
JUDGES 1:1 After the death of Joshua, the children of Israel asked of the LORD, saying, "Who should go up for us first against the Canaanites, to fight against them?"

The persons called Judges, שופטים Shophetim, from שפט, shaphat, to judge, discern regulate, and direct, were the heads or chiefs of the Israelites who governed the Hebrew republic from the days of Moses and Joshua till the time of Saul. The word judge is not to be taken here in its usual signification, i.e., one who determines controversies, and denounces the judgment of the law in criminal cases, but one who directs and rules a state or nation with sovereign power, administers justice, makes peace or war, and leads the armies of the people over whom he presides. Officers, with the same power, and nearly with the same name, were established by the Tyrians in new Tyre, after the destruction of old Tyre, and the termination of its regal state. The Carthaginian Suffetes appear to have been the same as the Hebrew Shophetim; as were also the Archons among the Athenians, and the Dictators among the ancient Romans. But they were neither hereditary governors, nor were they chosen by the people: they were properly vicegerents or lieutenants of the Supreme God; and were always, among the Israelites, chosen by Him in a supernatural way. They had no power to make or change the laws; they were only to execute them under the direction of the Most High. God, therefore, was king in Israel: the government was a theocracy; and the judges were His deputies. The office, however, was not continual, as there appear intervals in which there was no judge in Israel. And, as they were extraordinary persons, they were only raised up on extraordinary occasions to be instruments in the hands of God of delivering their nation from the oppression and tyranny of the neighboring powers. They had neither pomp nor state; nor, probably, any kind of emoluments.

The chronology of the Book of Judges is extremely embarrassed and difficult; and there is no agreement among learned men concerning it. When the deliverances, and consequent periods of rest, so frequently mentioned in this book, took place, cannot be satisfactorily ascertained. Archbishop Usher, and those who follow him, suppose that the rests, or times of peace, should be reckoned, not from the time in which a particular judge gave them deliverance; but from the period of the preceding deliverance, e.g.: It is said that Othniel, son of Kenaz, defeated Cushan-rishathaim, Jdg 3:9, and the land had rest forty years. After the death of Othniel the Israelites again did wickedly, and God delivered them into the hands of the Moabites, Ammonites, and Amalekites; and this oppression continued eighteen years; Jdg 3:14. Then God raised up Ehud, who, by killing Eglon, king of Moab, and gaining a great victory over the Moabites, in which he slew ten thousand of their best soldiers, obtained a rest for the land which lasted forty years: Jdg 3:15, Jdg 3:30; which rest is not counted from this deliverance wrought by Ehud, but from that wrought by Othniel, mentioned above; leaving out the eighteen years of oppression under Eglon king of Moab: and so of the rest. This is a most violent manner of settling chronological difficulties, a total perversion of the ordinary meaning of terms, and not likely to be intended by the writer of this book.

Sir John Marsham, aware of this difficulty, has struck out a new hypothesis: he supposes that there were judges on each side Jordan; and that there were particular wars in which those beyond Jordan had no part. He observes, that from the exodus to the building of Solomon's temple was four hundred and eighty years, which is precisely the time mentioned in the sacred writings; (1Kgs 6:1); and that from the time in which the Israelites occupied the land beyond Jordan, to the days of Jephthah, was three hundred years. But in reckoning up the years of the judges, from the death of Moses to the time of Ibzan, who succeeded Jephthah, there appears to be more than three hundred years; and from Jephthah to the fourth year of Solomon, in which the foundation of the temple was

laid, there are again more than one hundred and fifty years; we must, therefore, either find out some method of reconciling these differences, or else abandon these epochs; but as the latter cannot be done, we must have recourse to some plan of modification. Sir John Marsham's plan is of this kind; the common plan is that of Archbishop Usher. I shall produce them both, and let the reader choose for himself.

Who the author of the Book of Judges was, is not known; some suppose that each judge wrote his own history, and that the book has been compiled from those separate accounts; which is very unlikely. Others ascribe it to Phinehas, to Samuel, to Hezekiah, and some to Ezra. But it is evident that it was the work of an individual, and of a person who lived posterior to the time of the judges, (see Jdg 2:10, etc.), and most probably of Samuel.

The duration of the government of the Israelites by judges, from the death of Joshua to the commencement of the reign of Saul, was about three hundred and thirty-nine years. But as this book does not include the government of Eli, nor that of Samuel, but ends with the death of Samson, which occurred in A.M. 2887; consequently, it includes only three hundred and seventeen years; but the manner in which these are reckoned is very different, as we have seen above; and as will be more particularly evident in the following tables by Archbishop Usher and Sir John Marsham.

After the death of Joshua the Israelites purpose to attack the remaining Canaanites; and the tribe of Judah is directed to go up first, Jdg 1:1, Jdg 1:2. Judah and Simeon unite, attack the Canaanites and Perrizites, kill ten thousand of them, take Adoni-bezek prisoner, cut off his thumbs and great toes, and bring him to Jerusalem, where he dies, Jdg 1:3-7. Jerusalem conquered, Jdg 1:8. A new war with the Canaanites under the direction of Caleb, Jdg 1:9-11. Kirjath-sepher taken by Othniel, on which he receives, as a reward, Achsah, the daughter of Caleb and with her a south land with springs of water, Jdg 1:12-15. The Kenites dwell among the people, Jdg 1:16. Judah and Simeon destroy the Canaanites in Zephath, Gaza, etc., Jdg 1:17-19. Hebron is given to Caleb, Jdg 1:20. Of the Benjamites, house of Joseph, tribe of Manasseh, etc., Jdg 1:21-27. The Israelites put the Canaanites to tribute, Jdg 1:28. Of the tribes of Ephraim, Zebulun, Asher, and Naphtali, Jdg 1:29-33. The Amorites force the children of Dan into the mountains, Jdg 1:34-36.

Verse 1

Now after the death of Joshua - How long after the death of Joshua this happened we cannot tell; it is probable that it was not long. The enemies of the Israelites, finding their champion dead, would naturally avail themselves of their unsettled state, and make incursions on the country.

Who shall go up - Joshua had left no successor, and every thing relative to the movements of this people must be determined either by caprice, or an especial direction of the Lord.

JUDGES 1:2 The LORD said, "Judah shall go up. Behold, I have delivered the land into his hand."

Verse 2

The Lord said, Judah shall go up - They had inquired of the Lord by Phinehas the high priest; and he had communicated to them the Divine counsel.

JUDGES 1:3 Judah said to Simeon his brother, "Come up with me into my lot, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I likewise will go with you into your lot." So Simeon went with him.

Verse 3

Come up with me into my lot - It appears that the portions of Judah and Simeon had not been cleared of the Canaanites, or that these were the parts which were now particularly invaded.

JUDGES 1:4 Judah went up, and the LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand. They struck ten thousand men in Bezek.

JUDGES 1:5 They found Adoni-Bezek in Bezek, and they fought against him; and they struck the Canaanites and the Perizzites.

Verse 5

And they found Adoni-bezek - The word מצא matsa, "he found," is used to express a hostile encounter between two parties; to attack, surprise, etc. This is probably its meaning here. Adoni-bezek is literally the lord of Bezek. It is very probable that the different Canaanitish tribes were governed by a sort of chieftains, similar to those among the clans of the ancient Scottish Highlanders. Bezek is said by some to have been in the tribe of Judah. Eusebius and St. Jerome mention two villages of this name, not in the tribe of Judah, but about seventeen miles from Shechem.

JUDGES 1:6 But Adoni-Bezek fled; and they pursued him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his big toes.

Verse 6

Cut off his thumbs - That he might never be able to draw his bow or handle his sword, and great toes, that he might never be able to pursue or escape from an adversary.

JUDGES 1:7 Adoni-Bezek said, "Seventy kings, having their thumbs and their big toes cut off, scavenged under my table. As I have done, so God has done to me." They brought him to Jerusalem, and he died there.

Verse 7

Threescore and ten kinds - Chieftains, heads of tribes, or military officers. For the word king cannot be taken here in its proper and usual sense.

Having their thumbs and their great toes cut off - That this was an ancient mode of treating enemies we learn from Aelian, who tells us, Var. Hist. l. ii., c. 9, that "the Athenians, at the instigation of

Cleon, son of Cleaenetus, made a decree that all the inhabitants of the island of Aegina should have the thumb cut off from the right hand, so that they might ever after be disabled from holding a spear, yet might handle an oar." This is considered by Aelian an act of great cruelty; and he wishes to Minerva, the guardian of the city, to Jupiter Eleutherius, and all the gods of Greece, that the Athenians had never done such things. It was a custom among those Romans who did not like a military life, to cut off their own thumbs, that they might not be capable of serving in the army. Sometimes the parents cut off the thumbs of their children, that they might not be called into the army. According to Suetonius, in Vit. August., c. 24, a Roman knight, who had cut off the thumbs of his two sons to prevent them from being called to a military life was, by the order of Augustus, publicly sold, both he and his property. These are the words of Suetonius: Equitem Romanum, quod duobus filis adolescentibus, causa detractandi sacramenti, pollices amputasset, ipsum bonaque subjecit hastae. Calmet remarks that the Italian language has preserved a term, poltrone, which signifies one whose thumb is cut off, to designate a soldier destitute of courage and valor. We use poltroon to signify a dastardly fellow, without considering the import of the original. There have been found frequent instances of persons maiming themselves, that they might be incapacitated for military duty. I have heard an instance in which a knavish soldier discharged his gun through his hand, that he might be discharged from his regiment. The cutting off of the thumbs was probably designed for a double purpose:

1. To incapacitate them for war; and,
2. To brand them as cowards.

Gathered their meat under my table - I think this was a proverbial mode of expression, to signify reduction to the meanest servitude; for it is not at all likely that seventy kings, many of whom must have been contemporaries, were placed under the table of the king of Bezek, and there fed; as in the houses of poor persons the dogs are fed with crumbs and offal, under the table of their owners.

So God hath requited me - The king of Bezek seems to have had the knowledge of the true God, and a proper notion of a Divine providence. He now feels himself reduced to that state to which he had cruelly reduced others. Those acts in him were acts of tyrannous cruelty; the act towards him was an act of retributive justice.

And there he died - He continued at Jerusalem in a servile and degraded condition till the day of his death. How long he lived after his disgrace we know not.

JUDGES 1:8 The children of Judah fought against Jerusalem, took it, struck it with the edge of the sword, and set the city on fire.

Verse 8

Had fought against Jerusalem - We read this verse in a parenthesis, because we suppose that it refers to the taking of this city by Joshua; for as he had conquered its armies and slew its king, Jos 10:26, it is probable that he took the city: yet we find that the Jebusites still dwelt in it, Jos 15:63; and that the men of Judah could not drive them out, which probably refers to the strong hold or fortress on Mount Zion, which the Jebusites held till the days of David, who took it, and totally destroyed the Jebusites. See 2Sam 5:6-9, and 1Chr 11:4-8. It is possible that the Jebusites who had been discomfited by Joshua, had again become sufficiently strong to possess themselves of

Jerusalem; and that they were now defeated, and the city itself set on fire: but that they still were able to keep possession of their strong fort on Mount Zion, which appears to have been the citadel of Jerusalem.

JUDGES 1:9 After that, the children of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites who lived in the hill country, and in the South, and in the lowland.

Verse 9

The Canaanites, that dwelt to the mountain - The territories of the tribe of Judah lay in the most southern part of the promised land, which was very mountainous, though towards the west it had many fine plains. In some of these the Canaanites had dwelt; and the expedition marked here was for the purpose of finally expelling them. But probably this is a recapitulation of what is related Jos 10:36; Jos 11:21; Jos 15:13.

JUDGES 1:10 Judah went against the Canaanites who lived in Hebron (now the name of Hebron before was Kiriath Arba); and they struck Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmi.

JUDGES 1:11 From there he went against the inhabitants of Debir. (Now the name of Debir before was Kiriath Sepher.)

JUDGES 1:12 Caleb said, "I will give Achsah my daughter as wife to he who strikes Kiriath Sepher, and takes it."

Verse 12

And Caleb, etc. - See this whole account, which is placed here by way of recapitulation, in Jos 15:13-19 (note), and the explanatory notes there.

JUDGES 1:13 Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it, so he gave him Achsah his daughter as wife.

JUDGES 1:14 When she came, she got him to ask her father for a field. She dismounted from off of her donkey; and Caleb said to her, "What would you like?"

JUDGES 1:15 She said to him, "Give me a blessing; because you have set me in the land of the South, give me also springs of water." Then Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs.

JUDGES 1:16 The children of the Kenite, Moses' brother-in-law, went up out of the city of palm trees with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which is in the south of Arad; and they went and lived with the people.

Verse 16

The children of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law - For an account of Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, see Exodus 18:1-27 (note); Num 10:29 (note), etc.

The city of palm trees - This seems to have been some place near Jericho, which city is expressly called the city of palm trees, Deu 34:3; and though destroyed by Joshua, it might have some suburbs remaining where these harmless people had taken up their residence. The Kenites, the descendants of Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, were always attached to the Israelites: they remained with them, says Calmet, during their wanderings in the wilderness, and accompanied them to the promised land. They received there a lot with the tribe of Judah, and remained in the city of palm trees during the life of Joshua; but after his death, not contented with their portion, or molested by the original inhabitants, they united with the tribe of Judah, and went with them to attack Arad. After the conquest of that country, the Kenites established themselves there, and remained in it till the days of Saul, mingled with the Amalekites. When this king received a commandment from God to destroy the Amalekites, he sent a message to the Kenites to depart from among them, as God would not destroy them with the Amalekites. From them came Hemath, who was the father of the house of Rechab, 1Chr 2:55, and the Rechabites, of whom we have a remarkable account Jer 35:1, etc.

JUDGES 1:17 Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they struck the Canaanites who inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. The name of the city was called Hormah.

Verse 17

The city was called Hormah - This appears to be the same transaction mentioned Num 21:1 (note), etc., where see the notes.

JUDGES 1:18 Also Judah took Gaza with its border, and Ashkelon with its border, and Ekron with its border.

Verse 18

Judah took Gaza - and Askelon - and Ekron - There is a most remarkable variation here in the Septuagint; I shall set down the verse: Και ουκ εκληρονομησεν Ιουδας την Γαζαν, ουδε τα όρια αυτης· ουδε την Ασκαλωνα, ουδε τα όρια αυτης· και την Ακκαρων, ουδε τα όρια αυτης· την Αζωτον, ουδε τα περισπορια αυτης· και ην Κυριος μετα Ιουδα. "But Judah Did Not possess Gaza, Nor the coast thereof; neither Askelon, nor the coasts thereof, neither Ekron, nor the coasts thereof; neither Azotus, nor its adjacent places: and the Lord was with Judah." This is the reading of the Vatican and other copies of the Septuagint: but the Alexandrian MS., and the text of the Complutensian and Antwerp Polyglots, agree more nearly with the Hebrew text. St. Augustine and Procopius read the same as, the Vatican MS.; and Josephus expressly says that the Israelites took only Askelon and Azotus, but did not take Gaza nor Ekron; and the whole history shows that these cities were not in the possession of the Israelites, but of the Philistines; and if the Israelites did take them at this time, as the Hebrew text states, they certainly lost them in a very short time after.

JUDGES 1:19 The LORD was with Judah; and drove out the inhabitants of the hill country; for he could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron.

Verse 19

And the Lord was with Judah, and he drove out the inhabitants of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron - Strange! were the iron chariots too strong for Omnipotence? The whole of this verse is improperly rendered. The first clause, The Lord was with Judah should terminate the 18th verse, and this gives the reason for the success of this tribe: The Lord was with Judah, and therefore he slew the Canaanites that inhabited Zephath, etc., etc. Here then is a complete period: the remaining part of the verse either refers to a different time, or to the rebellion of Judah against the Lord, which caused him to withdraw his support. Therefore the Lord was with Judah, and these were the effects of his protection; but afterwards, when the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim, etc., God was no longer with them, and their enemies were left to be pricks in their eyes, and thorns in their side, as God himself had said. This is the turn given to the verse by Jonathan ben Uzziel, the Chaldee paraphrast: "And the Word of Jehovah was in the support of the house of Judah, and they extirpated the inhabitants of the mountains; but afterwards, When They Sinned, they were not able to extirpate the inhabitants of the plain country, because they had chariots of iron." They were now left to their own strength, and their adversaries prevailed against them. From a work called the Dhunoor Veda, it appears that the ancient Hindoos had war chariots similar to those of the Canaanites. They are described as having many wheels, and to have contained a number of rooms. - Ward's Customs.

JUDGES 1:20 They gave Hebron to Caleb, as Moses had spoken: and he drove out there the three sons of Anak.

Verse 20

They gave Hebron unto Caleb - See this whole transaction explained Jos 14:12 (note), etc.

JUDGES 1:21 The children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who inhabited Jerusalem; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.

Verse 21

The Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin - Jerusalem was situated partly in the tribe of Judah, and partly in the tribe of Benjamin, the northern part belonging to the latter tribe, the southern to the former. The Jebusites had their strongest position in the part that belonged to Benjamin, and from this place they were not wholly expelled till the days of David. See the notes on Jdg 1:8. What is said here of Benjamin is said of Judah, Jos 15:63. There must be an interchange of the names in one or other of these places.

Unto this day - As the Jebusites dwelt in Jerusalem till the days of David, by whom they were driven out, and the author of the book of Judges states them to have been in possession of Jerusalem when he wrote; therefore this book was written before the reign of David.

JUDGES 1:22 The house of Joseph, they also went up against Bethel; and the LORD was with them.

Verse 22

The house of Joseph, they also went up against Bethel - That is, the tribe of Ephraim and the half tribe of Manasseh, who dwelt beyond Jordan. Beth-el was not taken by Joshua, though he took Ai, which was nigh to it. Instead of בית יוסף beith Yoseph, "the house of Joseph," ten of Dr. Kennicott's MSS. and six of De Rossi's have בני יוסף beney Yoseph, "the children of Joseph;" and this is the reading of both the Septuagint and Arabic, as well as of two copies in the Hexapla of Origen.

JUDGES 1:23 The house of Joseph sent to spy out Bethel. (Now the name of the city before was Luz.)

Verse 23

Beth-el - the name of the city before was Luz - Concerning this city and its names, see the notes on Gen 28:19.

JUDGES 1:24 The watchers saw a man come out of the city, and they said to him, "Please show us the entrance into the city, and we will deal kindly with you."

Verse 24

Show us - the entrance into the city - Taken in whatever light we choose, the conduct of this man was execrable. He was a traitor to his country, and he was accessory to the destruction of the lives and property of his fellow citizens, which he most sinfully betrayed, in order to save his own. According to the rules and laws of war, the children of Judah might avail themselves of such men and their information; but this does not lessen, on the side of this traitor, the turpitude of the action.

JUDGES 1:25 He showed them the entrance into the city; and they struck the city with the edge of the sword; but they let the man go and all his family.

JUDGES 1:26 The man went into the land of the Hittites, and built a city, and called its name Luz, which is its name to this day.

Verse 26

The land of the Hittites - Probably some place beyond the land of Canaan, in Arabia, whither this people emigrated when expelled by Joshua. The man himself appears to have been a Hittite, and to perpetuate the name of his city he called the new one which he now founded Luz, this being the ancient name of Beth-el.

JUDGES 1:27 Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth Shean and its towns, nor Taanach and its towns, nor the inhabitants of Dor and its towns, nor the inhabitants of Ibleam and its towns, nor the inhabitants of Megiddo and its towns; but the Canaanites would dwell in that land.

Verse 27

Beth-shean - Called by the Septuagint Σκυθωνπολις, Scythopolis, or the city of the Scythians. On these towns see the notes, Jos 17:12-13 (note).

JUDGES 1:28 When Israel had grown strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labour, and did not utterly drive them out.

JUDGES 1:29 Ephraim didn't drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer; but the Canaanites lived in Gezer among them.

Verse 29

Neither did Ephraim - See the notes on the parallel passages, Jos 16:5-10 (note).

JUDGES 1:30 Zebulun didn't drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, nor the inhabitants of Nahalol; but the Canaanites lived among them, and became subject to forced labour.

Verse 30

Neither did Zebulun drive out - See on Jos 19:10-15 (note).

JUDGES 1:31 Asher didn't drive out the inhabitants of Acco, nor the inhabitants of Sidon, nor of Ahlab, nor of Achzib, nor of Helbah, nor of Aphik, nor of Rehob;

Verse 31

Neither did Asher - See on Jos 19:24-31 (note).

Accho - Supposed to be the city of Ptolemais, near to Mount Carmel.

JUDGES 1:32 but the Asherites lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; for they did not drive them out.

JUDGES 1:33 Naphtali didn't drive out the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh, nor the inhabitants of Beth Anath; but he lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: nevertheless the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh and of Beth Anath became subject to forced labour.

Verse 33

Neither did Naphtali - See the notes on Jos 19:32-39 (note).

JUDGES 1:34 The Amorites forced the children of Dan into the hill country; for they would not allow them to come down to the valley;

Verse 34

The Amorites forced the children of Dan, etc. - Just as the ancient Britons were driven into the mountains of Wales by the Romans; and the native Indians driven back into the woods by the British settlers in America.

JUDGES 1:35 but the Amorites would dwell in Mount Heres, in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim: yet the hand of the house of Joseph prevailed, so that they became subject to forced labour.

Verse 35

The Amorites would dwell in Mount Heres - They perhaps agreed to dwell in the mountainous country, being unable to maintain themselves on the plain, and yet were so powerful that the Danites could not totally expel them; they were, however, laid under tribute, and thus the house of Joseph had the sovereignty. The Septuagint have sought out a literal meaning for the names of several of these places, and they render the verse thus: "And the Amorites began to dwell in the mount of Tiles, in which there are bears, and in which there are foxes." Thus they translate Heres, Aijalon, and Shaalbim.

JUDGES 1:36 The border of the Amorites was from the ascent of Akrabbim, from the rock, and upward.

Verse 36

Akrabbim - Of scorpions; probably so called from the number of those animals in that place.

From the rock, and upward - The Vulgate understands by לְרֹאשׁ הַסֵּלַע sela, a rock, the city Petra, which was the capital of Arabia Petraea.

The whole of this chapter appears to be designed as a sort of supplement to those places in the book of Joshua which are referred to in the notes and in the margin; nor is there any thing in it worthy of especial remark. We everywhere see the same fickle character in the Israelites, and the goodness and long-suffering of God towards them. An especial Providence guides their steps, and a fatherly hand chastises them for their transgressions. They are obliged to live in the midst of their enemies, often straitened, but never overcome so as to lose the land which God gave them as their portion. We should learn wisdom from what they have suffered, and confidence in the protection and providence of God from their support, because these things were written for our learning. Few can be persuaded that adversity is a blessing, but without it how little should we learn! He, who in the school of affliction has his mind turned towards God, "Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,

Sermons in stones, and good in every thing."