



JUDGES



DALE RALPH DAVIS







JUDGES

Such a Great Salvation



Dale Ralph Davis

CHRISTIAN
FOCUS





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Abbreviations

<i>IB</i>	<i>Interpreter's Bible</i>
<i>IBD</i>	<i>Illustrated Bible Dictionary</i>
<i>IDB</i>	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
<i>IDB/S</i>	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible/Supplementary Volume</i>
<i>ISBE</i>	<i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>
<i>JB</i>	<i>Jerusalem Bible</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>KJV</i>	<i>King James Version</i>
<i>Moffatt</i>	<i>The Bible: A New Translation (James Moffatt)</i>
<i>NASB</i>	<i>New American Standard Bible</i>
<i>NEB</i>	<i>New English Bible</i>
<i>NIV</i>	<i>New International Version</i>
<i>NJB</i>	<i>New Jerusalem Bible</i>
<i>RSV</i>	<i>Revised Standard Version</i>
<i>NJPS</i>	<i>Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text (1985)</i>
<i>TEV</i>	<i>Today's English Version</i>
<i>TWOT</i>	<i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i>
<i>ZPEB</i>	<i>Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible</i>





Preface

I want to apologize publicly to Samson. I was going to credit the writer of Hebrews for loaning me the title for this book (see Heb. 2:3). Imagine my surprise to discover that – perhaps – even the writer of Hebrews had borrowed it from Samson (Judg. 15:18)! Hence, both my apologies and gratitude to Samson.

The church (in general) has a problem with the Book of Judges. It is so earthy, so puzzling, so primitive, so violent – in a word, so strange, that the church can scarcely stomach it. As with many Old Testament materials, the sentiment seems to be, ‘If we just study the epistles long enough, maybe it will go away.’ The church has her way of dealing with embarrassing Scripture; ignore it. Yet that is difficult to do with Judges. It’s so interesting. Only people who take tranquilizers before sitting down can doze off while they read it.

Yet there is danger in that. When a book and its human characters are so colorful and dramatic, we may miss the book’s intention – to be a revelation from God about God (Alec Motyer). That’s why I try to give the *theo-centric* exposition of this chunk of Old Testament narrative. We must see the beauty of Yahweh our God here; if we do, we can be sure we have begun to handle Scripture rightly.

I remember seeing a cartoon in which a young, hip, guitar-plucking, Christian singer announced to his audience, ‘I wrote this song last year, but I think it still has relevance.’ And this volume was originally finished in 1989, a fact attentive readers will divine from the footnotes. Because of ongoing writing





commitments I have not revised the book or updated the documentation. But I believe it still has relevance, especially since the exposition is not tied to the fads of research but to the text of Judges as we have it. I am delighted that Christian Focus has consented to make it available.

I allude to a number of English translations, but otherwise the translations are my own.

I want to dedicate the book to the memory of Dad and Mom Herron whose quiet steadfastness through many troubles testifies that Yahweh does not let go of us.





Non-Introduction

This introduction is an apology for omitting an introduction. Not that it couldn't be done. We could wade through it all: the question of the Deuteronomic History, the matters of *Überlieferungsgeschichte*, the definition of a *shōphēt*, moral 'problems' in the stories, chronology, archaeology, date, authorship – all those exciting things readers are just dying to know.

But the idea of omitting an introduction came to me in part from reading I. Howard Marshall's explanation for not writing an introduction to Luke in his magnum opus on the third Gospel: 'in so far as an introduction to the Gospel can be written, an excellent piece of work has been done by E. E. Ellis in his important commentary, and I am not capable of writing a better one.'¹ In a similar vein, I can only confess that as for an introduction to Judges, an excellent piece of work has already been done by the author of the book, and I am not capable of writing a better one. Indeed, I have a growing conviction that we would find far more fun and profit in Bible study if we gave more heed to the introductions the biblical writers themselves prefaced to their works than to the welter of opinions (helpful as they may sometimes be) about a biblical book, drearily culled from the last 200 years of biblical scholarship.

We do better, I think, to jump straight into the biblical text and get dirty with *its* ink.

One word of anticlimax. Does this mean we begin without any idea of the overall development or content of Judges?

¹ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 29.





Perish the thought! The book can be summarized in this outline:

- I. The Failure of a Second Generation, 1:1–3:6
- II. The Salvation of a Long-suffering God, 3:7–16:31
- III. The Confusion of a Depraved People, 17–21

Hope to meet you in the text.





Part I

The Failure of a Second Generation

(Judges 1:1–3:6)







Is This an Ancient Geography Book? (Judges 1:1–2:5)

Let's admit it: geography has fallen on hard times. Our local paper recently carried a blurb about a convention of geography teachers and buffs. At the convention they bemoaned widespread geographical illiteracy and the minimal attention geography receives in the educational schema. Geography was in the pits. And the newspaper proved it, for whoever supplied the headline for the story had written '*Geology* Courses Get Low Grade.' Geography is so low that when editors read the word – repeatedly – it just doesn't register!

A year or so ago I found in my father's study a scrapbook he had begun. It was an old elementary-school geography book in which he had taped and pasted family mementos. That's what old geography books are for – to keep you from having to invest in a proper scrapbook. Not that I can blame newspaper editors or my father. I myself can remember only one item about fourth-grade geography – we studied about Baghdad. And I can only remember one thing about that – I was not interested in Baghdad.

Now I should guess a reader's reaction to Judges 1 is much the same. Such a catalog of Palestinian places. Readers wonder: 'What have I hit upon? An ancient geography book? I'm not interested in geography. I'd better meditate in the Gospel of





John today!' Don't turn that page. The living God has a word for you from this conglomeration of locations and squiggly trails. There is vital teaching here. We'll get right to it as soon as we deal with several preliminaries.

Preliminary Matters

First, remember that Judges 1 deals with a second movement of the conquest of Canaan. The Book of Joshua, especially in chapters 1-12, tells of 'taking' the land, breaking the back of Canaanite resistance in something of a blitzkrieg style. Judges 1 emphasizes the process of 'possessing' the land in which separate tribes or tribal groups were to follow up the previous conquest and nail down and settle their assigned territories. I am not going to substantiate this matter, because I have already done so in *Joshua: No Falling Words* (pp. 88-90, 99-100, 110-11, 133-35, 142-43).

Second, for many readers Judges 1 raises once more the so-called moral problem of the conquest. How horrid that Israel butcher innocent Canaanites, wreak havoc and misery, grab their land – and all, allegedly, at Yahweh's command! If only the Canaanites could know how much emotional support they receive from modern western readers. And the conquest *was* frightful. But people who bemoan the fate of the poor Canaanites don't view the conquest from the Bible's own perspective. They forget one vital fact: the Canaanites were not innocent. Moses was emphatic about that; he humbled the Israelites by insisting that Yahweh was not giving them Canaan because they were such godly folks but because the Canaanites were so grossly wicked (Deut. 9:4-6). If you want all the gory details, see Leviticus 18:6-30 and Deuteronomy 18:9-14.¹ These texts show that the conquest was an act of justice, Yahweh's justice. Israel was the instrument of his just judgment upon a corrupt and perverted people. The Bible, of course, does not claim the conquest will be palatable; but it does insist it was just. Anyway, contemporary western church members who vicariously and avidly gorge themselves on violence via television and cinema have forfeited any right to throw the first stone at the biblical conquest.

¹ See also the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon 12:3-11.



Third, let us set forth the structure of 1:1-2:5 so that we can see at a glance how this material develops and holds together, for, contrary to appearances, this section is not simply a pile of stuff but a carefully organized pile of stuff:

- Yahweh's guidance and assurance, 1:1b-2
 - Success of Judah, 1:3-21
 - Joint tribal effort, 1:3-7
 - (Bezek)
 - Assault on Jerusalem, 1:8
 - Against the Canaanites, 1:9-18
 - Hill country, 1:10-15
 - Negev, 1:16-17
 - Coastal area, 1:18
 - Summary, 1:19-21 (Yahweh's presence, 19a)
 - Failure of the north, 1:22-36
 - Initial success, 1:22-26
 - Joint tribal effort
 - (Bethel) (Yahweh's presence, 22)
 - Incomplete conquest:
 - Canaanites among Israel, 1:27-30
 - (Manasseh, Ephraim, Zebulun)
 - Incomplete conquest:
 - Israel among Canaanites, 1:31-33
 - (Asher, Naphtali)
 - Conquest in reverse, 1:34-36
 - (Dan)
- Yahweh's accusation and threat, 2:1-5
 - Review of covenant of grace, 2:1
 - 'I brought you up...'
 - 'I brought you in...'
 - 'I told you...'
 - Statement of covenant stipulation, 2:2a
 - 'But *you*...'
 - Accusation of covenant transgression, 2:2b
 - Announcement of covenant judgment, 2:3
 - Response of the people, 2:4-5

Several observations about this structure: (1) The opening section of 'Yahweh's guidance and assurance' (1:1b-2) forms

a contrast with 'Yahweh's accusation and threat' (2:1-5) at the close. (2) The two major sections of chapter 1 likewise stand in sharp contrast: the 'success of Judah' (vv. 3-21) finds its antithesis in the 'failure of the north' (vv. 22-36). (3) The 'failure of the north' (vv. 22-36) follows a step-by-step declension intended to depict the steadily downward direction of northern tribal fortunes. (4) In the material about Judah, verse 9 seems to hold the structural clue for verses 10-18, for it specifies the three areas of combat (the hill country, the Negev, and the Shephelah) to which the following record conforms (vv. 10-15, hill country; vv. 16-17, Negev; v. 18, Shephelah and beyond).²

An additional observation is not apparent from the preceding outline: the writer uses a form of the verb '*alah* (to go up) to open each of the major divisions of 1:1-2:5 (see 1:4, 22; 2:1; note also that '*alah* is used in 1:1, 2, 3 as well).

Theological Concerns

Let us now seek to hear the witness of these opening sections.

A Picture of Divine Adequacy

First, observe how we meet a picture of divine adequacy in 1:1-21. Israel and/or Judah receives divine direction (vv. 1-2a) and divine assurance (v. 2b) and experiences the divine power (v. 4) and presence (v. 19a). It is in light of all this that readers are to view the 'success of Judah': their victories at Bezek (vv. 4-7), Jerusalem (v. 8),³ Hebron (v. 10),⁴ Debir (vv. 11-15), Zephath/Hormah (v. 17),⁵ and the towns on the coastal plain (vv. 18-19).⁶

² Debir (vv. 11-15) may belong to the Negev section if Achsah's statement (v. 15) is taken strictly. Otherwise it belongs to the hill country and should probably now be identified with Khirbet Rabud, seven and one-half miles southwest of Hebron; cf. Mose Kochavi, 'Debir (City),' *IDB/S*, 222, and the report 'Where Is Biblical Debir?' *The Biblical Archaeology Review* 1 (March 1975): 5-7. For more detailed discussion on 1:9ff. (including 'the valley,' Hebrew, *ha'emeq*, in v. 19) see Bachman's position as cited in Paulus Cassel, *The Book of Judges*, Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, in vol. 2, *Numbers-Ruth* (1865; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960), 39.

³ There is no substantial conflict between verse 8 and verse 21. Judah and Simeon took (Hebrew, *lakad*) Jerusalem, decimating its population and setting the



We must ask then in what circumstances this divine adequacy shows itself. It shows itself in historical crisis. Don't pass by the opening clause of the book, which may be translated, 'Here's what happened after the death of Joshua' (1:1a). I take this as a general title for the book. Probably not everything reported in chapter 1 occurred after Joshua's death (cf. vv. 10-15 with Josh. 15:13-19). But, generally, 1:1a provides the backdrop against which we are to view chapter 1 and the whole book.

Have you ever noticed how new beginnings are punctuated by the earthly end of God's servants?

Exodus begins with the death of Joseph.
 Joshua begins with the death of Moses.
 Judges begins with the death of Joshua.
 1 Kings begins with the death of David.⁷

And yet for all that, God's kingdom does not collapse, not even when Sheol takes God's most useful servants. The

site on fire. Benjamin, on the other hand, did not dispossess (Hebrew, *yarash*) the city's residents and so possess and control the city. The verbs *lakad* and *yarash* carry different connotations, as I have argued in *Joshua: No Falling Words* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2000), 88-90. What has been taken may later need to be retaken in order to possess it completely. Unless a site was settled when it was taken, the remnant of the conquered town could filter back and control it again.

⁴ Again, some see a rub between Joshua 15:13-14, where Caleb dispossesses (*yarash*) the three sons of Anak, and this text (Judg. 1:10), where Judah attacks or smites (Hebrew, *nakah*) them. Even if we disregard the different verbs used, verse 20 is careful to point out that whatever part the tribe of Judah may have had in the overthrow of Hebron, it was Caleb in particular who effectively cleaned out the area.

⁵ Zephath or Hormah may be identified with Tel Masos, some twenty-two miles (for a crow) south/southwest of Hebron. Cf. Yohanan Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography*, rev. and enl. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 215-16, and John J. Bimson, *Redating the Exodus and Conquest*, JSOT Supplement Series 5 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1978), 203-4. Other biblical references to Hormah include Numbers 14:45; 21:1-3; Joshua 12:14.

⁶ There is no conflict between verses 18 and 19. The former only claims Judah took (see n. 3) Gaza, Ashekelon, Ekron, and their environs, not that he controlled them, as he did the hill country ('possessed,' v. 19). Indeed, at that time Judah was not able to possess (i.e. permanently control) the valley areas to the west of the Shephelah (lowland hills).

⁷ I suppose if one wanted to stretch the matter (especially in light of the division of books in the English Bible) one could add that 1 Samuel begins with the deaths of Eli and sons (1 Sam. 1-4), 2 Samuel begins with the deaths of Saul and Jonathan (in the report to David and his lament), and 2 Kings begins with the taking of Elijah (2 Kings 2).





kingdom of God continues though the servants of God die. That is the witness of Judges 1. Joshua died, but 'Yahweh said, 'I have given the land into Judah's hand'' (v. 2). Joshua died, but 'Yahweh gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand' (v. 4). Joshua died, yet 'Yahweh was with Judah so that he possessed the hill country' (v. 19). The point should not be lost on contemporary Christians. Your help is in the name of the Lord, not in the name of your favorite Christian hero. Even when the Lord himself 'went away,' it proved a boon for his church (John 16:7).

But the divine adequacy also appears as God's people operate in corporate unity. 'Judah said to Simeon his brother, 'Go up with me into my portion and let us fight against the Canaanites, and I too shall go with you into your portion'; so Simeon went with him' (1:3). 'Then Judah went with Simeon his brother and they attacked the Canaanites who live in Zephath' (1:17). When 'the sons of Joseph' – presumably Ephraim and Manasseh acting in concert – accost Bethel, 'Yahweh was with them' (1:22) and gave success. Each time Israel acted in some sort of tribal unity Yahweh granted victory.

We can easily think 'so what?' about these observations. Probably, however, we shouldn't, for the unity of Israel seems to be one of the author's primary concerns. He makes his point by his fragmentation-of-Israel theme; throughout the book he depicts Israel's unity as progressively deteriorating – and with it Israel's fortunes. We need not trace this theme in detail here.⁸ We simply note it in order to argue that the notes about tribal unity and cooperation in chapter 1 are not sentimental little ditties for our author. He regards them as significant – as Yahweh's people assist one another they receive Yahweh's help.

One does not torture this text by applying it to the body of Christ at large or to any group of worshiping believers. The Lord's people thrive on mutual assistance; God has given us one another as channels of his help and strength. Indeed, the

⁸ See, for example, 5:15b-17, 23; 8:1-4, 5-9; 12:1-6; 15:11-13. But for more textual data and argumentation see J. P. U. Lilley, 'A Literary Appreciation of the Book of Judges,' *Tyndale Bulletin* 18 (1967): 98-99; also my 'Proposed Life-Setting for the Book of Judges' (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1978), 66-78.





apostle prayed ‘that you, having your roots and foundation in love, might have the strength to grasp *together with all the saints* how wide and long and high and deep Christ’s love is’ (Eph. 3:17-18, italics added). Getting a grip on the staggering limitlessness of Christ’s love for us is not something the believer does in blissful isolation. It can only be done/attempted ‘together with all the saints’! The unity and fellowship of God’s people is not a wimpy idea weaker Christians dote on. It is an essential condition for experiencing the strength of our God.⁹

One of the unique marks of this chapter is the inclusion of interesting little episodes related to the tribal conflicts and settlement. This leads me to suggest that when Yahweh shows how adequate he is, he does so in fascinating detail.

Could we interview Adoni-bezek he likely would testify that Israel’s God acts in justice (1:4-7). Yahweh granted Judah victory at Bezek.¹⁰ Adoni-bezek fled but was captured and mutilated. Judah’s troops cut off his thumbs and big toes, which, at the very least, would force his early retirement from military service,¹¹ not to mention life (v. 7b). What can Adoni-bezek be but philosophical? ‘Seventy kings,’ so he claims, ‘with their thumbs and big toes cut off have been picking up food under my table; as I have done, so God has paid me back’ (v. 7).

A second vignette contains a touch of romance. Othniel thought attacking Bookville (Kiryath Sepher/Debir) worth

⁹ On Ephesians 3:18 see F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1961), 68. As for Judges 1:3, A. R. Fausset aptly comments: ‘The lot of Simeon fell within that of Judah, and was assigned out of it. Simeon was one of the least important of the tribes, and Judah one of the most important; yet Judah does not hesitate to solicit Simeon’s alliance and help against the common foe. We Christians cannot afford to despise the aid and sympathy of even weaker brethren, in our spiritual conflict for the goodly land, against the prince of darkness. God can bring forth strength out of even the most humble (Rom. xiv. 3, 4; 1 Cor. i.27); so that he that is high as the head, cannot say to those who are low as the feet, I have no need of you, seeing that all believers are members of one another (1 Cor. xii.21; Acts xi.17, xv.8, 9, 11)’ (*A Critical and Expository Commentary on the Book of Judges* [London: James Nisbet, 1885], 15).

¹⁰ Aharoni (*The Land of the Bible*, 214) and J. Simons (*The Geographical and Topographical Texts of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1959), 281) identify the site as Khirbet Ibziq, thirteen miles northeast of Shechem. See 1 Samuel 11:8.

¹¹ See Theodor H. Gaster, *Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969), 2:416-18.



the risk if it meant winning Achsah, Caleb's daughter.¹² Achsah urged Othniel to ask for some additional cultivatable land from Caleb. Who knows whether Othniel did so? But at least Achsah was sharp enough to know they would need guaranteed water rights for such land, and she pressed her father to grant that (v. 15).¹³

The third little incident (1:22-26) breathes intrigue. The Joseph tribes persuade a resident of Bethel/Luz to show them the entrance to the city, which was obviously not the city gate but likely a secret, hidden entrance to the fortified area.¹⁴ It proved a splendid way to surprise and conquer a town.

Granted, you may not get excited over what happened at Bezek, Bookville, and Bethel. You may not be greatly interested in Adoni-bezek's toes or Achsah's springs or Bethel's camouflaged entrance. But I think such anecdotes of justice, romance, and intrigue are fascinating. And the testimony of the text is that 'Yahweh gave' Israel's enemies into their hands (v. 4) and that 'Yahweh was with them' (v. 22). And that is typical of the God of the Bible. When he shows how adequate he is, he usually gives us some stories to tell. God seldom gives

¹² Othniel could have been either Caleb's nephew or younger brother (v. 13; cf. Leon J. Wood, 'Othniel,' *ZPEB*, 4:552-53, and C. F. Keil, *The Books of the Chronicles*, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament [1872; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966] 89-90, on 1 Chron. 4:13). 'Brother' could be used as 'military confederate' (Robert G. Boling, *Judges*, The Anchor Bible [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975], 56). The text of verse 14 is also difficult but not so gaseous as the New English Bible suggests.

¹³ It is always useful to wonder why an episode like verses 11-15 is included in Scripture. One cannot always answer this 'why,' but one should keep asking it nevertheless. And, of course, one must always so question the text in light of its larger context. However, we need to beware of deriving a useful application from a text merely to 'justify' its existence as Scripture. I think it is illegitimate to use Achsah's request as a paradigm for Christian prayer (as does Faussett, *Judges*, 32-34). I do not know, ultimately, why this apparently inconsequential episode was included in Scripture. But any Israelite would know that in that land water was no inconsequential matter. And Achsah had the sense to know that access to water could spell the difference between life and disaster. She was prudently concerned over a necessity of life. Any Israelite would be as concerned about that as a midwestern farmer about weather in wheat harvest. What is a minor incident to us is no trivial matter at all. Perhaps we must ride Achsah's donkey to fully understand her request.

¹⁴ Anson F. Rainey, 'Ramat Rahel,' *The Biblical World: A Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology*, ed. Charles F. Pfeiffer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966), 473: 'There was an underground postern gate leading into the citadel through its northern wall. The outer opening is just wide enough for one person to enter at a time.' This gate at Ramat Rahel belonged to V/A, about 600 BC.

his people up to monotony but leaves them vivid episodes to remember.

A Lesson in Theological Geography

Secondly, we are taught a lesson in theological geography in 1:22-36. Please look back at the outline of the structure set out earlier in this chapter and note again the section called ‘the failure of the north’ (1:22-36). These verses show a progressive failure of the northern tribes to possess their territories. After an initial success by the Joseph tribes, tribal efforts wane until, with the Danites, the conquest hits a reverse flow. The section has been put together very carefully.

Naturally, western readers are apt to regard this incessant listing of places with impatience. Some will wonder if the pen of inspiration wasn’t picked up by a frustrated cartographer. No – by a preacher. And the preacher keeps pounding home his message: such-and-such a tribe ‘did not drive out’ (or: dispossess, a form of the verb *yarash*). Seven times he accuses in this way (vv. 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33).¹⁵ What we have here is not geographical tedium but theological accusation, that is, theological geography.

Without doubt there were pragmatic reasons why Israel needed absolute control over many of these sites. Somewhere along the time line they would likely see the strategic folly of failing to possess Beth-shan (v. 27), a massive site guarding the juncture of the Jordan and Jezreel valleys, through which ‘passed the main arteries of the ancient world.’¹⁶ They would live to regret the failure to dominate Taanach, Ibleam, and Megiddo (v. 27), crucial fortresses along the Plain of Esdraelon.¹⁷ Maybe they could have prevented cocky Sisera (chs. 4-5) from strutting all over Israel. We could also point out how strategic Gezer (v. 29) was; but no more of this, for we are getting away from our author’s concern.

The motivation for driving out Canaanites was not pragmatic but spiritual. Yahweh had warned through Moses: ‘Do not let those people live in your country; if you do, they

¹⁵ If one adds the note about Judah (v. 19) and Benjamin (v. 21) the tally is nine.

¹⁶ Anson F. Rainey, ‘Beth-shean/Beth-shan,’ *ISBE* (rev. ed.), 1:475. See also George Adam Smith, *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, 22d ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.), 357-59.

will make you sin against me. If you worship their gods, it will be a fatal trap for you' (Exod. 23:33 TEV). Remaining Canaanites would not be so much a military threat as a spiritual cancer (see Exod. 23:23-33; 34:11-16; Deut. 7:1-5). That's why Israel was to eliminate the Canaanites and other '-ites.' That's why Israel was to wreck and demolish all their worship centers (every Saint-Baal-on-the-Hill Shrine and Our Lady of Harvest Chapel). To be sure, Yahweh would make them able to do this in a somewhat gradual manner (Exod. 23:29-30). But it *was* to be done. If Canaan's native populations tolerated, it will lead Israel willy-nilly to intermarriage with them – and you can kiss covenant faith good-bye (Exod. 34:15-16; Deut. 7:3-4). Grandkids will know Yahweh as an also-ran fertility god. So our writer's '(they) did not dispossess' rings with spiritual emergency. It is the preacher's accusation of God's people for covenant failure.¹⁸ They are like a surgeon who removes only part of the cancer because even cancer has a right to grow and find fulfillment. Tolerance and suicide are congenial bed-fellows.

Though our writer repeatedly accuses Israel of covenant failure (she 'did not dispossess'), he nevertheless describes her military success. This point is frequently missed. Four times he tells us that the Canaanites or Amorites became subject to 'forced labor' (vv. 28, 30, 33, 35). What does this mean? It means that if once Israel's tribes were not strong enough to expel the local residents (cf. vv. 19, 27), the time came 'when Israel grew strong' (v. 28) and could dominate the Canaanite population. But instead of expelling, instead of driving out these enclaves – which, according to the biblical text, Israel was now perfectly able to do – she put them to forced labor, in violation of Yahweh's commands. The picture Judges 1 gives us is of an Israel in substantial control of Canaan,¹⁹

¹⁷ See Smith's description, *Historical Geography*, 379-91; also John Garstang, *Joshua-Judges* (1931; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1978), 94.

¹⁸ I have since discovered that Brevard S. Childs has taken the same view of Judges 1: 'The function of the introduction [= ch.1] is to mark the beginning of a period of disobedience which stands in sharp contrast to the period which preceded. A theological judgment is made by its characterization of the period. No leader after Joshua has arisen. The unity of the nation has been fractured. The successes from the divine blessing have given way to a failure to repel the enemy. That the introduction performs this negative role is made explicit in 2.1-5 which confirms the judgment of God on the nation's disobedience' (*Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979], 259).



a people clearly successful though certainly disobedient. Pragmatic success and spiritual failure – a strange but possible combination. So Israel is dominant if not obedient; she enjoys superiority even if she does not maintain fidelity.

This text carries its admonition for God's people in any age. For one thing, it tells us that it is possible for the believer's life to display the marks of success and yet be a failure in the eyes of God. Christian success (whether personal or in the form of a glossy evangelical enterprise) is not necessarily the same as pleasing God.

The text also underscores the importance of 'small' faithfulness. Certainly nothing is too tragic by the end of chapter 1. Israel has not dispossessed the Canaanites, but does hold them under forced labor. Israel is – to a large degree – in control. Hence her lethargy seems to have been 'minor' disobedience. Precisely here, however, we need to see a larger picture. Hence the following general structure for 1:1-3:6:

Title, 1:1a

The conditions for apostasy develop, 1:1b-36

Sorrow over Yahweh's word, 2:1-5

Transition: The new generation, 2:6-10

The course of apostasy described, 2:11-3:4

Summary and digest, 3:5-6

3:5 summarizes 1:1b-2:5

3:6 summarizes 2:11-3:4

By looking at the two largest blocks of material (1:1b-36 and 2:11-3:4) in this structure, one can readily see how crucial Israel's failure in chapter 1 was. In chapter 1 Israel permitted conditions which brought no instant disaster. The impact of her failure became visible later (2:11-13, 19; 3:5-6).²⁰ What began as toleration became apostasy. What seemed so reasonable proved lethal. Living with Canaanites led to worshiping with Canaanites. Tolerate Baal's people and sooner or later you

¹⁹ Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 50-51. See also *No Falling Words*, 110-11.

²⁰ Childs, *Old Testament as Scripture*, 259: 'The introduction of ch.1 offers a theological judgment on the nature of disobedient Israel. The Deuteronomic introduction [= 2:6-23 for Childs] which follows assumes this breakdown.'



bow at Baal's altar. But it seemed like a rather small matter at the time. After all, Sinai didn't smoke when Israel 'did not dispossess' the Canaanites. 'Faithful in little' (cf. Luke 16:10) hardly describes our idea of a glamorous career, but nothing else much matters in the kingdom of God. Let each man examine himself.

A Question of Genuine Repentance

Third, the Bokim (or Bochim) episode poses for us a question of genuine repentance (2:1-5). Uncertainties about the text in verse 1b do not obscure the message. In the Angel of Yahweh's speech Yahweh himself addresses Israel, as the repeated 'I' shows. Yahweh accuses Israel of breach of covenant (v. 2b)²¹ and announces the discipline and judgment they would endure (v. 3)²² They have now forfeited the promised help in 1:2, 4. The primary peril, however, will be spiritual (v. 3c).

Note the response. There are tears all over the place. 'The people lifted up their voice and wept' (Hebrew, *bakah*, v. 4b). The place was even named for their tears – Bokim ('Weepers,' vv. 1, 5). And the tears led to sacrifice (v. 5b). So far so good. It is usually a good sign when God's people can still weep, when we can be moved to tears. Would that it would happen more often! We are either too sophisticated, too refined, too hard-hearted, or, what's worse, all of these, to cry over our sins.²³

Yet the text keeps us hanging. There is no neat closing, no answer to 'What happened then?' So they wept and sacrificed. What did all that produce? The Angel of Yahweh's sermon

²¹ The implication of 2:2 is that Israel did enter into covenant agreements with remaining residents of the land, evidently promising them life in exchange for servitude, much as Joshua and Company mistakenly did with Gibeon in Joshua 9.

²² For the structure of 2:1-5 see the outline at the beginning of this chapter. Matthew Henry has a most useful observation on the intrusion of the Angel of Yahweh here: 'It was the privilege of Israel that they had not only a law in general sent them from heaven, once for all, to direct them into and keep them in the way of happiness, but that they had particular messages sent them from heaven, as there was occasion, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, when at any time they turned aside out of that way' (*Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 6 vols. [New York: Revell, n.d.], 2:126).

²³ As John R. W. Stott has written of preachers: 'I constantly find myself wishing that we twentieth-century preachers could learn to weep again. But either our tear-springs have dried up, or our tear-ducts have become blocked. Everything seems to conspire together to make it impossible for us to cry over lost sinners who throng the



induces weeping, tears, and profound impressions. Does anything go beyond Israel's tear ducts? Is anything more lasting than water produced here?²⁴

While a pastor in Wales, Martyn Lloyd-Jones was accused of encouraging emotionalism. Lloyd-Jones's retort was that 'it is very easy to make a Welshman cry, but it needs an earthquake to make him change his mind!'²⁵

Our response to Yahweh's accusing word should be more than wet eyes. It is good to be moved to tears but better to be brought to repentance. God wants to produce 'good grief' in us (cf. 2 Chron. 7:8-11). Yahweh's demand via Joel keeps the perfect balance and needs no hermeneutical doctoring for the church: 'Return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning, and tear open your heart, not your garments' (Joel 2:12-13).

broad road which leads to destruction' (*Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], 276).

²⁴ 'This was good, and a sign that the word they heard made an impression upon them: it is a wonder sinners can ever read their Bibles with dry eyes. But this was not enough; they wept, but we do not find that they reformed, that they went home and destroyed all the remains of idolatry and idolaters among them. Many are melted under the word that harden again before they are cast into a new mould' (Henry, *Commentary*, 2:128).

²⁵ Iain H. Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years 1899–1939* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), 315-16.

