

Who Shall Go Up First? Judges 1's Call to Conquest

Scriptures for Today: Judges 1:1-7

""Judges 1:1-7

Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them? 2 And the LORD said, Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand. 3 And Judah said unto Simeon his brother, Come up with me into my lot, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I likewise will go with thee into thy lot. So Simeon went with him. 4 And Judah went up; and the LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand: and they slew of them in Bezek ten thousand men. 5 And they found Adoni-bezek in Bezek: and they fought against him, and they slew the Canaanites and the Perizzites. 6 But Adoni-bezek fled; and they pursued after him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes. 7 And Adoni-bezek said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me. And they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died.""

Introduction to Judges 1: Who Will Go First?

Judges picks up where Joshua ends. Joshua has died, and a new generation faces unfinished business. The land was promised, much had been conquered, but the Canaanites still remained. Israel's question is vital: *"Who shall go up for us first?"*

The book of Judges shows the cycle of conquest, compromise, defeat, and deliverance. Before we even see the failures, Judges 1 sets the stage: God calls His people to finish the fight. Let's place this in the storyline of Scripture:

- **Genesis** — God's covenant with Abraham: a people, a land, and a blessing.
- **Exodus** — God redeems His people out of Egypt with a mighty hand.
- **Leviticus** — God calls His people to holiness and shows how to approach Him through sacrifice.
- **Numbers** — God organizes His people as an army, numbering them for war.
- **Deuteronomy** — God charges the new generation to go in and possess the land.
- **Joshua** — God leads them into conquest, giving victories but leaving work unfinished.
- **Judges** — God tests Israel's obedience. Will they drive out the enemy, or compromise with them?

Now in Judges 1:1–7, we see the very first steps in this new season. This passage is about leadership, obedience, victory, and judgment. If Israel obeys, God fights for them. If they compromise, they fall.

Outline of Joshua 24, Judges 1, Judges 2

Joshua Chapter 24:

1. Joshua assembles the tribes at Shechem.
- 2-13. A brief history of God's benefits, from Terah.
- 14-25. He renews the covenant between them and God.
- 26-28. A stone the witness of the covenant.
- 29-31. Joshua's age, death, and burial.
32. Joseph's bones are buried.
33. Eleazar dies.

Judges Chapter 1:

- 1-3. The acts of Judah and Simeon.
- 4-7. Adonibezek justly requited.
- 8-9. Jerusalem taken.
10. Hebron taken.
- 11-15. Othniel has Achsah to wife for taking of Debir.
16. The Kenites dwell in Judah.
- 17-20. Hormah, Gaza, Askelon, and Ekron taken.
21. The acts of Benjamin.
- 22-29. Of the house of Joseph, who take Beth-el.
30. Of Zebulun.
- 31-32. Of Asher.
33. Of Naphtali.
- 34-36. Of Dan.

Judges Chapter 2:

- 1-5. An angel rebukes the people at Bochim.
- 6-13. The wickedness of the new generation after Joshua.
- 14-19. God's anger and pity towards them.
- 20-23. The Canaanites left to prove Israel.

Focus on Judges 1:1–7

Judges 1:1–7 lays the foundation for the entire book. Three truths stand out: God's people are called to fight, God chooses who leads, and God gives victory when they obey. This opening

scene is not just history — it's theology in action. It tells us how God's people must live in every generation.

If this passage never happened, Israel would have drifted aimlessly after Joshua's death. Without God's clear direction, they would have dissolved into tribal chaos. But because God answered their question, "Who shall go up first?" Israel was reminded that leadership belongs to Him, victory comes from Him, and their duty is to follow Him.

This teaches us that God's people must keep asking for God's will to be done, keep obeying, and keep conquering — and don't stop. The fact that Judah is chosen first is no accident — out of Judah will one day come the greater Conqueror, the Lord Jesus Christ. Already in this first step of Judges, God is pointing to His ultimate Deliverer.

The lesson is simple, but very important: every generation must fight the battles of faith. Yesterday's victories under Joshua do not excuse today's duties under the next leaders.

God doesn't call His people to live in the memory of past glory; He calls them to present obedience. Just as Israel could not rest forever on the conquest of Joshua, the church today cannot rest on the revivals of the past, the faith of our fathers, or the victories of yesterday. Each generation must take up the sword of the Spirit and go forward in the fight of faith.

Exposition of Judges 1:1-7

Verse 1 — "Who shall go up for us first?"

"" Judges 1:1

Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them?"

After Joshua's death, Israel does the right thing: they **ask the LORD**. Leadership in God's people is **received**, not invented (Prov 3:5–6). Proverbs 3:5-6 says: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

This verse teaches dependence on God: before swords are drawn, **prayer and revelation** must direct the campaign — just as you in your life. Just as me in my life.

The question also assumes the call to **conquest continues** — Joshua's passing away didn't cancel God's command (cf. Deut 7:1–5) for them to take over the land, destroy them, their altars, their images, their groves, and their graven images. Burn it all down.

The Word & Guidance: God's people seek marching orders from Him. **Continuity of Mission:** New generation, same assignment; truth outlives leaders. **Spiritual Warfare:** The

church must still “fight the good fight of faith” (Eph 6:10–18; 1 Tim 6:12) – and it is a fight. But you're fighting on the correct side of things when you're fighting with a good church.

Verse 2 — “Judah shall go up”

""Judges 1:2

And the LORD said, Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand.""

God answers specifically: **Judah** first. "Judah shall go up." This is providential and messianic—Judah is the royal tribe (Gen 49:8–10); from Judah comes **David** and ultimately **Jesus**, the **Lion of the tribe of Judah** (Rev 5:5). Judah was not the first born. But here you see him first.

Reuben was the firstborn (Genesis 29:32), but he **lost the birthright** because of his sin with Bilhah, his father's concubine (Genesis 35:22; 49:3–4). Jacob's prophecy over Reuben was:

"Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel."

Simeon and Levi were next in line, but they were disqualified because of their violence in the massacre at Shechem (Genesis 34:25–30; 49:5–7). Jacob's prophecy over Simeon and Levi was:

"I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel."

Judah is the fourth in line – the fourth son of Jacob. Jacob's prophecy over Judah was one of rulership: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah." Judah was a sinner especially in that he was looking for a harlot and his daughter in law tricked him. But Judah said, "She hath been more righteous than I." He publicly confessed and seemed to get things right from that point on.

Judah wasn't spotless. He repented. He changed things. And he became the vessel of God's grace. God's grace increases. In Genesis 44, Judah offers himself as a substitute for his little brother, Benjamin: "Now therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide instead of the lad."

He was going to give himself for his brother – picturing Jesus Christ. Jesus goes up first and fights for us **FIRST**. Judah is going up first and fighting here in Judges 1.

Note the tense in verse 2 there – the second half of the verse: **“I have delivered”** – the promise **precedes** the performance. Israel fights **from** God's decree, not toward uncertain odds.

God says he already delivered the land into the hand of Judah. If another tribe went up, God had not delivered the land into that tribe's hand – it was delivered into the hand of Judah.

Sovereignty & Providence: God appoints the leader and **guarantees** the outcome.

Christology: Judah going up first anticipates victory in Christ. **Faith:** Obedience rests on **what God has said**, not what circumstances suggest.

Verse 3 — “Judah said unto Simeon his brother”

""Judges 1:3

And Judah said unto Simeon his brother, Come up with me into my lot, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I likewise will go with thee into thy lot. So Simeon went with him.""

Judah, though chosen, **invites partnership**. God’s work advances through **brotherly cooperation** (Eccl 4:9–12; Phil 1:27). Courage invites courage: “I’ll help you; you help me.” This is covenant solidarity—tribes interlocking for the common mission.

Now, I’ve heard pastors preach that this was wrong. And I’ve fallen for that as well in the past. But we study the Bible and we don’t see anything here that says this was wrong for Judah to ask Simeon to come up with me into my lot and likewise I will go with thee into thy lot. Simeon’s inheritance was within the inheritance of Judah.

Judah’s inheritance was huge and too large so Simeon’s inheritance was placed within Judah’s. That’s why Judah asked Simeon. They were together.

""Joshua 19:1

And the second lot came forth to Simeon, even for the tribe of the children of Simeon according to their families: and their inheritance was within the inheritance of the children of Judah.""

And the next verses in Judges 1 also show us that God wasn’t against this. He never rebuked them for this. And the battle is won. So there’s no proof this was wrong. This is brotherhood. The tribes worked together to bring the victory. This is fellowship in the fight, a reminder of shared inheritance, we strive together for the faith of the Gospel, the victory that Christ wins is not His alone but ours also, and we conquer together with Him.

Judah had the promise, yet he said: “Come with me.” The Bible never says Judah lacked faith to win that battle against the Canaanites. We can’t add to the word of God. “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.” Jesus didn’t need our help but He includes us. He shares victory with us.

Simeon was weak in the past. They were fading. They would be divided in Israel. You could say this is a picture of us before Christ – sinful, weak, scattered, unable to stand on our own. Judah didn’t need Simeon to win but Simeon got to share in the victory.

Jesus says, “Come to me.” He brings us into His lot, His kingdom, and His victory. So Simeon went with him the Bible says right there at the end of the verse. So I went with Jesus. So you go with Jesus.

Ecclesiology: Ministry is corporate; God fits the body together for mutual help. **Humility in Leadership:** God-appointed leaders still **value fellowship**, not isolation. **Unity & Mission:** Shared battles deepen shared faith.

Verse 4 — “The LORD delivered ... ten thousand men”

""Judges 1:4

And Judah went up; and the LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand: and they slew of them in Bezek ten thousand men.""

Cause and effect: **Judah went up** (obedience), **the LORD delivered** (divine action). Scripture assigns victory to God, not to numbers or swords (Josh 23:10; Prov 21:31). “Ten thousand” underscores scale, but the reason is singular: **the LORD**. Again, ten thousand in Bezek were killed. The LORD, the only true God, delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites.

Providence in Battle: Outcomes belong to God. **Obedience & Promise:** Human obedience is the **appointed means** by which God’s decrees unfold. **Glory to God Alone:** Boasting is excluded; the praise is His. We don't boast. Instead, we praise God because He delivered.

Verse 5 — “They found Adoni-bezek”

""Judges 1:5

And they found Adoni-bezek in Bezek: and they fought against him, and they slew the Canaanites and the Perizzites.""

God brings Israel face to face with a **regional tyrant**. “They found” shows divine **exposure** — the oppressor cannot hide. When God summons His people to cleanse the land, He also **uncovers** the strongholds that must fall (Num 33:55). And, if not, they become pricks in your eyes and thorns in your side.

Same thing around here. We ask God (only He can do this) to remove all the obstacles in this area. Help us to see this and to conquer this in our land. And send us to do the right work.

So they defeat the ten thousand at Bezek. Then they find the leader Adoni-bezek. That name means lord of Bezek or ruler of that city. The army is destroyed and their leader is found.

God’s Justice: The Lord reveals and confronts entrenched evil. It's everywhere out there. **Holiness & Separation:** Driving out Canaanite rule fulfills God’s call to **purity of worship**.

Verse 6 — “They ... cut off his thumbs and his great toes”

""Judges 1:6

But Adoni-bezek fled; and they pursued after him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes.""

Adoni-bezek runs away. But they catch him. They cut off his thumbs and his great toes.

People believe Christians are weak. Here, we aren't and we won't be. You will not walk all over us. Understand this. I've had enough of that – not happening any more to any of you here. If I see it, I will stop it. And don't be going around my back trying to use other people here to gain some type of advantage. Don't act like I can't see and can't figure that out. For example, don't try to take advantage of people because they are nice and won't tell you no. I'll tell you no for them.

The mutilation, cutting off his thumbs and great toes, signals the **end of his military power**—no grip for a sword, no balance for battle. He's done fighting. The narrative here reports, not prescribes; it shows **poetic justice** measured to a cruel ruler (see v.7). God often lets judgment mirror sin (Ps 18:26). God says, "With the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward."

For example, if you see that I get mad at you, it's because you did something. I don't want to get mad at you. I don't want to get angry. So do good to your people. And don't blame it on me. You can take a look at yourself. When God allows this judgment in Judges 1, it's there for a reason.

Retributive Justice: In history, judgments may **fit the crime**. That's become less and less here lately. You can murder someone and it seems you can get out in a few years now. Not good.
Sowing & Reaping: Sin disables the sinner in the very strength he trusted.

Verse 7 — “As I have done, so God hath requited me”

""Judges 1:7

And Adoni-bezek said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table: **as I have done, so God hath requited me**. And they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died.""

The pagan king **confesses** divine justice. He had humiliated **seventy kings**. He cut off their thumbs and great toes. He was fierce. He says those 70 kings gathered their meat under my table meaning they were reduced to beggars – forced to eat scraps like dogs under his table. They collected leftovers and crumbs. They were kings. Now look at them.

And he admits that God did this to him: "As I have done, so God hath requited me." Now he receives the same. Even an enemy acknowledges **God's moral government** of the world. History bends toward God's verdicts (Ps 9:16). "The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth." They took him to Jerusalem and he died there. Jesus was on trial in Jerusalem but died at Calvary or Golgotha outside the city of Jerusalem.

God the Judge: He repays; His justice is **inescapable**. **Providence & Conscience:** God makes even adversaries admit His righteousness. **Kingdom Pattern:** Earthly tyrants fall; God's kingdom stands — always. GOD WILL NEVER FALL.

Just a quick summary of Judges 1:1-7:

Ask (v.1): Dependence on God's Word. **Obey** (vv.2–3): Submit to God's order and labor together. **Conquer** (vv.4–7): God grants victory and executes justice. This passage inaugurates

Judges with a pattern that you're going to see throughout the book: **seek God's will, accept God's order, engage God's mission**—and give God the glory when He delivers.

Doctrinal Truths in Judges 1:1–7 Who Shall Fight First

1. **Doctrine of God's Sovereignty** — God chooses the tribe to lead (Judah). Leadership and victory come from Him, not man (Daniel 2:21).
2. **Doctrine of Jesus Christ** — The Lion of Judah (Revelation 5:5) foreshadowed here, pointing to Christ as the ultimate Deliverer.
3. **Doctrine of the Church** — God's people must fight together, not alone (Ecclesiastes 4:9–10; Philippians 1:27).
4. **Doctrine of Providence** — The LORD delivers enemies into their hand. Victory is not luck but God's decree (Proverbs 21:31).
5. **Doctrine of Justice** — Adoni-bezek confesses God's retribution. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Romans 12:19).
6. **Doctrine of Sin** — Cruelty reaps cruelty. Sin brings its own punishment, both temporal and eternal (Galatians 6:7).

Practical Applications in Judges 1:1-7 Call to Conquest

1. **Seek God First** — Israel asked God before fighting. So must we. Prayer is not an afterthought; it is the battle plan.
2. **Follow God's Order** — Judah was chosen. God appoints roles and we must submit. Disobedience to order brings defeat.
3. **Stand Together** — Judah brought Simeon. We need each other in the Christian life. Lone soldiers fall.
4. **Give God the Glory** — Ten thousand fell, but the LORD delivered. Don't boast in your sword; boast in the Savior.
5. **Trust God's Justice** — Adoni-bezek reaped what he sowed. No one escapes God's righteous judgment.

Warnings and Encouragements

Warnings from Judges 1:1–7

- Beware pride: Adoni-bezek thought himself untouchable, but God brought him low.
- Beware cruelty: Sinful sowing always leads to reaping.
- Beware delay: If Israel had not sought God first, defeat would have followed.

Encouragements from Judges 1:1–7

- God answers when His people ask.
- God appoints leaders and provides order.
- God gives victory when His people obey.
- God's justice will prevail — even enemies will confess it.

The Gospel Connection in Judges 1:1–7

Judah leads the charge because from Judah will come the King — Jesus Christ, the Lion of Judah. He is the greater Warrior who conquered sin, death, and hell. Just as Judah went up first, Christ went up to the cross first, alone (by his own self), to win the victory we could never win. And just as God delivered enemies into Judah's hand, so God "delivered him up for us all" (Romans 8:32).

Conclusion: Judges 1:1-7 The Call to Conquest

Judges 1:1–7 teaches us that every generation must fight the battles of faith. We cannot live on Joshua's victories or yesterday's glory. God calls us to ask, to obey, to unite, and to conquer in His name.

One-Sentence Takeaway: The Lion of Judah leads His people still — follow Him into battle, and the victory is sure.

Let's pray.