

Judges 1-2 • When God's People Fail

Introduction

Biblical patterns not only repeat themselves throughout the Bible in the history of the nation of Israel, but have been frequently found to exist throughout all of human history as well. Like a great many spiritual movements and organizations through the whole of church history, Israel began right and was OK for awhile, but ultimately failed to achieve what it set out to accomplish. Why is that sometimes God's people fail? What lessons can we learn and apply which might allow us to prevent repeating the same mistakes as past generations or efforts?

¹Now it came about after the death of Joshua that the sons of Israel inquired of the LORD, saying, "Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?"

²The LORD said, "Judah shall go up; behold, I have given the land into his hand."

³Then Judah said to Simeon his brother, "Come up with me into the territory allotted me, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I in turn will go with you into the territory allotted you." So Simeon went with him.

⁴Judah went up, and the LORD gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hands, and they defeated ten thousand men at Bezek. ⁵They found Adoni-bezek in Bezek and fought against him, and they defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites. ⁶But Adoni-bezek fled; and they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and big toes. ⁷Adoni-bezek said, "Seventy kings with their thumbs and their big toes cut off used to gather up scraps under my table; as I have done, so God has repaid me." So they brought him to Jerusalem and he died there.

⁸Then the sons of Judah fought against Jerusalem and captured it and struck it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire. ⁹Afterward the sons of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites living in the hill country and in the Negev and in the lowland. ¹⁰So Judah went against the Canaanites who lived in Hebron (now the name of Hebron formerly was Kiriath-arba); and they struck Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmai.

¹¹Then from there he went against the inhabitants of Debir (now the name of Debir formerly was Kiriath-sepher).

¹²And Caleb said, "The one who attacks Kiriath-sepher and captures it, I will even give him my daughter Achsah for a wife."

¹³Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, captured it; so he gave him his daughter Achsah for a wife.

[Read 1:1-36]

Q: How would you describe the first main failure of God's people?

A: They failed to conquer the land.

Q: What is the main difference between the events described in v.1-18 from those in v.19-36?

A: The first half records the early victories of Judah and Simeon while the second half is mainly focused on the repeated defeats of the rest of Israel. With the exception of Joseph taking Bethel, in v.22, the rest of the tribes were unable to drive out the enemy.

Q: How do these events relate to the way the book of Joshua ended?

A: In chapters 23-24, the last chapters in Joshua, Israel is warned of the consequences of not fully driving out the whole enemy.

"Be very firm, then, to keep and do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, so that you may not turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you will not associate with these nations, these which remain among you, or mention the name of their gods, or make anyone swear by them, or serve them, or bow down to them. But you are to cling to the LORD your God, as you have done to this day..." "For if you ever go back and cling to the rest of these nations, these which remain among you, and intermarry with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, know with certainty that the LORD your God will not continue to drive these nations out from before you; but they will be a snare and a trap to you, and a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good land which the LORD your God has given you."

Joshua 23:6-8; 12-13

Point: *The issue wasn't limited to executing God's wrath of judgment on those who steadfastly refused Him for other gods, but had far more to do about removing spiritual influences who were dedicated to seducing God's people away from the One True God.*

Q: Whereas it started out with a series of victories, how would you characterize the way things concluded?

A: With a series of compromises. They allowed those they couldn't drive out to settle down with them and in some cases rationalized their failures by making slaves of the people they were supposed to remove.

Point: *One of the mistakes believers make is the false notion that they can control or inhibit the bad spiritual influences which aren't supposed to be allowed in the first place. If you can't overcome the enemy, you won't be able to ultimately control or limit them either.*

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¹⁴Then it came about when she came to him, that she persuaded him to ask her father for a field. Then she alighted from her donkey, and Caleb said to her, "What do you want?"

¹⁵She said to him, "Give me a blessing, since you have given me the land of the Negev, give me also springs of water." So Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs.

¹⁶The descendants of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up from the city of palms with the sons of Judah, to the wilderness of Judah which is in the south of Arad; and they went and lived with the people. ¹⁷Then Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they struck the Canaanites living in Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. So the name of the city was called Hormah. ¹⁸And Judah took Gaza with its territory and Ashkelon with its territory and Ekron with its territory.

¹⁹Now the LORD was with Judah, and they took possession of the hill country; but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley because they had iron chariots. ²⁰Then they gave Hebron to Caleb, as Moses had promised; and he drove out from there three sons of Anak. ²¹But the sons of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem; so the Jebusites have lived with the sons of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.

²²Likewise the house of Joseph went up against Bethel, and the LORD was with them. ²³The house of Joseph spied out Bethel (now the name of the city was formerly Luz). ²⁴The spies saw a man coming out of the city and they said to him, "Please show us the entrance to the city and we will treat you kindly." ²⁵So he showed them the entrance to the city, and they struck the city with the edge of the sword, but they let the man and all his family go free. ²⁶The man went into the land of the Hittites and built a city and named it Luz which is its name to this day.

²⁷But Manasseh did not take possession of Beth-shean and its villages, or Taanach and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Ibleam and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages; so the Canaanites persisted in living in that land. ²⁸It came about when Israel became strong, that they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but they did not drive them

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?

2 Corinthians 6:14

Application: *How might these lessons have replayed themselves in the history of the church in the Western world? What happens when, in the name of religious tolerance, spiritual influences dedicated to seducing us from Christ are allowed to grow side-by-side with our Christianity?*

out completely.

²⁹Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites who were living in Gezer; so the Canaanites lived in Gezer among them.

³⁰Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, or the inhabitants of Nahalol; so the Canaanites lived among them and became subject to forced labor.

³¹Asher did not drive out the inhabitants of Acco, or the inhabitants of Sidon, or of Ahlab, or of Achzib, or of Helbah, or of Aphik, or of Rehob. ³²So the Asherites lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; for they did not drive them out.

³³Naphtali did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh, or the inhabitants of Beth-anath, but lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; and the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and Beth-anath became forced labor for them.

³⁴Then the Amorites forced the sons of Dan into the hill country, for they did not allow them to come down to the valley; ³⁵yet the Amorites persisted in living in Mount Heres, in Aijalon and in Shaalbim; but when the power of the house of Joseph grew strong, they became forced labor. ³⁶The border of the Amorites ran from the ascent of Akrabbim, from Sela and upward.

¹Now the angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, "I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land which I have sworn to your fathers; and I said, 'I will never break My covenant with you, ²and as for you, you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed Me; what is this you have done? ³Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they will become as thorns in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you.' "

⁴When the angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept. ⁵So they named that place Bochim; and there they sacrificed to the Lord.

⁶When Joshua had dismissed the people, the sons of Israel went each to his inheritance to possess the land. ⁷The people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, who had seen all the

[Read 2:1-10]

Q: Why did they name the place the Angel of the Lord appeared to them "Bochim"?

A: "Bochim" means "weeping", as in their realization of what the consequences of their sin was bringing upon them. They did not weep because they were repentant, but because they were "caught" in sin.

Q: How does this contrast to v.1 where it says "the angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim"?

A: Gilgal had been a place of great victory for Israel, and literally meant "a wheel rolling". To go from "a wheel rolling" unto victory to a place of "weeping" due to defeat was a very powerful illustration of what was happening both literally and spiritually.

Point: *Gilgal, the center of Israel's military operations under Joshua had been forsaken as they attempted to continue the work from a new and weakened position in Bochim. Their tactical decisions reflect their eroding and changing commitment to God's Word and ways. Just as they moved away from Joshua and the original generation spiritually, so they also moved away physically. One reflected the other.*

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great work of the LORD which He had done for Israel. ⁸Then Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of one hundred and ten. ⁹And they buried him in the territory of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. ¹⁰All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel.

Q: What is the primary cause cited for their defeat?

A: "But you have not obeyed Me". (v.2)

Point: Their second reason for failure is they failed to consider the Law.

Q: What was the basis on which God had previously promised victory?

A: It was a conditional promise predicated on obedience and honor for God's Word.

"Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.

Joshua 1:7-8

Q: Was this the first time God's people were hearing that they were supposed to remain separate from the other nations?

A: No, this is what Deuteronomy 7 is dedicated to.

Q: So what is the chief problem experienced by the "next" generation which was not experienced by the previous one?

A: The latest generation "did not know the LORD" – in other words, did not put His Word into practice.

Q: What might this imply? Where might the issue of unfaithfulness have begun where the new generation is concerned?

A: The implication is that the older generation did not fully obey Deuteronomy 6, God's instructions to teach their children the Law. The problem of disobedience to God's Law may have begun in the "younger" generation because the "older" generation did not fully train them up in the way they should go.

Application: How might these events be playing out again in the church today? How has consideration for God's Word eroded between recent generations? What is the inevitable result of failing to keep God's Word?

[Read 2:11-23]

¹¹Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals, ¹²and they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked the LORD to anger. ¹³So they forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtaroth. ¹⁴The anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies around them, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. ¹⁵Wherever they went, the hand of the LORD was against them for

Q: First they failed to drive the enemy completely out of the land, then they compromised obedience to God's Word. To what did this inevitably lead?

A: To utterly forsaking God and pursuing other, false gods.

Q: How would you characterize the people's third failure?

A: They failed to cleave to the Lord.

Point: The worship of Baal and Ashtaroth (male and female Canaanite deities) will plague Israel for the rest of its history leading up to being taken into captivity in Babylon. Once it was allowed entrance into their lives, it was extremely difficult to permanently exterminate.

Q: So when exactly did the Lord forsake His people?

A: When they finally and utterly forsook Him. The process of falling away began with tolerating the enemy and was exacerbated by disobedience

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evil, as the LORD had spoken and as the LORD had sworn to them, so that they were severely distressed.

¹⁶Then the LORD raised up judges who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them. ¹⁷Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they played the harlot after other gods and bowed themselves down to them. They turned aside quickly from the way in which their fathers had walked in obeying the commandments of the LORD; they did not do as their fathers. ¹⁸When the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them.

¹⁹But it came about when the judge died, that they would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them and bow down to them; they did not abandon their practices or their stubborn ways. ²⁰So the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He said, "Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers and has not listened to My voice, ²¹I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, ²²in order to test Israel by them, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk in it as their fathers did, or not."

²³So the LORD allowed those nations to remain, not driving them out quickly; and He did not give them into the hand of Joshua.

to His Word. Ultimately it led to complete unfaithfulness.

Q: What was the God's original intention in giving His people the Promised Land?

A: It was supposed to be the place where they enjoyed God's "rest".

Q: What is the irony of how it turned out due to their unfaithfulness?

A: They would spend periods of the next several hundred years in slavery, and periods of temporary freedom under various judges. The only "rest" they got were occasional periods of rest from the Lord.

Point: *There is a stark difference between one's faith being honed to spiritual perfection through tests and trials versus punishment for willful, sinful behavior and rejection of God's Word and ways.*

Q: When does it appear that God's people returned to Him?

A: Only when judgment became so severe that they finally cried out to Him.

Q: Why do you suppose permanent rest eluded God's people?

A: Because they only turned to the Lord in times of trouble and, once each particular judge was gone, fell back into sin again; the Lord was only really with the judges individually instead of the people collectively.

Application: *How might this apply to spiritual movements or organizations which have appeared to have started out effectively but ultimately failed?*

Q: What greater, repeated spiritual principle can be articulated by the fact that God ultimately allowed the nations to remain?

A: As seen throughout all of history, judgment always begins with God's house first. He does not proceed to Final Judgment against non-believers until He's first and fully dealt with those claiming to be His own.

Q: What is the specific sin of believers defined by God in v.20?

A: They "transgressed My covenant...and has not listened to My voice". The "covenant" comprises the specific requirements of a right relationship with God entered into voluntarily and willfully to begin with, knowing up front all the requirements of God's Word to maintain that right relationship. This isn't occasionally backsliding or accidentally sinning, it's purposely breaking the promise and commitment believers made to begin with.

Overall Application

These are all failures witnessed in professing Christians today. At times, instead of overcoming the enemy we instead compromise and allow the enemy to drag us down. There are times when we deliberately disobey God's Word as well as many times when we fail to love Him and cleave to Him alone by faith. When this happens, God must chasten us and the sole remedy is for us to wholly repent and return to Him. Without true and sincere repentance where we permanently become faithful to Him alone, we find ourselves in a cycle of discipline from which we find no permanent rest except during our short bouts of temporarily returning to His Word and ways. The only permanent fix is exclusively clinging to Him alone, forsaking all others.

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