. Manasseh’s failure to take possession of a number of cities is recorded in Josh 17:11-13 and again in Judg 1:27 with only minor variations.

6. Ephraim’s failure to drive out the Canaanites from Gezer is noted in Josh 16:10 and Judg 1:29.

The writer has recast the story of the conquest to emphasize Judah and Simeon’s success in conquering their inheritances while the northern tribes floundered in their efforts. As the story moves geographically from south to north, it describes how the tribes became less and less successful in possessing the land. Manasseh, Ephraim, and Zebulun could not drive the inhabitants out but allowed the Canaanites to live among them, eventually reducing their status to forced labor. Asher and Naphtali lived among the Canaanites *because they [Asher] did not drive them out* (v 32). The failure to rid the land of its former inhabitants climaxes with Dan

being driven out of its inheritance by the Amorites; a situation not resolved until ch 18 (Stone 1992, 332).

Joshua 13:2 notes that Joshua was not able to take the Philistine cities, yet in Judg 1:18 it is stated that Judah took the cities of Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ekron with their surrounding territories. The next verse (v 19) states that Judah was not able to dispossess the inhabitants of the plain. The LXX reads v 18 as a negative: *Judah was not able to take Gaza*. This reading relieves the apparent contradictions between Josh 13:2 and Judg 1:18 and between vv 18 and 19. However, 1:18 as it stands is in keeping with the context in which Judah's success is heightened in contrast with the failures of the northern tribes.

## IN THE TEXT

### I. Judah Goes Up (1:1-7)

■ 1-7 With the death of Joshua a new chapter in the story of Israel began. Moses at the command of God had designated Joshua to be his successor (Deut 31:7-8, 14-23), but no successor to Joshua had been chosen. Joshua belonged to the first generation, which had witnessed the mighty acts of God in bringing Israel out of the bondage of Egypt. Because this generation refused to obey God and invade the land from the south, it had been cursed by God to die in the wilderness; only Joshua and Caleb were allowed to enter the land with the next generation (Num 14:26-38). The next generation under the leadership of Joshua successfully began the conquest. This second generation remained faithful to God during both the life of Joshua and the lives of their elders (2:7). Then a third generation arose. The first chapters of Judges address the questions of who would lead it; and would it remain faithful to the covenant given by God?

*The sons of Israel* or Israelites *inquired of Yahweh* (v 1); that is, they sought by some means an oracle or direct word from God as to which tribe should *go up* against *the Canaanite* (singular).

### Who Were the Canaanites?

The term "Canaanite," occurring in the OT almost always in the singular as a collective term, may refer to a specific ethnic or cultural group as distinct from other groups. It may also refer in general to the inhabitants of the area along the southeastern coast of the Mediterranean, up to the city of Tyre, and extending inland beyond the city of Damascus. Legal and administrative documents from the Late Bronze era (1550-1200 B.C.) from Egypt, Babylon, and other areas refer to inhabitants of this area as "sons of Canaan," "men of Canaan," "sons of the land of

Canaan,” or Canaanites (Rainey 1996, 1-15). In Judges it refers to the inhabitants of the land as a whole, even when it is paired with another specific ethnic group (e.g., the Perizzites in v 4).

The term *‘ālāh* (“to go up”) appears in vv 1, 2, 3, 4, 16, 22, and 2:1 and ties the unit together. With the exception of 2:1, it carries the meaning of going into battle or war. In 20:18 the tribes again inquired of Yahweh who should go up or lead in battle. The same terminology is used and the same answer was given, Judah. In both the opening chapter of the book and in the closing story Judah was given the place of prominence in going to war.

Yahweh’s response to the inquiry was that Judah would lead the invasion. The second half of the verse is a promise, *I have given the land into his hand* (v 2). This was not spoken as an accomplished fact but rather an assurance that God would be with Judah to bless the tribe’s efforts.

Judah invited his brother-tribe Simeon to form a coalition in order to assist each other in their war efforts. Simeon would in the time of the monarchy be absorbed by Judah and lose its separate identity. Their first attack was against the *Canaanites and Perizzites* whom *Yahweh gave into their hands* (v 4). The victory was assured by divine help. The Perizzites were a pre-Israelite group located in the wooded hills between Jerusalem and the inheritance of Ephraim (Josh 11:3; 17:15), an area originally given to Benjamin, not Judah (Josh 18:11). Nothing is known about the Perizzites other than what is contained in the OT, and that is very little. The name the Perizzite, always a collective term with an article and singular in number, probably is non-Semitic, possibly Hurrian, an ethnic group whose homeland was located in the mountains north of Mesopotamia (Reed 1997, ABD-CD). They were one of the peoples that the Israelites intermarried with (Judg 3:5-6), in violation of the commands given by Moses (Deut 7:1-3).

*Bezek* (Judg 1:4) is generally located north of Jerusalem, possibly in the area of Manasseh. Zertal suggests that Judah and Simeon may have taken a more northern route into the hill country and were opposed by the lord/ruler of Bezek, or rather translated as a name, *Adoni-bezek* (v 5) (Zertal 1997, ABD-CD). In Josh 10:1 the king of Jerusalem is identified as Adoni-zedek. It is not certain if the name “Bezek” has been corrupted from the original form “Zedek,” however, they were two different kings. *Adoni-bezek* was taken to Jerusalem to die (Judg 1:7). The king of Jerusalem, Adoni-zedek, met a different fate, being struck down and his body hung on a tree (Josh 10:26).

When the Judeans captured Adoni-bezek *they cut off the thumbs of his hands and the big toes of his feet* (Judg 1:6). This would immobilize him as a warrior, for he would not be able to grasp a sword or run swiftly. There is no other account in Judges of the Israelites mutilating a living captive. Later David removed the head of Goliath (1 Sam 17:47-51) and after executing the men who killed Ish-baal had their hands and feet cut off and their bodies hung (2 Sam 4:12), but accounts of the Israelites mutilating their captives are rare. The Judeans inflicted upon Adoni-bezek that same cruelty he had used on others. This action produces a tension in the story. Were the Judeans becoming like the Canaanites they were displacing? Adoni-bezek acknowledged that what he had done to *seventy kings* (a round number used to mean “many”) God had justly brought upon him (Judg 1:7). However, that confession does not relieve the tension in the story. Later the body of the concubine who had been sexually abused would be dismembered (19:29). When Saul called upon the Israelites to gather at Bezek to go and lift the siege of Jabesh-gilead (1 Sam 11:7-11), he dismembered his oxen as a symbol to the tribes of the seriousness of the situation. The mutilation of Adoni-bezek foreshadows both the dismemberment of the concubine (Judg 19:29) and of Saul’s oxen (Schneider 2000, 6).

The verse ends with the sobering note that *they took him to Jerusalem, and he died there* (1:7). Who took him? The Judeans in order to strike fear into the inhabitants of Jerusalem? Or, his own people seeking refuge? The text does not tell us.

## 2. Taking Jerusalem and Hebron (1:8-10)

■ **8-10** The account of the attack on Jerusalem is concise but descriptive. The Judeans seized the city, put its inhabitants to death by the sword, and set the city ablaze. While the account is at variance with Josh 15:63, which states that the Judeans were unable to take the city, it serves the function of heightening the success of Judah to give it more prominence among the tribes. The Judeans then moved against the Canaanites *in the hill country, the Negev, and the Shephelah* (Judg 1:9). The hill country as it extends south of Jerusalem becomes less rugged. The Negev, which means “dry,” lays at the end of the hill country as the terrain becomes flat and arid. It includes the Arad and Beer-sheba valleys, about a 40 by 40 km region. It was thinly populated during the time of the judges (Beit-Arieh 1997, ABD-CD). The Shephelah of Judah is an area of lower hills that runs southwest to northeast about 50 miles along the western edge of the Judean hills. It is good farmland and a number of major cities—such as

Lachish, Mareshah, Azekah, and Beth-shemesh—were located there (Brodsky 1997, ABD-CD).

In v 10 the tribe of Judah rather than Caleb took the active role in capturing Hebron (Josh 14:6, 13-14) and is credited with both the capture of Hebron and for striking down the three sons of Anak (Josh 15:13-15). Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai have non-Semitic names, indicating that their family was not indigenous to the area. They may have been Philistine. Caleb is not mentioned until he is introduced in Judg 1:12 in conjunction with the destruction of Kiriath-sepher. Ascribing the conquest of Hebron to Judah, not Caleb, continues the pattern of highlighting the successes of Judah.

Hebron was a significant political and sacred city located in the central hill country about 20 miles south of Jerusalem. It later became the first royal residence of David (2 Sam 2:1). Joshua had set it aside as a sacred city to which a person who had accidentally killed someone could flee for safety (Josh 20:7). It continued as a sacred center into the reign of David. His son Absalom, as a cover for launching his revolt, secured David's permission to go to Hebron to worship Yahweh (2 Sam 15:7-12).

### 3. Taking Debir (1:11-15)

■ 11-15 The town of Debir (v 11) was probably located southwest of Hebron in the Shephelah. Its former name was Kiriath-sepher, or "Town of the Book." In Josh 15:49 the city is called Kiriath-sannah, or "Town of Learning." The names indicate that the town was known as a center of learning or scribal activity. A city of learning and culture was taken and destroyed by the Israelites. As Fewell notes, "A city of learning was simply erased" (1995, 132).

Caleb offered his daughter Achsah as a wife to the warrior who would take the city. The identification of Othniel is ambiguous. Was he *the son of Kenaz who is the younger brother of Caleb* (v 13), and thus the cousin of Achsah? Or, was he *the son of Kenizzite [a Kenite], the younger brother of Caleb*, and thus the uncle of Achsah? The early Greek translations vary while the Vulgate has the latter. Since a marriage between an uncle and niece was considered improper, early commentators such as Poole (1685) and Scott (1702) suggested that "brother" be taken in the expanded sense of kinsman (Gunn 2005, 21-22). Stone argues that Kenaz should be read as the father of Othniel and the younger brother of Caleb. This would make Othniel a member of the second generation, the faithful generation of the conquest (1987, 204-7).

The beginning of v 14 should be read *he went in to her*, reading the

ending *h* of the Hebrew verb as indicating direction. The terminology has sexual overtones and indicates the consummation of the marriage between Othniel and Achsah (Schneider 2000, 12). The second verb *sūt* also has sexual overtones, to allure, incite (KBL 1985, 654) or seduce. Since Achsah subsequently approached her father with a request, the LXX and Vulgate read “he urged her to ask her father for a field” (Boling 1975, 56-57). It is better to follow the MT and read *she seduced him*. Achsah had been given without her consent to a warrior as a prize of war. She was under the authority first of her father and then her husband. It would be in keeping with her social position to use her sexuality to persuade her husband to seek further advantages from her father. Themes that are introduced in this first chapter are further developed later in the book. The motif of a woman using her sexuality for advantage over a man appears again in the Samson story where Delilah sought to discover the secret of his strength (16:4-22) (Schneider 2000, 13-14).

In the next scene Achsah traveled a good distance, riding on a donkey rather than walking, to see her father, Caleb. He realized that this was no casual visit as he asked, literally, “*What to you?*” or more smoothly, “*What do you want?*” (v 14). She demanded (the verb is in the imperative) that Caleb give her a blessing. She had been placed by him on water-poor land in the dry region of the Negev. Specifically she wanted springs of water. Her assertive manner in confronting her father over the poor quality of the land shamed Caleb, forcing him to respond. Caleb complied with her request. Achsah was not willing to accept a passive role in a male-dominated society (Matthews 2004, 40). She used her sexuality to prod her husband to ask for a field and then confronted her father over the poor quality of the land. She is the first of the women in Judges who stepped outside the traditional role established by society.

#### 4. Judah’s Successes and Inadequacies (1:16-21)

■ **16-21** This section completes the story of Judah’s part in the conquest. It also includes several notes on those who were associated with Judah. The Kenites were related to Moses by marriage. Some part of the tribe went with Judah from Jericho, the City of Palms, into the Negev and *lived among the people* (v 16), an ambiguous term that could mean the indigenous people of the area or the people of the tribe of Judah or Simeon who were also moving into the area. The Jerahmeelites, another tribe that was related to Israel, also lived in the Negev (1 Sam 27:10).

Judah fulfilled its pledge to assist Simeon in occupying his inheritance (Judg 1:17). The Canaanites at Zephath were placed under the ban

of total destruction, *hāram*. The city was then renamed Hormah, *hārmāh*, which is a play on the two words.

According to the MT Judah then seized the Philistine cities of Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ekron (v 18). However, the beginning of v 18 in LXX reads, ***and Judah did not acquire Gaza***. The MT reading is probably better since it continues the theme of the success of Judah. In Josh 10:33 Joshua killed the king of Gezer who came to assist the city of Lachish, which the Israelites had placed under siege. However, the Philistine cities were not taken by Joshua (13:2). Both Gaza and Ashkelon were sea ports located on the coastal plain of the Mediterranean. Ekron was on the eastern edge of the plain. The next verse, however, notes that Judah did not conquer the cities in the valleys, as the inhabitants had chariots strengthened with iron (Judg 1:19).

### Military Use of Chariots

The chariot served the same military purposes as the modern tank. Along with the one who handled the horses, there were one or two persons with bows or lances. It was highly maneuverable and with its greater fire power it produced shock and panic in the opposing infantry. The chariot was made of wood and then had iron bands and fittings to give it strength. One made wholly of iron would have been very expensive and too heavy to maneuver.

The beginning of v 19, ***And Yahweh was with Judah***, forms a concluding remark, which with the last half of v 2, ***I will give the land into his hand***, forms a frame or envelope around the narrative.

Caleb received the city of Hebron (v 20) as Moses had promised (Josh 14:9). However, he is associated with the tribe of Judah as his victory is an extension of the conquest of Judah.

This section closes (Judg 1:21) with the note that Benjamin did not take possession of Jerusalem because the Jebusites were there. What Judah had destroyed (v 8), Benjamin could not take. The Judah/Benjamin comparison forms the final note of the Judah narrative.

## 5. Taking Bethel (1:22-26)

■ **22-26** *The house of Joseph* (v 22) may refer specifically to the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh whose ancestor was the patriarch Joseph (Gen 48:8-20; Josh 17:17). It may also stand for the northern tribes in general, as it does in this passage. The town of Bethel belonged to the tribe of Benjamin (Josh 18:22). The concluding phrase of Judg 1:22, ***and Yahweh was with them***, expresses the same commitment by God to the northern

tribes as he made to the tribe of Judah (v 2). Since God was willing to assist each of the tribes to take possession of its territory, the tribe's success or failure was determined by its actions, not some failure on God's part.

Verse 23 begins with the verb *tûr* ("to spy, or reconnoiter"). The word links this story with the account in Num 13—14 where twelve were sent to spy out the land. The same word occurs there eleven times. The report that the men brought back was not positive. The Israelites refused to trust God and enter the land. Thus that generation proved unfaithful and died in the wilderness (Num 14:26-35). This new generation would succeed where the earlier one failed.

When the spies saw a man departing the city (Judg 1:24), they approached him with an offer to deal faithfully (*hesed*) with him and his family if he would show them an entrance into the city. The city probably had not only a main gate that would be heavily fortified but also smaller entrances or posterns more readily concealed and thus less heavily guarded. The offer of *hesed* echoes the story of Jericho where Rahab requested and received loyalty from the men she had hidden (Josh 2:12, 14). *Hesed* is a significant theological word that expresses faithful loyalty within a relationship. In modern versions it is often translated unfailing or steadfast love. Its only other occurrence in Judges is in 8:35 where the Israelites did not deal loyally with the family of Gideon after his death. The man agreed and showed the sons of Joseph an entrance. The inhabitants of the city were slaughtered, but the man with his family was permitted to leave in safety. The man then journeyed north of Lebanon, *to the land of the Hittites* (v 26), leaving the Canaanite area entirely to build a new city name Luz. While the story parallels the account of Rahab and the fall of Jericho, it also foreshadows the Danite conquest of Laish/Dan where a peaceful and unsuspecting people were slaughtered (18:27-29).

## 6. Living Among the Canaanites (1:27-36)

■ **27-36** As the narrative keeps moving topographically north, the success rate of the tribes diminishes. The tribes of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Zebulun were not able to fully possess the land but allowed the Canaanites to live among them. Next Asher and Naphtali lived among the Canaanites. Lastly, Dan was driven out of his inheritance by the Amorites.

The list of towns that Manasseh was unable to take (v 27) includes also the villages surrounding each town. Major towns like Beth-shean formed an economic district with the smaller villages. The surplus goods produced by the villages, both in the form of crops and material goods such as pottery, were taken as taxes by the hierarchical elite who lived in

the larger towns. These towns were not major cities as we think of them today. The city of Jerusalem at the time of David may have had a population of less than a thousand.

When the Israelites became militarily stronger (v 28), they were able to subject the Canaanites to forced labor (*mas*). Israel had experienced the same subjugation in Egypt (Exod 1:11). Later Solomon conscripted native Israelites themselves into forced labor gangs (1 Kgs 5:13). Israel had learned from the Egyptians how to deal with a non-Israelite people, and without compassion they became like their teachers.

Neither Ephraim nor Zebulun were able to possess their inheritance but allowed the Canaanites to live among them (Judg 1:29-30).

The tribe of Asher (vv 31-32) suffered a different set of circumstances. In addition to not being able to dislodge the Canaanites, they ***dwelt among the Canaanites*** (v 32). Here is a shift of situation, from allowing the Canaanites to dwell among the tribe, to the tribe dwelling among the Canaanites. Naphtali endured the same situation (v 33), but at some point did become strong enough to subjugate the Canaanites and use them as forced labor.

Dan was driven out of his inheritance (v 34) by the Amorites. Thus the conquest ended. At first the tribes were unable to dislodge the inhabitants but allowed them to dwell among them. Then the tribes had to dwell among the Canaanites. Finally, Dan was driven out of the plains and into the hills, a reversal of what should have happened in the conquest.

The Amorites are listed among the earlier inhabitants that were to be driven out of the land (Deut 7:1). Israel first came into contact with them in the Transjordan area when Sihon attacked them (Num 21:21-31). His attack failed and Israel took possession of that area. The term “Amorite” was also used in the same manner as Canaanite, to designate all the inhabitants of the land, regardless of ethnic group (Gen 15:16). However, in Judg 1:34-36 they were a distinct group with identifiable boundaries. The use of the phrase ***house of Joseph*** in both vv 35 and 22 forms a frame or literary boundary for this passage.

## 7. End of the Conquest (2:1-5)

■ **1-5** This passage contains an oracle from Yahweh, delivered by a messenger designated as an angel/messenger of Yahweh. A *mal'ak*, usually translated “angel” from the Greek *angelos*, “a messenger,” was a member of the heavenly court who did the bidding of Yahweh. The oracle first rehearses the past actions of deliverance performed by God on behalf of the people and the commitment he made to their fathers (Judg 2:1). It next moves to

an indictment of the people for not keeping the covenant (v 2). The oracle concludes with the passing of a sentence on the people in accordance with what God had previously said (v 3). This is in the style of a prophetic oracle seen commonly in the works of the classical prophets. The last two verses describe the reactions of the people, weeping and sacrificing.

The angel of Yahweh came up from Gilgal (v 1), the first encampment that the Israelites made after crossing the Jordan (Josh 4:19-20) and their base of operations for subsequent military actions (Josh 10:6-7). Boling suggests that this was an angelic being who took on human form (1975, 62). Later a prophet will bring a message of rebuke (Judg 6:7-10) and then the angel of Yahweh will foretell the birth of Samson to his parents (13:3). *Bochim*, which means “weepers,” is identified by the LXX with Bethel. Also, the “Oak of Weeping” was located near Bethel (Gen 35:8). The name Bochim appears in both Judg 2:1 and 5 to form a literary frame for this passage. McCann notes, “The people are still weeping at the end of the book of Judges” (2002, 30), for they appear before Yahweh at Bethel again to weep before him after having been defeated by Benjamin (20:23).

The messenger stated inclusively, *I caused you to go up from Egypt, and I brought you into the land* (v 1). The word “you” in both clauses is emphatic. It is also in keeping with Deuteronomic expressions of being inclusive of later generations (Deut 5:3). Israel’s obligation (Judg 2:2) was to keep the covenant, specifically by not forming covenants with the people in Canaan and by tearing down the altars erected to their gods. The Israelites were not chastised for leaving Canaanites alive, or not chasing them out of the land, but for entering into covenantal relationships with them and not destroying their places of worship. The violation shifts from not exterminating the people to becoming like them in both social intercourse and worship.

In v 3 the messenger recalls God’s threat to Israel (Exod 23:21, 33; Josh 23:13), that if they did not obey, God would not drive out the peoples. Instead, the Canaanites would become thorns to them, discomfoting barriers to Israel achieving God’s will for them. Also, their gods would be traps, hidden fowlers’ snares used to catch birds; a metaphor for enticing worshippers into the clutches of death. Israel’s response was to lift up their voices in weeping and to offer a sacrifice to Yahweh. The sentence had been passed, and further action would not reverse it. The conquest had come to an end.

## FROM THE TEXT

1. In Judges God is more of a reactor than an actor. God had chosen Moses and then Joshua to lead Israel and had given each direct orders on

how to proceed. While at times God dropped into the background and led through events, he was often seen as communicating directly; giving the commandments and laws, providing water and food, issuing battle plans. Judges opens with the tribes inquiring of God who should lead in battle. God responded by picking Judah to lead in battle and assured the tribe that he would be with them (1:2). The narrative notes twice more that God was with the tribes (vv 19, 22). The main actors in the story, however, were the tribes themselves. God did not intrude into the battles to give directions or to assure victory. At the end God sent a messenger to evaluate their actions and condemn their lack of obedience.

Humanity is given great freedom to respond to the challenges of life. God has given basic instructions and at times breaks in with specific directions, but most of life is lived with God in the shadows, working behind the scenes. This places great responsibility upon humanity. God allows us to shape the future, but we must also bear the consequences and live with the choices we make. If we fail to heed God's warnings about worshipping false gods, then we will experience the destructive consequences that come from disobedience.

This freedom of choice exists even in our spiritual life when God confronts us with the call to love him with all our body, mind, and strength. His Spirit does not call us to total commitment without enabling us to respond. However, we must be willing to tear down the altars to the false gods of power, wealth, sexuality, and self-centeredness, which try to seduce us. God is with his people (v 22), and it is only through his cleansing that the idols of the inner life can be destroyed. These last two statements speak of a great mystery. While it is the sovereign God who calls and his Spirit who empowers, he has through his grace enabled humans to choose. Therefore as in the days of Moses God still sets before us a choice, *life and goodness or death and evil* (Deut 30:15). While the choice is ours, God urges us to choose obedience and life.

2. Actions reveal who we are better than do our words. How different were the Judeans than Adoni-bezek? They did to him what he had done to others. The tribes lived among the Canaanites and did not destroy their places of worship. The Israelites had been slaves in Egypt and when in power reduced the Canaanites to the same forced labor they had experienced. While our ideals help shape our character, more telling is our actions. By acting like the Canaanites, do we become Canaanite? Recitations of creeds and public professions of faith help us sound religious, but it is our actions that truly define who we are and what we believe.

3. When the Israelites became powerful enough to overcome their

neighbors, they used the Canaanites as forced laborers. What they had been in Egypt, slaves, they in turn made the Canaanites. God's command to the Israelites was that they were to destroy the peoples of the land, not mix with them and become like them. The command, however, was capable of being modified, and it was possible for the Israelites to accept others into their community, if like Rahab (Josh 2:8-14) they were willing to acknowledge Yahweh as their God and make peace with the Israelites (Josh 11:19) (Stone 1991, 25-36). Instead, however, of incorporating them into the covenant community, Israel exploited them. The Israelites could not resist using such a valuable resource for their own profit. Economic gain triumphed over obedience to God. The exploitation of others for economic gain is a historically recurring injustice; one that is common to today's societies. We are driven by the desire not just for economic security but by a rapacious greed for more. This, as the apostle Paul stated, is idolatry (Col 3:5). Economic production must come under the judgment of God who demands that a community maintain economic justice especially for those in vulnerable circumstances (Isa 1:17; Amos 5:11-12; Mic 2:1-3).

## B. Testing of Israel (2:6—3:6)

### BEHIND THE TEXT

With 2:6 the reader is taken back to the time when Joshua dismissed Israel after the convocation at Shechem (Josh 24:28). The earlier edition of the book compiled by the Deuteronomic Historian (Dtr) began at this point. The first section (Judg 2:6-10) functions as a transition from the time of Joshua to the next generation. Joshua 24:28-31 is quoted almost exactly. One of the changes is that v 31, the last verse, is moved up to the second verse, Judg 2:7. This move emphasizes the obedience of the generation of elders and sets up the contrast with the unfaithfulness of the following generation.

With the later addition of 1:1—2:5, however, a shift is made in the setting of this passage. In Josh 24 the Israelites were at Shechem. In Judg 2:1-5 they were at Bochim, that is, Bethel, the location of the shrine established later by Jeroboam (1 Kgs 12:29—13:34). Reading the text (Judg 2:1-10) as it now stands (that is, in its canonical setting), the reader is alerted to the snare that Bethel became for the northern kingdom of Israel. While Judah continued to be ruled by the house of David, Israel experienced a tumultuous succession of nine different dynasties, none of which according to Dtr remained faithful to God and his covenant. Sweeney

notes, “The narrative thereby serves Judean/Davidic polemics in that Bochim/Bethel becomes the site associated with YHWH’s ‘testing’ or punishment of the people” (1997, 522).

Verses 10-20 introduce the cycle of sin, oppression, crying out to God, and deliverance in which each of the stories of the judges has been cast. The stories are not strictly cyclical, as each contains variations, and particularly with the later narratives become increasingly longer. There is also a progression downward. The Israelites continued to disobey God by worshipping the gods of the people who surround them and thus breached the covenant established at Sinai. What held the tribes together was not family ties or cultural solidarity, but the covenant of Yahweh. As the Israelites became more devoted to the false gods, their communal bonds became more frayed and the society became more fractured. At the end of the book the tribes will turn on each other in fratricidal wars.

The chapter ends (vv 21-23) with Yahweh’s decision not to remove the peoples surrounding the Israelites. They would become a test to enable Yahweh to know whether or not Israel remained faithful to the path he had established for them. The last word of the chapter is the name Joshua, the second word in v 6. The references to Joshua form a frame or envelope for the narrative, beginning and ending it.

This section ends with a summary statement concerning the purposes of God (3:1-6). It contains a double listing of the nations/peoples God left in the land and also of the purposes of God for not removing them. The material may have originally come from two sources and been combined by the editor. God allowed the people to remain in order to teach the next generation the art of war (vv 1-2) and also to test the Israelites to see if they would remain faithful to the commandments given to them by Moses (v 4). The Israelites did not obey the covenant (Exod 34:15-16) but intermarried with the people and worshipped their gods. As Judg 1:1—2:5 concludes with the failure of the conquest, in like manner 2:6—3:6 ends with the failure of the covenant.

## IN THE TEXT

### I. Death of Joshua (2:6-10)

■ **6-10** When Joshua dismissed the Israelites, they departed *each to his inheritance to possess the land* (v 6). The people were engaged with the conquest, doing what God had commanded. Verse 7 begins, *and the people served Yahweh*. The verb “serve” (*‘abad*) appears five times in this passage (2:7, 11, 13, 19, and 3:6) with a key function. It traces the religious