

Judges 1:1–2:5



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?"

²The LORD answered, "Judah is to go; I have given the land into their hands."

³Then 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.

⁴When Judah attacked, the LORD gave the Canaanites and Perizzites into their hands and they struck down ten thousand men at Bezek. ⁵It was there that they found Adoni-Bezek and fought against him, putting to rout the Canaanites and Perizzites. ⁶Adoni-Bezek fled, but they chased him and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and big toes.

⁷Then 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.

⁸The men of Judah attacked Jerusalem also and took it. They put the city to the sword and set it on fire.

⁹After that, the men of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites living in the hill country, the Negev and the western foothills. ¹⁰They advanced against the Canaanites living in Hebron (formerly called Kiriath Arba) and defeated Sheshai, Ahiman and Talmai.

¹¹From there they advanced against the people living in Debir (formerly called Kiriath Sepher). ¹²And Caleb said, "I will give my daughter Acsah in marriage to the man who attacks and captures Kiriath Sepher." ¹³Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it; so Caleb gave his daughter Acsah to him in marriage.

¹⁴One 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?"

¹⁵She 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.

¹⁶The 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.

¹⁷Then 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. ¹⁸The men of Judah also took Gaza, Ashkelon and Ekron—each city with its territory.

¹⁹The 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. ²⁰As Moses had promised, Hebron was given to Caleb, who drove from it the three sons of Anak. ²¹The Benjamites, however, failed to dislodge the Jebusites, who were living in Jerusalem; to this day the Jebusites live there with the Benjamites.

²²Now the house of Joseph attacked Bethel, and the LORD was with them. ²³When they sent men to spy out Bethel (formerly called Luz), ²⁴the 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." ²⁵So he showed them, and they put the city to the sword but spared the man and his whole family. ²⁶He then went to the land of the Hittites, where he built a city and called it Luz, which is its name to this day.

²⁷But 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. ²⁸When Israel became strong, they pressed the Canaanites into forced labor but never drove them out completely. ²⁹Nor did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites living in Gezer, but the Canaanites continued to live there among them. ³⁰Neither did Zebulun drive out the Canaanites living in Kitron or Nahalol, who remained among them; but they did subject them to forced labor. ³¹Nor did Asher drive out those living in Acco or Sidon or Ahlab or Aczib or Helbah or Aphek or Rehob, ³²and because of this the people of Asher lived among the Canaanite inhabitants of the land. ³³Neither 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. ³⁴The Amorites

confined the Danites to the hill country, not allowing them to come down into the plain. ³⁵And 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. ³⁶The boundary of the Amorites was from Scorpion Pass to Sela and beyond.

^{2:1}The angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bokim and said, "I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land that I swore to give to your forefathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you, ²and you shall not make a covenant with the people of this land, but you shall break down their altars.' Yet you have disobeyed me. Why have you done this? ³Now therefore I tell you that I will not drive them out before you; they will be *thorns* in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you."

⁴When the angel of the LORD had spoken these things to all the Israelites, the people wept aloud, ⁵and they called that place Bokim. There they offered sacrifices to the LORD.

Original Meaning

SECTIONS 1 (1:1–2:5) and 2 (2:6–3:6) of Judges are parallel and form a double introduction to the main section of the cycles (3:7–16:31). The first section narrates matters from the point of view of the Israelites, while the second does so from the point of view of Yahweh. The first section narrates the foreign wars of subjugation with the *hērem* being applied (see the introduction, pp. 30–31).

Judges 1 recapitulates, recasts, and extends the story of the process of Israel's taking possession of the land of Canaan.¹ While it is a complex narrative, this chapter utilizes material from the book of Joshua (esp. Josh. 13–19) to make explicit what is only implicit in Joshua.² Along with some expansions, it reflects the general success of Judah and the increasing failure of the other Israelite tribes, especially Dan, in the process of dispossessing the Canaanites from the individual tribal allotments.

1. On 1:1–2:5, see K. L. Younger Jr., "The Configuring of Judicial Preliminaries: Judges 1:1–2:5 and its Dependence on the Book of Joshua," *JSOT* 68 (1995): 75–92; and "Judges 1 in Its Near Eastern Literary Context," 207–27.

2. Josh. 10:1–5 is parallel to Judg. 1:4–7; Josh. 15:63 to Judg. 1:8, 21; Josh. 15:13–19 (cf. 14:6–15) to Judg. 1:10–15, 20; Josh. 13:2–3 to Judg. 1:18–19; Josh. 17:11–13 to Judg. 1:27–28; Josh. 16:10 to Judg. 1:29; Josh. 19:10–16 to Judg. 1:30; Josh. 19:24–31 to Judg. 1:31–32; Josh. 19:32–39 to Judg. 1:33; Josh. 19:41–48 to Judg. 1:34–35.

There are two major structural techniques used in the portrayal (augmented by some short narratives): (1) the use of a concentric layout that parallels the roles of the tribes of Judah and Joseph, and (2) a geographically arranged narration that presents the moral degeneration of Israel. The latter technique employs a four-stage pattern that builds to a literary climax and moral nadir in the Dan episode.

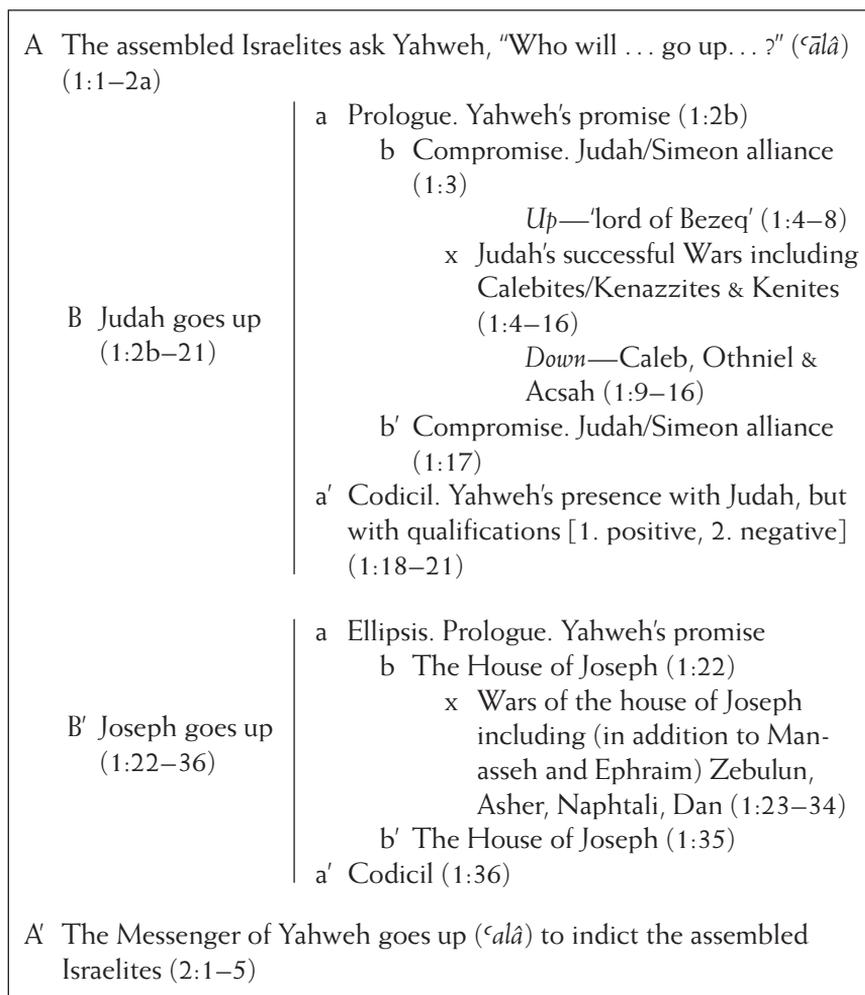


Figure 1. The Concentric Structures of Judges 1

The concentric design of this section can be seen in Figure 1. The Israelite assembly in A (1:1–2a) anticipates the activities described in the larger units of B (1:2b–21) and B' (1:22–36). By contrast, the Israelite assembly of A'

(2:1–5) reviews and evaluates the activities of B and B'.³ In both instances, as Webb has observed, the key word is *ʿālâ* ("to go up"). It unifies this segment of text and demarcates the units of which it is composed.

The structure of Section B also follows a concentric design. In the first instance there is a prologue (a) in which Yahweh promises victory (1:2b). The codicil⁴ (a'), in contrast to the prologue, confirms Yahweh's presence with Judah, but with qualifications both positive and negative (1:18–21). In the second instance, there is the alliance of Judah and Simeon (b), in which the Judahites obtain their allotment (1:3), and the alliance of Judah and Simeon (b'), in which the Simeonites obtain their allotment (1:17). In the third instance and the center of the entire section (x), Judah's successful wars are narrated (1:4–16). This unit is subdivided into an "up" movement (1:4–8) and a "down" movement (1:9–16).

Like Section B, the structure of Section B' follows a concentric design. In the first instance, there is a prologue (a) (implied by ellipsis) and a codicil (a'), in which a modification to the promise is noted (1:36). In the second instance, the beginning activities of the house of Joseph (b) are narrated positively (1:22), and the final activities of the house of Joseph (b') are narrated negatively (1:35). In the third instance and the center of the entire section (x), the wars of the house of Joseph are narrated (1:23–34). This unit is subdivided into the assessments of the other Cisjordanian (west bank) tribes.

Both sections B and B' narrate initial successes that are followed by failures. Moreover, B and B' serve to exegete the indictment of Israel by the messenger of Yahweh in 2:1–5.⁵ The compositional parallel between the Judah and Joseph sections (B and B') within chapter 1 throws the treatment of the Canaanite informer in the Bethel campaign (first item in the Joseph section) into sharp relief against the treatment of the Canaanite "lord of Bezeq"⁶ (Adoni-Bezek) in the Bezeq campaign (first item in the Judah section). This comparison helps us to perceive more clearly the basic shift that has already begun to take place at this point in the relationship between Israelites and Canaanites in spite of the fact that the second section, like the first, begins with a notable victory. With this overview of the chapter, it is now possible to expound the individual sections.

3. Webb, *The Book of the Judges*, 103.

4. A codicil is a short writing or addition to a will that modifies it in some way.

5. E. T. Mullen Jr., "Judges 1:1–36: The Deuteronomistic Reintroduction of the Book of Judges," *HTR* 77 (1984): 33–54, esp. 43.

6. Concerning the translation "lord of Bezeq," see S. Layton, *Archaic Features of Canaanite Names in the Hebrew Bible* (HSM 47; Atlanta: Scholars press, 1990), 117; and Younger, "The Configuring of Judicial Preliminaries," 78 n. 9. See standard commentaries for discussions of the variant Adoni-Zedek. At the present, it seems impossible to conclude that there is a wordplay in the name, as some commentators have suggested, since the precise meaning of *bezeq* is uncertain.

“Who Will . . . Go Up?” (1:1–2a)

SECTION A (1:1–2A) opens with an important phrase “after the death of Joshua.” Most commentators claim that this phrase is a later addition. The phrase, however, can be compared with the beginning of the book of Joshua: “after the death of Moses.”⁷ Thus it may be “a stylistic way of recapitulating briefly the previous book before interpreting it further.”⁸ In this case, Judges recapitulates the position of Joshua (how much of the land Israel would occupy) before going on to the central question of Judges: *Why* could they not completely occupy the land?⁹

The phrase “the Israelites asked the LORD” (šʾl *byhwh*) expresses the idea of obtaining a declaration of the divine will and is substantially the same as (lit.) “inquire of the judgment of the Urim” (sʾl *bmšp̄t̄ bʾwrym*) in Numbers 27:21, in which the divine will is obtained through the Urim and Thummim of the high priest. Thus at the beginning of the narrative, the Israelites seek divine guidance in the proper manner as to “Who will be the first to go up [*ʿalâ*] and fight for us against the Canaanites?” The idea contained in the term “first” is that of time, not rank. Hence, the question is who will be the first chronologically? While a series of campaigns by individual tribes is envisioned, the concept of a united Israel remains (“who will go up first *for us!*”).

Judah Goes Up (1:2b–21)

SECTION B (SEE Fig. 1) opens with a prologue (1:2b)¹⁰ that contains Yahweh’s promise through an oracle of victory: “I have given the land into their hands.” This is the same phrase that Yahweh used when he promised Joshua victory in the land (e.g., Josh. 6:2; 6:2; 10:8; 11:6). So far, so good.

The Judahites, however, immediately make a deal with the Simeonites (1:3). The alliance (b in Fig. 1) is a “natural” one since Judah and Simeon are

7. Also see the close parallels 2 Sam. 1:1 and 2:1. The latter contains the same question-answer sequence found in Judg. 1:1: “In the course of time [lit., afterwards], David inquired of the LORD: ‘Shall I go up [*ʿalâ*] to one of the towns of Judah?’ he asked. The LORD said: ‘Go up.’”

8. Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 148.

9. *Ibid.*

10. The difficulty in the handling of 1:2 is reflected in Webb’s analysis, where he understands verse 2 as part of Section A (*Judges*, 103) and yet as forming the prologue to the description of Judah’s activities in Section B (*ibid.*, 90). It seems to me that 1:2a goes with A (“Who will . . . go up?” 1:1–2a) as part of the major chiasm of Introduction 1. It is not only the answer to the Israelites’ inquiry of God but serves as a counter to the angel/messenger of the Lord in A’ (2:1–5). Judg. 1:2b goes with the next section (B), “Judah goes up” (1:2b–21), functioning as part of the smaller chiasm. In a sense 1:3–21 is the exposition of the answer in 1:2, and 1:22–36 a further exposition of the question of 1:1. Nonetheless, 1:2b serves as a transitional prologue to 1:3–21, and I have included it in Section B to indicate this.