

THE BOOK OF JUDGES – “THE FAILED CONQUEST”

At end Joshua’s life, he reminds Israel of the conquest remaining

- conquest is not a matter of military strength, but fidelity to God

Joshua 23:2-13

² Joshua summoned all Israel, its elders and heads, its judges and officers, and said to them, “I am now old and well advanced in years. ³ And you have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake, for it is the LORD your God who has fought for you.

⁴ Behold, I have allotted to you as an inheritance for your tribes those nations that remain, along with all the nations that I have already cut off, from the Jordan to the Great Sea in the west. ⁵ The LORD your God will push them back before you and drive them out of your sight. And you shall possess their land, just as the LORD your God promised you.

⁶ Therefore, be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left, ⁷ that you may not mix with these nations remaining among you or make mention of the names of their gods or swear by them or serve them or bow down to them, ⁸ but you shall cling to the LORD your God just as you have done to this day. ⁹ For the LORD has driven out before you great and strong nations. And as for you, no man has been able to stand before you to this day. ¹⁰ One man of you puts to flight a thousand, since it is the LORD your God who fights for you, just as he promised you.

¹¹ Be very careful, therefore, to love the LORD your God. ¹² For if you turn back and cling to the remnant of these nations remaining among you and make marriages with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, ¹³ know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations before you, but they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good ground that the LORD your God has given you.

But Israel failed to conquer Canaan, and so disobeyed God

Judges 1:19-35

¹⁹ And the LORD was with **Judah**, and he took possession of the hill country, but he could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain because they had chariots of iron. ²⁰ And Hebron was given to Caleb, as Moses had said. And he drove out from it the three sons of Anak.

²¹ But the people of **Benjamin** did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem, so the Jebusites have lived with the people of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.

²² The house of **Joseph** also went up against Bethel, and the LORD was with them.

²³ And the house of Joseph scouted out Bethel. (Now the name of the city was formerly Luz.) ²⁴ And the spies saw a man coming out of the city, and they said to him, “Please show us the way into the city, and we will deal kindly with you.”

²⁵ And he showed them the way into the city. And they struck the city with the edge of the sword, but they let the man and all his family go. ²⁶ And the man went to the land of the Hittites and built a city and called its name Luz. That is its name to this day.

²⁷ **Manasseh** did not drive out the inhabitants 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, for the Canaanites persisted in dwelling in that land. ²⁸ When Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but did not drive them out completely.

²⁹ And **Ephraim** did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer, so the Canaanites lived in Gezer among them.

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

³¹ **Asher** 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,

³² so the Asherites lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land, for they did not drive them out.

³³ **Naphtali** did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh, or the inhabitants of Beth-anath, so they lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land. Nevertheless, the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and of Beth-anath became subject to forced labor for them.

³⁴ The Amorites pressed the people of **Dan** back into the hill country, for they did not allow them to come down to the plain. ³⁵ The Amorites persisted in dwelling in Mount Heres, in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim, but the hand of the house of Joseph rested heavily on them, and they became subject to forced labor.

Judges 2:1-5

¹ Now the angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, “I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you, ² and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.’ But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done? ³ So now I say, ‘I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you.’”

⁴ As soon as the angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the people of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept. ⁵ And they called the name of that place Bochim. And they sacrificed there to the LORD.

Judges, “The Failed Conquest” | Notes

At end Joshua’s life – he reminds Israel of *the remaining Canaanite land to be conquered*

- the conquest was to be gradual and steady, as the Israelites consolidated and inhabited the land

Notice, Joshua repeatedly emphasizes the *religious and moral dimension of the conquest*

- not simply a matter of military strength | in fact, Israel’s tactics made no sense at all, but God did it
- the people of Israel are to have: courage and strength (military) *and* obedience and faithfulness (spiritual)

Joshua 23:2-13

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⁶ Therefore, be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left, ⁷ that you may not mix with these nations remaining among you or make mention of the names of their gods or swear by them or serve them or bow down to them, ⁸ but you shall cling to the LORD your God just as you have done to this day. ⁹ For the LORD has driven out before you great and strong nations. And as for you, no man has been able to stand before you to this day. ¹⁰ One man of you puts to flight a thousand, since it is the LORD your God who fights for you, just as he promised you.

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First, Joshua keeps reminding Israel that *God will fight for them – why?*

- Canaanites possessed superior technology (chariots), fortified positions (4-1 advantage), outnumbered Israel
- in many ways, this was a suicide mission – military, tactically impossible to conquer
- remember in Wilderness, spies said, “impossible to take the land,” “we are like grasshoppers before them”
- to proceed with conquest was an act of deep faith in God

Second, “keep what is written in *the Law of Moses*, turning aside neither to right or left”

- why does Joshua keep saying, “don’t neglect the law of God! Love and obey God!”?
- because the conquest was a spiritual test – would Israel obey God exactly, or take easy way out?
- don’t associate or mix with Canaanites in any way, don’t marry them | completely cleanse land of idolatry

Lastly, there’s a *haunting warning at the end*

- if you don’t obey and drive out Canaanites – then they will become a “snare” and a “trap”
- they will cause you to descend into idolatry and ultimately, they will oppress you
- that’s the story of Judges – the remaining Canaanites oppress Israel | story of Gideon hiding wine press

But Israel failed to conquer Canaan, and so disobeyed God

- this is the great tragedy of The Book of Judges | they started out so well, but faltered
- if read Judges, v. 1-18, things start out well | particularly with Judah, steadily conquer the land
- but then in v. 19, there is a subtle shift

Judges 1:19-35

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At first, this seems reasonable – Judah was faced with superior technology, chariots of iron

- but remember, God is with Israel | he will help Israel overcome impossible odds
- so is this a legitimate reason or just an excuse? lack of will and determination
- notice the contrast with Caleb, who drives out the sons of Anak

²¹ But the people of **Benjamin** did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem, so the Jebusites have lived with the people of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.

v. 21 simply states Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites

- no reason or explanation given
- and ominously, “the Jebusites have lived with the people of Benjamin to this day”
- “to with live” – doesn’t just mean, they were over there, but didn’t associate | means, “live with”
- command was “utterly destroy pagan peoples” | now, “live with them”

²² The house of **Joseph** also went up against Bethel, and the LORD was with them. ²³ And the house of Joseph scouted out Bethel. (Now the name of the city was formerly Luz.) ²⁴ And the spies saw a man coming out of the city, and they said to him, “Please show us the way into the city, and we will deal kindly with you.” ²⁵ And he showed them the way into the city. And they struck the city with the edge of the sword, but they let the man and all his family go. ²⁶ And the man went to the land of the Hittites and built a city and called its name Luz. That is its name to this day.

Interesting story of how Bethel was conquered

- spies worked out a deal with a man from the city – “show us way in and we’ll spare you”
- isn’t this like story of Rahab? no
- because with Rahab, she confessed the God of Israel | her assistance came out of her faith in God
- Joshua 2:11 – “the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on earth below”
- there is no mention of this man’s faith – it appears his assistance was only out of self-preservation

So they spare the man and his family (v. 25)

- man went away and built another Canaanite city called “Luz” | notice, unlike Rahab, does not join Israel
- in other words, because Israel compromised and allowed this man to live – pagan city reappears!
- “that is its name to this day” – pagan city persisted
- Israel took the moral shortcut and in the end, failed to fulfilled God’s command

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Here we see another deviation – Canaanites are made to be forced labor

- but if Manasseh was capable of enslaving the Canaanites, then they could certainly drive them out
- greed and self-enrichment compromise the conquest

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What began in Joshua 23 as:

“No man has been able to stand before you to this day. One man of you puts to flight a thousand, since it is the LORD your God who fights for you, just as he promised you.”

Now becomes:

“Israel could not drive the Canaanites out. They persisted in the land. Then made to be forced labor.”

Israel’s conviction and determination to obey God was weaker than the Canaanites’ ability to cling to the land

- and even when Israel has the upper-hand, they don’t drive Canaanites out, but enslave them

Judges 2 – we get God’s assessment of the half-hearted conquest

Judges 2:1-5 – ¹ Now the angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, “I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you, ² and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.’

But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done? ³ So now I say, ‘I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you.’”

⁴ As soon as the angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the people of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept. ⁵ And they called the name of that place Bochim. And they sacrificed there to the LORD.

God says plainly, “you have *not* obeyed my voice”

- then God says, “*what is this you have done?*” | harkens back to Genesis 3 in Eden, God says to Eve
- like Adam, Israel fails in the garden to obey God
- all of Israel’s excuses amounts to a lack of faith and devotion – not lack of military strength

Tragedy is that *Israel responds by weeping* (v. 4)

- but the weeping doesn’t translate into action | only short-lived sorrow
- 2 Corinthians 7:10 – “for godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.”
- sorrow over the consequences, not the sin | self-pitying sorrow, full of excuses

Lessons for us today

(1) We are called upon God to *wage war with sin and idols* in our lives

- we are to be utterly ruthless and utterly destroy sin and idolatry – not compromise
- Jesus said, “if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out”
- don’t tolerate sin in your life | God said he would be with you, only be courageous and obey

Colossians 3:5

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

(2) Are there things in our lives about which we say, “*I can’t do it*” but about which God may say, “*you really mean you won’t do it*”?

1 Corinthians 10:12-14

¹² Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. ¹⁴ Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

(3) The *strength to obey* doesn’t come from threats or focusing on the law – but *on gospel*

- the angel of the LORD says, “remember how I brought you up from Egypt”
- what was the story of Exodus? God rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt – that’s the gospel!
- as you focus on gospel, of God’s past saving works in Christ, can you have strength for future

(4) *Obedience is not optional* to the Christian life – it is essential

- Jesus said, “if you love me, you will obey me”
- Judges and the Bible never teaches “cheap grace” – but always, grace transforms your life
- otherwise, if you compromise with idolatry in your life – becomes a “snare”
- what’s a snare? it’s a devious, hidden trap. Tolerate idolatry, and then you’ll fall away from Christ
- that’s the whole point in 1 Cor. 10 – remember the example of Israelites who fell away
- this is a matter of life and death | to disobey is to go down a path towards apostasy