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Discover Your Bible Series

Discover JUDGES



LEADER GUIDE

LEADER GUIDE

Discover **JUDGES**



by
Marilyn A. McGinnis



Grand Rapids, Michigan

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ISBN 978-1-59255-482-9

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To the Leader

Prepare the Lesson

This leader guide is meant to assist you as a small group leader but not to substitute for your own work. As you prepare to lead each lesson, work first through the questions in the study guide. Then use the leader material to enrich your understanding of the passage. Prepare thoroughly before leading each group session so that you can lead without frequent references to notes. This approach will free you to concentrate on leadership responsibilities, keep eye contact with group members, and listen carefully.

Get Ready to Lead

Learn to think in terms of questions. As you prepare to lead a lesson, ask yourself questions and try to discover the answers yourself. This will prepare you to anticipate group members' questions and thus help others discover truths from God's Word.

Lead with Questions

Use questions to direct the group discussion. Draw out positive contributions by asking questions. Break down difficult or unclear questions into smaller, concise ones. Also use questions to respond to wrong or problematic answers. If you learn to lead others to truth by questions, you will be a good Bible discovery leader. The questions in this study are designed to be used with Today's New International Version of the Bible, but other translations can also be used.

Help to Apply

Gently help group members discover the meaning of God's message for their own lives. Be careful not to be judgmental of persons who may not yet seem to be applying the truths you encounter together. It's the Spirit's work to apply God's Word to people's hearts. Tactfully let the group know how the Spirit is applying the Word in your own heart and life. Pray faithfully for the Spirit's work in others.

While giving people the time and space to apply biblical truths as the Spirit leads them, simply try to help group members see that there is a relationship between the Bible and life. Questions for reflection at the end of each session invite everyone to take time for personal reflection and optional sharing. Try to offer at least a few minutes for reflection time toward the end of each lesson, and encourage group members to do follow-up reflection at home.

Leadership Training

If more than one group in your setting is using this Bible study, we strongly encourage leaders to meet regularly for discussion of the lessons, for prayer, and for mutual support.

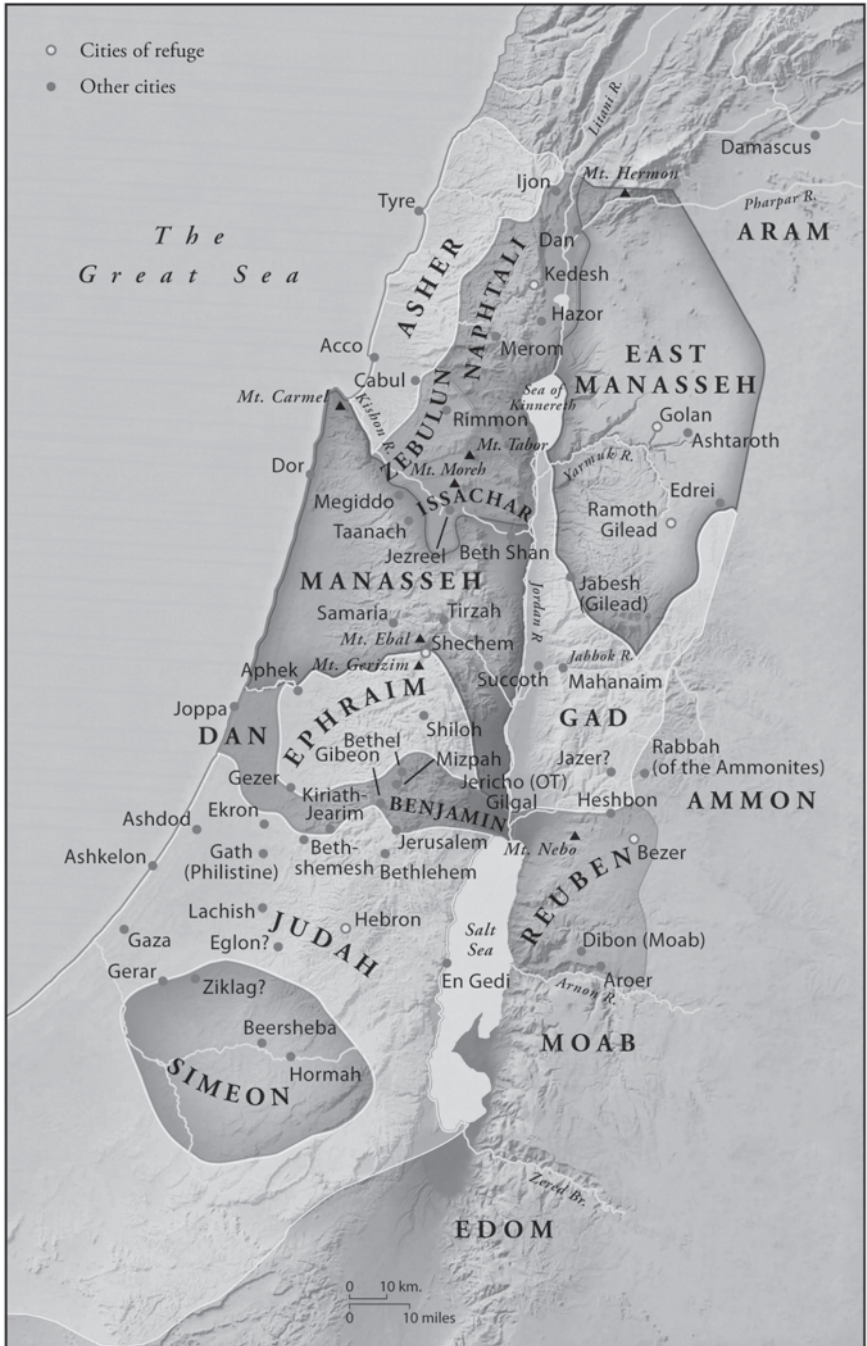
If this study is being used in a Coffee Break Small Groups program, each leader should have a copy of the *Coffee Break Evangelism Manual with Director's Handbook*, a basic "how-to" guide for establishing and leading a Bible discovery group. Reread the book or portions of it periodically and review it at the beginning of each season.

Leaders will also find it helpful to attend one or more of the leadership training workshops offered each year in connection with small group ministry.

For more information,

- call toll-free 1-888-644-0814, e-mail smallgroups@crcna.org, or visit www.smallgroupministries.org
- call toll-free 1-800-333-8300 or visit www.FaithAliveResources.org (to order materials)

Land of the Twelve Tribes



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Introduction

The book of Judges picks up the story of Israel where the book of Joshua left off. Joshua became the people's leader after Moses had died (Josh. 1:1-6), and in obedience to God Joshua led the people into the promised land. At the Lord's leading, they fought many battles and captured many cities, and each of the twelve tribes of Israel was now assigned an inheritance of land. Though many of the Canaanites were conquered, some still remained, so there was still work to be done.

Joshua promised the people, "The LORD . . . will push [the Canaanites] out for your sake. He will drive them out before you, and you will take possession of their land, as . . . God promised" (Josh. 23:5). God had first made this promise to Abraham about 700 years earlier, saying that his descendants (Israel) would receive the land from God when the sin of the peoples living there had reached "its full measure" (Gen. 15:16-20).

Joshua also reminded the people that they had made promises to God. Israel had promised not to worship the gods of the Canaanites or mix with the foreign powers around them. "The LORD has driven out before you great and powerful nations," Joshua said, "but if you turn away and ally yourselves with . . . these nations . . . the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations before you" (Josh. 23:9, 12-13).

Near the end of his life Joshua challenged the people, saying, "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve," and he set this example for them: "As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." And the people said, "We too will serve the LORD" (Josh. 24:15, 18).

But did the people mean what they said? Or was this a fair-weather response during a time of peace?

The book of Judges records a period of about 300 years between the death of Joshua and the beginning of the monarchy (era of kings) in Israel. During this time God appointed judges to rule over the people and to lead them through times when they needed deliverance from enemies.

The main theme of Judges is that God is faithful despite the unfaithfulness of his people. Though some of the stories in Judges pose shocking twists and puzzling turns, we discover that human nature isn't much different than it was a few thousand years ago. As a result, this study will often challenge us with issues that apply to our lives today.

God bless you as you study this book of the Bible together.

Note: Because of the narrative (storytelling) nature of this book, some accounts covered in the lessons of this study are lengthy, spanning two or more chapters of Scripture. This may call for more reading than your group is used to, so you may wish to read ahead in your Bibles at home before doing some of the lessons together.

Glossary of Terms

altar—a stone or heap of stones on which people laid animals or grain as sacrifices.

Amalekites—descendants of Esau (Gen. 36:12, 16).

Ammonites—descendants of Lot through his younger daughter (Gen. 19:36-38).

angel of the Lord—This figure appears at times to God's people (often as a man) and makes announcements or judgments in God's name (see Gen. 16:7; 22:11-18; Josh. 5:13-15; Judg. 6:11-12; 13:2-23). Sometimes this angel is also referred to as "the LORD" (for example, see Gen. 16:13; Judg. 6:14), and the *TNIV Study Bible* explains that "as the LORD's personal messenger who represented him and bore his credentials, the angel could speak on behalf of (and so be identified with) the One who sent him." (See also Ex. 23:20-23; Josh. 5:13-15.)

ark of the covenant—a wooden chest overlaid with gold that was placed in the innermost room (Most Holy Place) of the tabernacle (tent of meeting) or, later, in the temple (1 Kings 8). It symbolized the presence of God among his people (see Ex. 25:10-22). In Judges 20:27 we learn that sometimes the ark was moved to other places, even though the tabernacle was set up in a designated town (Shiloh—see 18:31).

Bethel—Bethel means "house of God" and is a significant location in Bible history. Abraham built an altar there after entering the promised land (Gen. 12:7-8; 13:3-4). Jacob had a vision of God at Bethel (Gen. 28:10-19). In Judges 20:27 we find that the ark of the covenant was temporarily at Bethel, with Phinehas the priest "ministering before it."

Baal and Ashtoreth (Asherah)—Canaanite god and goddess of fertility and war.

burnt offering—a sacrifice laid on an altar and completely burned.

Canaanites—occupants of the promised land of Canaan. This land was named after a grandson of Noah (Gen. 9:18). The peoples who lived in Canaan before Israel came had various tribal or regional names (such as Hittites, Amorites, Midianites, Perizzites, Hivites, Jebusites, Philistines, and Sidonians) and were also generally called Canaanites.

clean—God allowed people to eat certain kinds of animals and to use them for sacrifices. These were referred to as "clean"; all other animals were considered "unclean" (see Lev. 11).

concubine—a secondary wife who might also be a slave.

covenant—a mutually binding agreement between two parties; usually both parties agree to accept certain responsibilities.

ephah—a measure equaling about three-fifths of a bushel (22 liters).

ephod—a special garment worn by the high priest (Ex. 28:6-14). It could also refer to an object associated with idol worship (Judg. 17:5; 18:14).

Gibeah—a city within the tribe of Benjamin where the gang rape of a concubine took place. It and its inhabitants were destroyed by the rest of the tribes of Israel.

Israel—see **twelve tribes of Israel**.

judges—men or women chosen to arbitrate judicial matters, but also to lead the Israelites in battle against the Canaanites and other foreign powers.

lot casting—Casting lots or drawing lots can be done in many ways—by flipping a coin, throwing dice or other small objects with marks on them, drawing sticks of different lengths, pulling marked or different-colored pieces out of a hat, and so on. The lots approved by God for use in Israel were the Urim and Thummim, to be placed in the breastpiece of the sacred ephod worn by the priest of God (Ex. 28:30). See Numbers 27:18-21 for the Lord's instructions on lot casting in Joshua's day. Note as well that the land divisions in Canaan were determined by lot (Num. 26:55-56; 33:54; 34:13-17).

Midianites—descendants of Abraham's son Midian through his second wife, Keturah (Gen. 25:1-2).

Moabites—descendants of Lot through his older daughter (Gen. 19:36-38).

Molek—a god worshiped by the Canaanites; sometimes this worship involved the sacrifice of children by fire.

Moses—the leader of the Israelites when God delivered them from slavery in Egypt and as they lived in the wilderness before entering the promised land (Palestine). Moses received the law from God and taught it to the Israelites.

Nazirite—a person who took a vow to be set apart to God. The vow included restrictions such as not drinking wine and not cutting one's hair and could be temporary or long-term. Samson was dedicated to be a Nazirite from birth and throughout his whole life (Judg. 13:2-7; see also 1 Sam. 1:10-11; Luke 1:11-17).

oath—a binding promise that often involved swearing by something or someone greater than oneself.

ox goad—a long stick with a sharp point for prodding oxen.

Perizzites—a people who lived in Canaan from before the time of Abraham (Gen. 13:7). Their origin is obscure and unknown.

Philistines—descendants of a grandson of Noah’s son Ham who, in the time of the judges, occupied a strip of land along the Mediterranean Sea from Gaza to Egypt.

prophecy—a message from someone who speaks God’s Word to the people. The person who spoke a prophecy was a prophet.

sacrifice—the act of offering something precious to God. Unbelievers also made sacrifices to false gods. In the Old Testament this was usually an animal (the best of the flock) or the firstfruits of a harvest.

Shechem—a town known as the place where Abraham built an altar to God when he first arrived in Canaan. It was one of the six cities of refuge set up by Joshua, and the place where he delivered his farewell address. In the time of the judges it was a center of pagan Canaanite worship.

shekel—a unit of weight used to weigh silver and gold. In the time of the judges, ten shekels of silver was considered a decent yearly wage (Judg. 17:10).

sign—a miraculous event sought by Gideon to confirm that he should do what God told him to do.

sin—going against God’s will; disobeying God’s commands.

Spirit of the Lord—In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit came upon certain individuals to empower them to accomplish certain things.

threshing—In ancient times, farmers usually threshed their grain in an open area by having cattle walk on it to loosen the grain from the stalks or by drawing toothed sledges through it. In Judges 6 we read of Gideon threshing his grain in a winepress to keep the Midianites from stealing or destroying it.

twelve tribes of Israel—Jacob (whose name was changed by God to Israel) had twelve sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Joseph, and Benjamin (Gen. 49). Joseph’s two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, are half-tribes but are sometimes referred to as separate tribes, making it appear (erroneously) as though there were thirteen tribes in all.

worship—reverence and respect given to God; acknowledging God’s worthiness to be praised and served.

A Special Note to the Leader

Before beginning your study of Judges it will be important for your group to understand the place of war in the Old Testament. This may be the first time some group members have been able to hear an explanation about the violence that occurred in Israel's settling of the land of Canaan:

War in the Old Testament

God's command for the Israelites to take the promised land by force and destroy the Canaanites stands in contrast to the Lord's New Testament teachings about peace and loving our enemies. Without an understanding of Old Testament war, your group members might conclude they want no part of a religion that condones violence and bloodshed. Or they might become confused and decide that only the New Testament is worth reading. Use the following information to help everyone understand why God ordered the Israelites to go to war.

In God's plan to send a Redeemer, first mentioned in Genesis 3:15, God made a nation of people through whom the Redeemer would be born, and God designated a place where that nation would live. The promise of land, descendants, and blessing was first given to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:16-20) and was repeated over the years to his son Isaac (26:1-5) and to Isaac's son Jacob (28:13-15), whose descendants became the twelve tribes of Israel. The location God chose for his people was the land of Canaan, and the various peoples who lived there were mired in wickedness and rebellion against their creator. They followed false gods, worshiped idols, devised immoral religions based on fertility and prostitution, and sacrificed their own children in ritual fires (see Lev. 18-19; Deut. 12:31; 18:9-13; see also Rom. 1:18-32). The Canaanites' practices were so vile that God says "even the land was defiled" (Lev. 18:25), so he "punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants."

In Deuteronomy 9:5 God said to his people Israel, "On account of the wickedness of these nations . . . the LORD your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." About 700 years earlier God had promised Abraham that his descendants would live in this land after the sin of the peoples who lived there had "reached its full measure" (Gen. 15:16).

That time had come, and God brought his people into the land of Canaan through the leadership of Joshua. With the Lord going before them, the people had fought many battles and overtaken many cities, and this had resulted in much bloodshed and death as God directed the Israelites to destroy everything (see Deut. 7).

Was this "holy war"? There is nothing holy about war. Through the ages people who have declared themselves to be involved in holy war have

turned out to be driven by greed for power. No, this was God's war—a one-time event for a specific purpose mandated by the sovereign God.

Because God is holy, evil cannot stand in his presence (Isa. 6:1-5; Mal. 3:2; Rev. 6:12-17), so God also warned the Israelites that if they behaved like the Canaanites, they too would be "vomited out of the land." And, sadly, many years later, after a long time of disobeying God, the people of Israel were exiled from the land God had given them (2 Kings 17; 25).

In any discussion of this topic, it's important to point out that war is not God's first choice. God does not want anyone to perish (2 Pet. 3:9), so he waited long for the sin of the Canaanites to reach "its full measure," at which point God would allow it no longer. Many years later, after the Lord's own people had rebelled for many generations, God said to them, "As surely as I live . . . I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die . . . ?" (Ezek. 33:11).

Today we know that the Redeemer whom God sent into the world, who was born from the nation of Israel, died in our place so that we could have new life with God (John 3:16; Eph. 2:4-5). The book of Judges shows how God preserved that nation, again and again, so that eventually the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, could come.

Lesson 1

Judges 1:1-3:6

A Time of Testing

Introductory Notes

In the opening chapters of Judges we can glimpse the general situation in Israel “after the death of Joshua” (Judg. 1:1), by whom God brought the people into the promised land of Canaan. Though the Israelites had mainly overtaken the land by this time, they had to continue battling the Canaanites, who were often powerful enemies. The Israelites had to rout these peoples because God said their wickedness had “reached its full measure” (see Gen. 15:16), and the Canaanites’ punishment included losing their land to make way for God’s people to live there.

This period became a time of testing for Israel. Let’s see how the people responded to God in this era of their history.

Note: This lesson covers a lot of introductory material, so you may need to pace yourselves as you discuss the opening chapters of Judges. If you think you’ll run short of time to discuss everything, feel free to summarize Judges 2:6-3:6 rather than studying it in detail. That section is a sort of secondary introduction describing a pattern that emerges in later chapters.

As you begin this study with your group, it will be important to recognize that you don’t need to discuss every verse or its meaning in detail. But you can cover the main themes and content of Judges. If you have additional questions or a desire for learning that goes beyond the scope of this study, you may want to consult the *TNIV Study Bible*, a Bible handbook, or other resources listed at the end of this booklet.

In addition, point out the map and glossary and the description on how to study—available in each study guide. Note that the lessons in this study will serve mainly as a starting point for growth and learning. Invite everyone also to pray with you during the course of this study, asking God to use it to help you all grow to know the Lord and yourselves in new ways.

Optional Share Question

Note: The optional share question in each lesson may serve well at the beginning of your session or at some other time during your discussion. Use or adapt each share question in a way that works best for your group.

How do you handle times of testing? How do you hold up under pressure?

1. *Judges 1:1-20*

a. *How do the people begin their task of routing the Canaanites who remained in the land?*

- **Whom do the people ask for advice or wisdom? What answer do they receive?**

Note here that the writer of Judges is teaching an important lesson about serving the Lord. Joshua had learned that it was best to seek God's advice and wisdom before making big decisions that would affect the people's future (see Josh. 6-8). Apparently the tribal leaders of Israel had learned this principle too—and they practiced it at least some of the time.

As believers today, we know we are called to put God first in all things, so we aim to live within God's will by remaining close to the Lord in prayer and worship; learning from God's Word, the Scriptures; working together with God's people in unity; and trying to discern God's leading through the Holy Spirit. These are basic spiritual disciplines that we are responsible to maintain as followers of Christ, and in the strength of the Holy Spirit we can do these things.

- **Why might the choice of Judah be significant?**

The tribe of Judah eventually became prominent among the twelve tribes of Israel. One day a descendant of Judah, King David, would sit on the throne of Israel, and God promised that a descendant of David would be established to rule over God's people forever. Today we know that person is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Savior and King, who rules over all things (Eph. 1:18-23).

Judah leads the charge here (Judg. 1:2), and Judah will be called on again to take the lead in another battle (20:18).

- **Why would the tribe of Judah ask Simeon to fight with them?**

It was wise for Judah to ask for help from another tribe. Not only would this strengthen their numbers in routing the local Canaanites, but the leaders of Judah and Simeon apparently saw that the benefit of working together could help both tribes in the long run (Judg. 1:3). There

may also have been a strong bond between the two tribes because Judah and Simeon had the same mother, Leah (Gen. 29:31-35).

Note also that in the allotment of land to the tribes of Israel, the inheritance of Simeon lay entirely within the inheritance of Judah (see map, p. 6; Josh. 19:1-9). Strategically it made sense for Judah to help Simeon with clearing its land, for if Simeon, which probably had fewer numbers, could not rout the Canaanites from its property, their enemies would remain in the interior of Judah.

Additional note: Little is known about the Perizzites except that they lived in the land of Canaan. In this study, unless a story speaks about a particular group (such as the Midianites or the Philistines), we will often refer generally to the peoples of the land of Canaan (Perizzites, Hittites, Amorites, Anakites, Jebusites, Hivites, and others) as Canaanites.

- **Why does Judah cut off Adoni-Bezek’s thumbs and big toes?**

This mutilation was a common practice in Middle Eastern warfare; it assured that the warrior-leader could no longer serve in the military. Notice Adoni-Bezek’s comment that God was paying him back for the way he had treated others. We can’t tell whether Adoni-Bezek believed in God as the one true God, but it was common among Canaanite peoples to believe in many gods. In addition, if one people conquered another, the Canaanites believed that the victor’s god was stronger.

- **What is the significance of the brief story about Caleb, Othniel, and Aksah in verses 11-15?**

If you have time and group members are interested, help everyone note a theme of obedience and faithfulness that reaches back in Israel’s history and points forward to its future.

About forty-five years earlier, Moses had sent ten spies into Canaan to report on the land and its peoples. Only two of the spies trusted God’s promise that he would help the Israelites conquer Canaan despite huge obstacles. Those two were Joshua and Caleb. Despite the pleas of those two leaders, the people of Israel did not trust God to bring them to victory. So God punished the Israelites by sending them off to wander in the desert for forty years, until all the unbelieving spies and their generation had died (Num. 13-14).

Now Caleb, an old warrior at age eighty-five (Josh. 14:10), was the only remaining Israelite of that generation (Num. 26:65). He had been allotted a special inheritance in Hebron “because he followed the LORD . . . wholeheartedly” (Josh. 14:14). As a prominent leader in Judah (1 Chron. 2:42-50; 4:15), Caleb aimed to inspire his soldiers by offering his daughter Aksah in marriage to the one who led a successful

charge against Debir (Kiriath Sepher). (In those days, daughters were often married under such circumstances; see 1 Sam. 18:17-27.) Othniel, a nephew of Caleb, succeeded in capturing the city, so he received Aksah in marriage. In this way Caleb, Aksah, and Othniel honored God's command not to intermarry with Canaanites, who worshiped other gods. Aksah later asked her father to give her and Othniel a field along with other land he had given (probably as a dowry), and Caleb graciously gave her a piece of land that would always be well watered.

In this brief story we can detect a theme of testing, trust, obedience, and blessing that played out in the life of Caleb and passed along to the next generation. Note together that Othniel later became the first judge God raised up to lead Israel (Judg. 3:7-11). So God clearly preserved a remnant of faithful believers and leaders in Israel, despite the unfaithfulness of many who often headed the people on a path toward destruction. This theme of God's preservation becomes apparent again and again throughout Israel's history and is particularly poignant in the book of Judges.

- b. *What do these first twenty verses show us about God's support of his people? What does it mean when the people begin to fail?*

Along with the summary in Judges 1:19—"The LORD was with the men of Judah"—we can see several examples in the preceding verses showing that God was faithful to his covenant promises and honored the people's obedience when they gave it.

But, sadly, the people's obedience was not consistent, and we soon see evidence that they did not always fully trust God to drive out the powerful peoples living in Canaan. In the second half of verse 19 we read, "They were unable to drive the people from the plains, because they had chariots fitted with iron."

Does this mean God could not lead Israel to rout the Canaanites completely? Not at all. Even though the Canaanites had advanced weaponry in their day, they were no match for the God who had brought Israel through the Red Sea and had destroyed the armies of Pharaoh and all their chariots (Ex. 14-15). Earlier Joshua had told Israel they could drive out these Canaanites who had iron chariots (Josh. 17:18). The only reason for failure was the Israelites' weakened trust in God, probably out of fear.

Notice also the stark contrast in verse 20, where we read that "Hebron was given to Caleb, who drove from it the three sons of Anak." Earlier those Anakites were described as giants who had made the Israelites feel "like grasshoppers" (Num. 13:33). But Caleb, an aging warrior, drove those giants out in the strength of the Lord.

As we will see in the remaining verses of Judges 1, a downward spiral begins as the people fail to trust God fully and often try to rely on their wits, puny strength, and political alliances with Canaanites to claim the land rather than clearing it of ungodliness and wickedness.

2. *Judges 1:21-36*

- a. *Describe the successes and/or failures of the Israelite tribes mentioned in these verses. List the tribes, if you like, and assign each one a success rate.*

Note that “the house of Joseph” (Judg. 1:22) refers to both Ephraim and Manasseh, the two sons of Joseph. These were both sometimes referred to as half-tribes. The tribe of Levi did not receive a tract of land, but its families were assigned to cities. The Levites were called upon to take care of the tabernacle and to serve as priests for the people in their worship of God (Ex. 28-29; Num. 3; Josh. 21).

- b. *What pattern do you see emerging here?*

- **Instead of routing the Canaanites completely, what did the Israelites do with them?**
- **Or, in some cases, what did the Canaanites do with the Israelites?**

Because some of the Canaanite groups “were determined to live in [the] land” (Judg. 1:27), the Israelites subjected them to forced labor. Other groups of Canaanites managed to escape that fate, so they simply remained in the land, and the Israelites “lived among” them (1:32-33).

The Israelite tribe of Dan seemed to have the least success, because the Amorites “confined [them] to the hill country, not allowing them to come down into the plain” (1:34).

Note also that Jerusalem, which Judah and Simeon had taken earlier (1:8), was actually within the territory of Benjamin (see map), and yet the Benjamites failed to keep the city secure (Josh. 18:28).

With your group you may wish to note an irony in that the people of Israel, whose ancestors had spent over 400 years in forced labor in Egypt, now modified God’s commands about taking over Canaan and subjected its peoples to forced labor.

3. *Judges 2:1-5*

a. *What does God announce through the angel of the Lord?*

- **Who is this angel of the Lord?**

The “angel of the Lord” is a figure who appears at times to God’s people and makes announcements or judgments in God’s name. This messenger is mentioned several times in Scripture (for example, see Gen. 16:7; 22:11-18; Josh. 5:13-15; Judg. 6:11-12; 13:2-23). Some interpreters have suggested that this angel, referred to as “the LORD” in Genesis 16:13 and Judges 6:14 and elsewhere, was a manifestation of the second person of the Trinity (Christ). But according to the *TNIV Study Bible*, it may simply be that “as the LORD’s personal messenger who represented him and bore his credentials, the angel could speak on behalf of (and so be identified with) the One who sent him.” (See also Ex. 23:20-23; Josh. 5:13-15.)

- **The angel of the Lord reminds the people of some very important things. What are they?**

The angel called the people to remember that God had brought them out of Egypt and would never break his covenant with them. The angel also pointed out that the people had disobeyed God in many of their dealings with the Canaanites. The Israelites were supposed to “demolish them and break their sacred stones to pieces” (Ex. 23:24; see Deut. 7). The angel also reminded the people of the consequences they would face if they failed to obey God (Josh. 23:12-13):

“If you turn away and you ally yourselves with the survivors of these nations . . . and if you intermarry with them and associate with them, then you may be sure that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead, they will become snares and traps for you, whips on your backs and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land, which the LORD your God has given you.”

See also Exodus 23:20-33 and Numbers 33:55-56.

- **Are there any ways in which we compromise our living for God by disobeying the Lord and following the ways of the world around us? Explain.**

b. *How should we interpret the people's sorrow?*

- **Is this the sorrow of repentance? Or is it just sorrow for having to suffer consequences? Explain.**
- **What are the signs of true repentance?**

Discuss how we will know which kind of sorrow this is (see Ps. 32; 51). True repentance is followed up by actions that align with the Lord's commands for godly living (see Ex. 20:1-17; Matt. 22:37-40).

4. *Judges 2:6-3:6*

Note: Judges 2:6 begins another summary of Israel's history after the death of Joshua and before the Lord raised up judges to lead the people back into times of obedience and peace in the land. If you're running short of time to discuss this section in detail, feel free to summarize it and move on to the questions for reflection at the end of this lesson. The main points to mention about this section, as noted in the *TNIV Study Bible*, are that this "is a preliminary survey of the accounts narrated in Judges 3:7-16:31," showing that Israel's first few hundred years in Canaan reveal "a recurring cycle" of disloyalty to God, oppression by local enemies, cries for help, and "gracious deliverance" by God. The main teaching throughout this book of history, as we often find in the Old Testament, is that God is faithful to his purpose despite the fallenness and unfaithfulness of his people.

a. *Judges 2:6-9 mentions the death of Joshua again (see Judges 1:1). Compare this with Joshua 24:28-30.*

Note together that this section begins a sort of secondary introduction to the book of Judges, picking up (again) where the book of Joshua left off and now summarizing a general trend that will take place for the next few hundred years of Israel's history.

- b. *Describe how far the people fell away from the Lord after the generation under Joshua's leadership died.*
- **How is it possible for a later generation to grow up with no knowledge of God or what God had done for Israel?**

Perhaps this situation is best understood as a lack of spiritual understanding of what God had done in the past. No doubt the Israelites knew the stories of their history with God, but somehow they had failed to internalize the truth of God's amazing faithfulness to them. Perhaps

Canaan simply had so much enticement, attraction, and all-around “good living” that the people fell lax in their devotion to God.

- **Can you think of any parallels to this situation in other periods of the history of God’s people? Does anything in our society today resemble this situation? Explain.**
- **What did the society of Canaan look like?**

Baals and Ashtoreths (similar to Asherahs in 3:7) were gods and goddesses of fertility and war. It may be difficult for us, looking back at these stories from a distance of more than three thousand years, to understand why the Israelites would give up their life of blessing with God to follow a confusing mixture of pagan gods. The *New International Biblical Commentary on Joshua, Judges, and Ruth* (p. 157) helps us understand something of this matter:

Canaanite religions, essentially fertility cults, had strong appeal in two areas: physical gratification and economic security or success. It was not only great business to worship Baal but also great fun! The Baal cult operated on the principle of sympathetic magic, so in order to ensure fertility of people, animals, and crops, a person would engage in sexual intercourse with a cult prostitute—male or female—at the local Baal shrine. The purpose was to inspire Baal to act likewise on the person’s behalf and thus to ensure fertility in all areas of life. Of course, the Lord promised his people that he would supply all of their needs and even more. But they wanted to make sure that all their bases were covered . . . so they worshiped Baal along with the Lord. The Lord viewed this not as an expedient business move on their part but as the gravest offense they could commit against him, on a par with the sin of worshiping the golden calf (Exodus 32). He demanded exclusive worship (Deut. 6:13-15) or none at all.

This may be a good time to discuss the importance of each generation’s passing along the good news of Jesus to the next generation. Point out that it’s especially necessary not only to talk about the good news of God’s kingdom but also to live by it. Ask group members to share an example of a family member or friend who may have influenced them to follow Christ. Sometimes it is a godly member of an older generation who fills that role.

- c. *How did the Lord respond to the people's disobedience and then to their cries of distress?*
- **Describe the cycle that developed because the people were stubborn.**

Because of the people's disobedience, the Lord handed them over to their enemies, as God had said he would (see again Num. 33:55-56; Josh. 23:12-13). Then when the people cried out "in great distress" (Judg. 2:15), the Lord "raised up judges" to deliver them (2:16). But then after a while the people again followed other gods and worshiped them. "They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways" (2:19).

- d. *What did the Lord conclude because of the people's longlasting disobedience and stubbornness?*

Because the people broke their part of the covenant again and again and again, God said he would no longer drive the Canaanites out. Instead God would "use them to test Israel and see whether they [would] keep the way of the LORD" (Judg. 2:22).

- e. *What would be the significance of teaching warfare to later generations of Israel?*

Group members may note that in light of the preceding discussion on the cycle of sin, punishment, and deliverance, it can seem out of place to say that the purpose of testing Israel was "only to teach warfare" to descendants who had no battle experience (3:2). Commentators suggest various explanations for this statement, some of which note that the warfare was spiritual as well as physical. For example, says the *TNIV Study Bible*, "As [God's] covenant servant, Israel was the Lord's army for fighting against the powers of the world that were settled in his land. In view of the incomplete conquest, succeeding generations in Israel needed to become capable warriors." The same resource adds that "'only' probably here means 'especially.'"

While we may find this answer less than satisfying and perhaps confusing, maybe it can help to recall that God's reason for routing the Canaanites was that their sin had "reached its full measure" (Gen. 15:16). This was first of all a spiritual matter. But because sinful people are a part of God's creation and the land itself was defiled (Lev. 18:25), the situation in Canaan was also a physical matter. So physical combat as well as spiritual battle had to take place. God's purpose of bringing a Redeemer to save people from the ultimate curse of sin—that is, death—called for making a new nation (Abraham's descendants—Gen. 12:1-3) in a land

designated by God to be the dwelling place for his holy Name (Deut. 12:5). As stated earlier in “A Special Note to the Leader,” this was a one-time event in history, and it took place at God’s command by God’s power. Now that the Redeemer—Christ—has come and God’s Spirit has been poured out “on all people” (Acts 2:17), there is no more need for physical battle. Through faith in Christ, people in all the lands of God’s earth can be free of the curse of sin and have eternal life with God.

Still, however, a spiritual battle rages between the Lord and the powers of evil (Eph. 6:12). In the end God will have ultimate victory, but in the meantime God’s people—us—are also involved in this battle. In this way we too are being tested to “keep the way of the Lord and walk in it” (Judg. 2:22)—and we can do that by the power of God’s Spirit living in us (2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 5:22-25). If you have time and people are interested, discuss the spiritual armor God provides as described in Ephesians 6:10-18.

Questions for Reflection

What characteristics of God have you (re)discovered in the Scriptures for this lesson? How does God demonstrate these characteristics?

Why was the Israelites’ obedience to God so important? What were the results if they obeyed? If they did not obey? Why do we sometimes find it hard to obey God?