

Victories and Settlements: Judges 1 Explained

Scriptures for Today: Judges 1:8-26

""Judges 1:8–26

Now the children of Judah had fought against Jerusalem, and had taken it, and smitten it with the edge of the sword, and set the city on fire. 9 And afterward the children of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites that dwelt in the mountain, and in the south, and in the valley. 10 And Judah went against the Canaanites that dwelt in Hebron: now the name of Hebron before was Kirjatharba: and they slew Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmai. 11 And from thence he went against the inhabitants of Debir: and the name of Debir before was Kirjathsepher. 12 And Caleb said, He that smiteth Kirjathsepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife. 13 And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it: and he gave him Achsah his daughter to wife. 14 And it came to pass, when she came to him, that she moved him to ask of her father a field: and she lighted from off her ass; and Caleb said unto her, What wilt thou? 15 And she said unto him, Give me a blessing: for thou hast given me a south land; give me also springs of water. And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the nether springs. 16 And the children of the Kenite, Moses' father in law, went up out of the city of palm trees with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which lieth in the south of Arad; and they went and dwelt among the people. 17 And Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they slew the Canaanites that inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. And the name of the city was called Hormah. 18 Also Judah took Gaza with the coast thereof, and Askelon with the coast thereof, and Ekron with the coast thereof. 19 And the LORD was with Judah; and he drave out the inhabitants of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron. 20 And they gave Hebron unto Caleb, as Moses said: and he expelled thence the three sons of Anak. 21 And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem unto this day. 22 And the house of Joseph, they also went up against Bethel: and the LORD was with them. 23 And the house of Joseph sent to descry Bethel. (Now the name of the city before was Luz.) 24 And the spies saw a man come forth out of the city, and they said unto him, Shew us, we pray thee, the entrance into the city, and we will shew thee mercy. 25 And when he shewed them the entrance into the city, they smote the city with the edge of the sword: but they let go the man and all his family. 26 And the man went into the land of the Hittites, and built a city, and called the name thereof Luz: which is the name thereof unto this day.""

Introduction — The Book of Judges Begins With a Mixture of Victory and Failure

Before we dive into Judges 1:8–26, we must understand how we arrived here in the Bible. **What has happened so far?**

Genesis — God creates, calls Abraham, establishes the covenant, and forms the nation.

Exodus — Israel multiplies in Egypt, is enslaved, delivered by Moses, and receives the law.

Leviticus — God teaches Israel holiness and worship through the sacrificial system.

Numbers — Israel is numbered, tested, disciplined, and prepared to enter the land.

Deuteronomy — Moses gives final instruction, warning, and blessing before his death.

Joshua — Under Joshua's leadership, Israel crosses the Jordan, conquers Canaan, divides the land, and serves the Lord faithfully *during Joshua's life*.

Joshua dies at the age of 110 (Joshua 24:29). Now the question is: **What will Israel do without Joshua?**

What Judges 1 is about: Judges continues directly from Joshua but sets a new tone. Israel begins by **inquiring of the LORD** (Judges 1:1). God gives Judah leadership in the military campaigns. Some victories follow but **full obedience does not**.

Judges 1 is a chapter of **mixed success**—obedience in some areas, compromise in others. It sets the stage for the entire book, where a repeated pattern emerges: Israel obeys partially, Israel fails spiritually, Israel suffers consequences, God raises a deliverer (a judge), Israel returns to sin again.

Judges 1:8–26 shows the early days of settling the land, victories taken, and opportunities lost. Now let's walk through the verses.

Verse 8 — Judah Takes Jerusalem

""Judges 1:8

Now the children of Judah had fought against Jerusalem, and had taken it, and smitten it with the edge of the sword, and set the city on fire.""

Judah begins the book of Judges with strength, courage, and obedience. Jerusalem at this time was not the glorious capital it would one day become under David. It was a stronghold of the Jebusites — a fortified, pagan, strategically placed city.

Judah conquers it fully: They fight, They take it, They strike it, They burn it. This is total victory — yet temporary. The Jebusites later retake it, proving something essential for Christians today:

A victory not maintained will eventually become a defeat. Israel did not remain vigilant. They did not occupy. They did not follow through. And the enemy returned.

This is how sin works. You can conquer a habit, but if you don't guard your heart, it returns. You can gain ground spiritually, but if you stop reading, stop praying, stop walking with God, the old sins creep back in.

Judges begins with fire — but ends with failure. Not because God failed, but because obedience was not kept.

Verses 9–10 — Judah Continues Conquering

""Judges 1:9–10

And afterward the children of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites, that dwelt in the mountain, and in the south, and in the valley. 10 And Judah went against the Canaanites that dwelt in Hebron: (now the name of Hebron before was Kirjatharba:) and they slew Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmai.""

Judah attacks multiple terrains — mountains, valleys, and the southland. Each one presents new challenges. Some foes are in high places, some in low places. Some enemies are uphill battles, others are lurking below.

Hebron especially carries major biblical weight: Abraham lived there, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob were buried there, David ruled there for 7½ years.

And it was home to **giants** — literal giants. Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai were descendants of Anak. Israel once trembled before them in Numbers 13. The ten spies feared them. The people wept because of them. Now Judah slays them. What changed?

Faith. Back then the people said, “We be not able.” Now Judah says with their swords, “God is able.” Every believer has “Hebron battles” — things that once scared you but God now gives you the courage to face. When God is with you, giants fall.

Verses 11–15 — Othniel and Achsah

""Judges 1:11–15

And from thence he went against the inhabitants of Debir: and the name of Debir before was Kirjathsepher: 12 And Caleb said, He that smiteth Kirjathsepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife. 13 And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it: and he gave him Achsah his daughter to wife. 14 And it came to pass, when she came to him, that she moved him to ask of her father a field: and she lighted from off her ass; and Caleb said unto her, What wilt thou? 15 And she said unto him, Give me a blessing: for thou hast given me a south land; give me also springs of water. And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the nether springs.""

This passage gives us a rare look into a godly family in the midst of a collapsing culture. Caleb, at around 85 years old, is still a conqueror. He challenges the younger men to step up. Othniel rises to the occasion — bold, courageous, obedient. Later he becomes Israel's first judge.

Achsah demonstrates spiritual maturity as well. She asks for land with water — something fruitful, life-sustaining, future-oriented. She is not content with barren land; she desires blessing that will last for generations.

This teaches us: Faith is contagious, Courage can be inherited, Spiritual desire produces spiritual fruit, Families of faith can thrive even when nations fall apart. Caleb gives her both upper springs and lower springs — showing God's tendency to give more than we ask.

Verses 16–17 — Partnership and Victory

""Judges 1:16–17

And the children of the Kenite, Moses' father in law, went up out of the city of palm trees with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which lieth in the south of Arad; and they went and dwelt among the people. 17 And Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they slew the Canaanites that inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. And the name of the city was called Hormah.""

These verses emphasize cooperation:

The Kenites — Moses' in-laws — join Judah. Though Gentiles, they are welcomed because they stand with God's people. They journey together, dwell together, fight together. Then Judah fights alongside Simeon and obtains total victory over Zephath, renaming it Hormah ("utter destruction").

This illustrates an important biblical truth: **Victory is multiplied when God's people walk in unity.**

Judah alone was strong. Judah + Simeon was unstoppable. A divided home, divided church, or divided people will lose battles they should have won. But when God's people unite around obedience, the enemy falls easily.

Verses 18–19 — Limits Appear

""Judges 1:18–19

Also Judah took Gaza with the coast thereof, and Askelon with the coast thereof, and Ekron with the coast thereof. 19 And the LORD was with Judah; and he drave out the inhabitants of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron.""

Judah experiences massive victories — Gaza, Ashkelon, Ekron — major Philistine cities. These are not weak enemies; these are coastal strongholds. Then comes the tragic phrase:

“but could not drive out... because they had chariots of iron.”

Notice very carefully: The LORD **was with** Judah, The LORD **drove out** the mountain inhabitants, But Judah **stopped** because of iron chariots. Did God lack power? No. Did God retreat? No. Did chariots intimidate Him? No.

The people feared the weapon more than they trusted the God who parts seas, levels walls, rains hailstones, and commands creation. This is the danger of partial faith — obeying until it looks too difficult, then stopping.

Iron chariots today look like: Hard conversations, Financial obstacles, Health challenges, Pressure from the world, Persecution, Unknown futures. Every believer comes to a line where faith and fear collide. Judah stepped back. God wanted them to step forward.

Verses 20–21 — Benjamin’s Failure

""Judges 1:20–21

And they gave Hebron unto Caleb, as Moses said: and he expelled thence the three sons of Anak. 21 And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem unto this day.""

Contrast **Caleb** — FULL obedience to **Benjamin** — FAILED obedience. Partial obedience is disobedience.

Caleb — as always — obeys fully. He drives out the giants completely. He does not hesitate. He does not compromise. He finishes what God commanded. Benjamin, by contrast, leaves the Jebusites in Jerusalem. They allow the enemy to live among them.

This becomes a centuries-long problem. The lesson is unmistakable: **Any sin left alive becomes a future master. Any compromise tolerated becomes a future chain. Any enemy spared becomes a future nightmare.**

Caleb enjoyed blessing. Benjamin inherited bondage.

Verses 22–26 — Joseph’s House Shows Faith

""Judges 1:22–26

And the house of Joseph, they also went up against Bethel: and the LORD was with them. 23 And the house of Joseph sent to descry Bethel. (Now the name of the city before was Luz.) 24 And the spies saw a man come forth out of the city, and they said unto him, Shew us, we pray thee, the entrance into the city, and we will shew thee mercy. 25 And when he shewed them the entrance into the city, they smote the city with the edge of the sword; but they let go the man and all his family. 26 And the man went into the land of the Hittites, and built a city, and called the name thereof Luz: which is the name thereof unto this day.""

Joseph’s tribes — Ephraim and Manasseh — show faith, initiative, and wisdom. They spy out the land, seek strategy, and trust God. They show mercy to the man who helps them, fulfilling the principle God later states: “I will bless them that bless thee.”

This man later rebuilds a city named Luz — a reminder that God preserves people who show kindness to His people.

This section teaches: God honors initiative, God blesses strategic obedience, God responds to active faith, God works through unlikely people. Joseph's house mirrors the victory that Judah should have continued.

Practical Applications from Judges 1:8–26

- 1. Past victories don't guarantee future obedience.** Israel began well—but did not continue well. Same with Christians.
- 2. Fear stops what God commands.** Iron chariots still stop believers today: fear of people, fear of failure, fear of sacrifice. Faith must conquer fear.
- 3. Partial obedience leads to future bondage.** Every Canaanite left behind becomes a future enemy. Every sin we tolerate becomes a snare later.
- 4. God blesses unity among His people.** Judah + Simeon = victory. Families united in obedience = blessing.
- 5. God uses ordinary people.** Achsah, Othniel, the Kenites, the unnamed man of Luz — none are famous, but all are used.
- 6. God is with those who move forward in faith.** “**The LORD was with Judah**” — yet they stopped. “**The LORD was with the house of Joseph**” — and they conquered. Faith determines outcome.

Conclusion — Victory or Compromise?

Judges 1 is not just history — it is diagnosis. It shows the heart of God's people:

- The tribes who obeyed
- The tribes who feared
- The tribes who compromised
- The tribes who quit

And the same choices face us today. Here is the message of Judges 1:8–26:

When God is with you, no enemy can stop you — but when fear rules you, even small enemies defeat you. Judges 1 reveals **mixed success** — because Israel had **mixed obedience**. Choose faith. Choose courage. Choose full obedience.

Let's pray.