

# *The Book of Judges*

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9409 Pendennis Lane  
Charlotte, NC 28210

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Printed in the United States of America  
First impression 2012

Edited by Katie McDermott

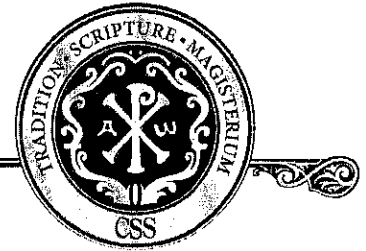
Production and Design by Malcolm Schluenderfritz

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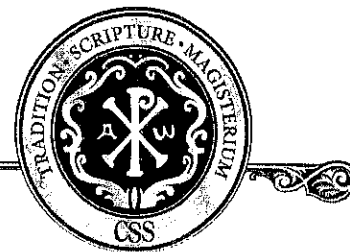


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# Book of Judges



## Lesson 1: A New Phase in Israel's Theocracy

### Introduction

*Judges* is one of the saddest books in the Bible. After Joshua's conquests and national unity, courage and national pride, it all comes crumbling down. Victory shifts to defeat; progress slides to decline. Freedom gives way to bondage, unity to division, and faith to selfish ambition. Song turns to mourning; prayers for deliverance displace hymns of praise. Eyes move from the God of Israel to the pagan gods of the Canaanites. The theme of *Joshua* was national fidelity to God. The key phrase in *Judges* is "every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg 17:6, 21:25).

It is instructive to read through the book of *Judges* and count the times it repeats the distressing phrase, "The people of Israel [again] did evil in the sight of the Lord." You will find it seven times (Judg 2:11, 3:7, 3:12, 4:1, 6:1, 10:6, 13:1). The first appears as an introduction to the overall downfall of Israel. The remaining six times indicate the beginning of each of six downward cycles. The cause of Israel's self-imposed disaster and grief is always the same.

The cycles begin with obedience to God, which results in God's blessing. The blessing of God brings freedom and abundance. This results in ease and comfort—which eventually turns into



*The Angel of the Lord*

complacency and self-centeredness, which then quickly turns to neglect of God and sloth. This, in turn, gives way to sin and disobedience. God ultimately rewards Israel's apostasy with punishment, manifested in the invasion and occupation of the tribes' inheritances by surrounding nations. The Israelites are crushed and forced to admit their sin. Under duress they humble themselves in repentance and cry out to God for deliverance. God is merciful and sends deliverers (called "judges") who fight in God's name and deliver the people from bondage and oppression. The people praise and obey God, and he again blesses them. Then, unfortunately, the downward cycle begins again.

Some have characterized this cycle of events as follows: obedience > blessing > complacency > sin > oppression > repentance > deliverance. Others have simplified it in four steps: sinning, suffering, supplication, salvation. In the book of *Judges* we see this cycle run its course six times with the six major judges: Othni-el, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson. There are also six "minor" judges: Shamgar, Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon and Adbon.

Let us begin our study of one of Israel's most turbulent periods not with a spirit of sorrow but with great hope and love for the one true God and Father Almighty who is always faithful to his promises.

## Judges 1:1 – 2:23

### Chapter 1

<sup>1</sup> After the death of Joshua the people of Israel inquired of the LORD, "Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?" <sup>2</sup> The LORD said, "Judah shall go up; behold, I have given the land into his hand." <sup>3</sup> And Judah said to Simeon his brother, "Come up with me into the territory allotted to me, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I likewise will go with you into the territory allotted to you." So Simeon went with him. <sup>4</sup> Then Judah went up and the LORD gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand; and they defeated ten thousand of them at Bezek. <sup>5</sup> They came upon Adoni-bezek at Bezek, and fought against him, and defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites. <sup>6</sup> Adoni-bezek fled; but they pursued him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes. <sup>7</sup> And Adoni-bezek said, "Seventy kings with their thumbs and their great toes cut off used to pick up scraps under my table; as I have done, so God has requited me." And they brought him to Jerusalem, and he died there. <sup>8</sup> And the men of Judah fought against Jerusalem, and took it, and smote it with the edge of the sword, and set the city on fire. <sup>9</sup> And afterward the men of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites who dwelt in the hill country, in the Negeb, and in the lowland. <sup>10</sup> And Judah went against the Canaanites who dwelt in Hebron (now the name of Hebron was formerly Kiriath-arba); and they defeated Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmai. <sup>11</sup> From there they went against the inhabitants of Debir. The name of Debir was formerly Kiriath-sepher. <sup>12</sup> And Caleb said, "He who attacks Kiriath-sepher and takes it, I will give him Achsah my daughter as wife." <sup>13</sup> And Othni-el the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it; and he gave him Achsah his daughter as wife. <sup>14</sup> When she came to him, she urged him to ask her father for a field; and she alighted from her ass, and Caleb said to her, "What do you wish?" <sup>15</sup> She said to him, "Give me a present; since you have set me in the land of the Negeb, give me also springs of water." And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs. <sup>16</sup> And the descendants of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up with the people of Judah from the city of palms into the wilderness of Judah, which lies in the Negeb near Arad; and they went and settled with the people. <sup>17</sup> And Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they defeated the Canaanites who inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. So the name of the city was called Hormah. <sup>18</sup> Judah also took Gaza with its territory, and Ashkelon with its territory, and Ekron with its terri-

tory. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> And Hebron was given to Caleb, as Moses had said; and he drove out from it the three sons of Anak. <sup>21</sup> But the people of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who dwelt in Jerusalem; so the Jebusites have dwelt with the people of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day. <sup>22</sup> The house of Joseph also went up against Bethel; and the LORD was with them. <sup>23</sup> And the house of Joseph sent to spy out Bethel. (Now the name of the city was formerly Luz.) <sup>24</sup> And the spies saw a man coming out of the city, and they said to him, "Pray, show us the way into the city, and we will deal kindly with you." <sup>25</sup> And he showed them the way into the city; and they smote the city with the edge of the sword, but they let the man and all his family go. <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean and its villages, or Taa-nach 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; but the Canaanites persisted in dwelling in that land. <sup>28</sup> When Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but did not utterly drive them out. <sup>29</sup> And Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites who dwelt in Gezer; but the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them. <sup>30</sup> Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, or the inhabitants of Nahalol; but the Canaanites dwelt among them, and became subject to forced labor. <sup>31</sup> 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; <sup>32</sup> but the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; for they did not drive them out. <sup>33</sup> Naphtali did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh, or the inhabitants of Beth-anath, but dwelt 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. <sup>34</sup> The Amorites pressed the Danites back into the hill country, for they did not allow them to come down to the plain; <sup>35</sup> the Amorites persisted in dwelling in Harheres, in Aijalon, and in Sha-albim, but the hand of the house of Joseph rested heavily upon them, and they became subject to forced labor. <sup>36</sup> And the border of the Amorites ran from the ascent of Akrabbim, from Sela and upward.

## Chapter 2

<sup>1</sup> 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 which I swore to give to your fathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you, <sup>2</sup> and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.' But you have not obeyed my command. What is this you have done? <sup>3</sup> So now I say, I will not drive them out before you; but they shall become adversaries to you, and their gods shall be a snare to you." <sup>4</sup> When the angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the people of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept. <sup>5</sup> And they called the name of that place Bochim; and they sacrificed there to the LORD. <sup>6</sup> When Joshua dismissed the people, the people of Israel went each to his inheritance to take possession of the land. <sup>7</sup> And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work which the LORD had done for Israel. <sup>8</sup> And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of one hundred and ten years. <sup>9</sup> And they buried him within the bounds of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash. <sup>10</sup> And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them, who did not know the LORD or the work which he had done for Israel. <sup>11</sup> And the people of Israel did what was evil



in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals; <sup>12</sup> and they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; they went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were round about them, and bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger. <sup>13</sup> They forsook the LORD, and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth. <sup>14</sup> So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them; and he sold them into the power of their enemies round about, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. <sup>15</sup> Whenever they marched out, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had warned, and as the LORD had sworn to them; and they were in sore straits. <sup>16</sup> **Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the power of those who plundered them.** <sup>17</sup> And yet they did not listen to their judges; for they played the harlot after other gods and bowed down to them; they soon turned aside from the way in which their fathers had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the LORD, and they did not do so. <sup>18</sup> Whenever the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge, and he saved 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 afflicted and oppressed them. <sup>19</sup> But whenever the judge died, they turned back and behaved worse than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them; they did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways. <sup>20</sup> So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel; and he said, "Because this people have transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not obeyed my voice, <sup>21</sup> I will not henceforth drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died, <sup>22</sup> that by them I may test Israel, whether they will take care to walk in the way of the LORD as their fathers did, or not." <sup>23</sup> So the LORD left those nations, not driving them out at once, and he did not give them into the power of Joshua.

## Points to Ponder

### The Cycle of Sin and Redemption

As already mentioned in the introduction to this lesson, there is an unhappy, though predictable set of cycles reoccurring in Israel due to the nation's violation of the covenant and continued shunning of God and his law. In short, the cycles follow the four steps of sinning, suffering, supplication, and salvation. Let us review this again:

The cycles begin with obedience to God, which results in God's blessing. The blessing of God brings freedom and abundance. This results in ease and comfort—which eventually turns into complacency and self-centeredness, which quickly turns into neglect of God and sloth. This, in turn, gives way to sin and disobedience. God ultimately rewards Israel's apostasy with punishment, manifested in the invasion and occupation of the tribes' inheritances by surrounding nations. The Israelites are crushed and forced to admit their sin. Under duress they humble themselves in repentance and cry out to God for deliverance. God is merciful and sends deliverers (called "judges") who fight in God's name and deliver the people from bondage and oppression. The people praise and obey God, and he again blesses them. Then, regrettably, the downward cycle begins again.

Do we sense anything familiar about this cycle in our world today? This unfortunate rhythm is also present in the Christian life, and even in the life of the Church and other institutions and nations. We are inclined to seek God only while suffering. Being fat and happy, rich and famous, healthy and wealthy—these satisfactions do not dependably drive us to God. Comfort, blessing, peace, afflu-

ence—all these and other such states of life could very well be used to give greater glory to God, but too frequently, they result in complacency and spiritual sloth. They seduce us into attaching ourselves to the pleasing (albeit temporary) things of the world we can see, while distancing ourselves from the blessings and eternal promises of the God we cannot see.

Suffering and loss, however, quickly get our attention. If we are hopeful, they become a much-needed remedy for apostasy. We tend to learn obedience from the things we suffer, as was said even of our Lord (Heb 5:8). This is why the Catholic Church has a theology of suffering—something sadly missing in most other religions. The Church's theology teaches us, like the book of Judges taught the Jews, that suffering can be both punitive and medicinal for our spiritual lives, leading us to repentance, restoration, spiritual healing, and fidelity to God. There is another aspect of suffering that is redemptive—the uniting of our suffering with that of Our Lord, but that lesson is for another time.

### A New Phase in Israel's Theocracy

The first two chapters in Judges form a transition from the time of Joshua to this new theocratic period (i.e., divine governance or guidance) in the life of Israel—the time of the judges. There is a good bit of repetition with the content of Joshua in the first chapters, including Caleb and his conquest of Hebron, his daughter's acquisition of land and springs, and the final days of Joshua ending with his death. These opening chapters also set the stage for the tragic downfall of Israel. Joshua emphasized the cohesiveness of the nation. Joshua led the people, and they fought as a unit. Individual tribes were secondary to the interests of the nation as a whole. Judges shows another story—tribes acting alone or with the assistance of another. Gone is the national solidarity centered in Shiloh with God as the reason for the commonwealth of tribes.

The book of Judges opens with the statement, “After the death of Joshua the people of Israel inquired of the Lord, ‘Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?’” (Judg 1:1). Joshua had already died in the book of Joshua, and this conquest by Judah involving Caleb and his daughter had already taken place before his death (Josh 14:6–15, 15:13–19). The compiler of Judges, however, is using the death of Joshua as a beginning point for Judges, even though he mentions Joshua's farewell and death again in Judges 2:6–9.

Among the people of Israel, the tribe of Judah inquires of the Lord to know who should go up against the Canaanites and Perizzites inhabiting its territory. As you may recall in Joshua, Judah had been given the “deed to the land”—it was theirs, but they had to fight for it. In Judges 1:2–7, we learn how Judah takes possession of the land. Simeon joins Judah, and they kill 10,000 men and conquer the land. Adoni-bezek, the unfortunate king, flees. When he is apprehended the Israelites cut off his thumbs and large toes. Like hamstringing a horse for domestic service (Josh 11:9), this incapacitates the king from being a warrior and thus makes him unable to resist Israel. He can no longer maintain his balance, swing a sword, or sting a bow. The pagan king is sent home incapable of further battle. There is also an element of humiliation in this cruel amputation. This kind of treatment was common in the ancient world. Adoni-bezek admits to having amputated his enemies' thumbs and big toes, leaving them to scrounge for food like dogs under his table. Adoni-bezek realizes he is suffering divine justice for what he himself has inflicted on others. Interestingly, even the pagans viewed everyday life through a theological lens.

Judges 1:8, which recalls the partial conquest of Jerusalem, is interesting since we are told that Jerusalem was not conquered during this time (Josh 15:63, Judg 1:21). We know that Joshua had already slain Adoni-zedek, the king of Jerusalem, and his four allies after the battle at Gibeon (Josh



10:1-5, 17-26), but Jerusalem had not yet been conquered because of the failure to drive out the Jebusites (Josh 15:63, Judg 1:21). Although the tribes of Judah and Simeon capture the city and set it on fire (Judg 1:8), Scripture tells us Jerusalem will not come under the Israelites' full possession until the period of the monarchy under King David (2 Sam 5:6-9).

Judges 1:9-15 recapitulates the conquest of Hebron by Caleb and the tribe of Judah along with the grant of land and springs to Caleb's daughter Achsah (as we also read in Josh 16:13-19).

### **But They "Did Not Drive Out"**

In Judges 1:16 we learn that, "the descendants of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up with the people of Judah from the city of palms [Jericho] into the wilderness of Judah, which lies in the Negeb near Arad; and they went and settled with the people." Moses spent 40 years as a shepherd in the Sinai Wilderness. While there he married Zipporah, the daughter of the Kenite named Jethro, from the tribe of Midian. Therefore, the sons of Moses were of mixed blood: Levites from the sons of Jacob and Midianites through the family of Jethro the Kenite. The Midianites had purchased Joseph, son of Jacob, when his brothers sold him into slavery 400 years before Moses (Gen 37:18-36). Jael, a heroic woman, whom we will learn of in Judges 4:17-21, is also from the Kenites; she kills the general of the army from Hazor. Later during Israel's monarchy, because of friendly relations, Saul offers to spare the Kenites (1 Sam 15:16).

In Judges 1:16-36 we find a list of the cities and territories taken by the Israelites in obedience to the command of God; but, the sour note played throughout the list is the peoples and areas not subdued. The Midianites move into Judah (Judg 1:16); the Benjamites do not drive out the Jebusites (Judg 1:21); and Judah takes possession of the hill country but does not drive out the inhabitants of the plain because they have chariots of iron (Judg 1:19).

Further, we read in Judges 1:27: "Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean and its villages, or Taa-nach 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; but the Canaanites persisted in dwelling in that land." The unhappy list continues in the following verses, with the phrase "did not drive out" used over eight times. Nine tribes are indicted in the list. Three others are also implicated, in a way, because they fail to enter and take an inheritance in the land west of the Jordan, being content to stay on the eastern side. The contagion is apparent and the results predictable.

### **A Message from the Angel of the Lord**

Chapter two begins with a visit from God: "Now the angel of the Lord went up from Gilgal to Bochim" (Judg 2:1). Bochim is thought by many to be the same site as Bethel. It would be appropriate, being the site was the place visited by Abraham, who built an altar and called on the name of the Lord. Jacob later named the place Bethel, which means "the House of God." Here Jacob built an altar and made a covenant with God (Gen 28:19, 13:13).

This divine visit is a response to Israel's failure to do as God had commanded them through Joshua. But what are we to make of this mysterious visitor—is he God himself or the angel of the Lord? It seems the answer is both. Moses met God in the wilderness. God spoke to him from the burning bush, but the source of the voice is also referred to as the "angel of the Lord" (Ex 3:2-7). It is the same here. The "angel of the Lord" visits the Israelites but speaks in the first person as God:

"I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you into the land which I swore to give to your fathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants

of this land; you shall break down their altars.' But you have not obeyed my command. What is this you have done? So now I say, I will not drive them out before you; but they shall become adversaries to you, and their gods shall be a snare to you." (Judg 2:1-3)

The Fathers of the Church understand "the angel of the Lord" to be God himself in pre-incarnate form, coming to speak with his people. St. Hilary of Poitiers, Doctor of the Church, writes:

"The vision and the voice are in the one place, nor is anyone else heard except the one who is seen. He who is an angel of God when he is seen is the same one who is the Lord when he is heard, but he himself who is the Lord when he is heard is recognized as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. When he is called the angel of God, it is revealed that this is not his true nature and that he is not alone, for he is the angel of God. When he is called the Lord and God, he is proclaimed as possessing the glory and name of his own nature. Accordingly you have in an angel who appeared in the bush him who is also the Lord and God." (On the Trinity, 4.32)

St. Augustine writes, "And here he is first called the angel of the Lord and then God. Is the angel then the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob? Therefore he may be rightly understood to be the Savior himself" (The Trinity, 2.13.23).

In response to God's words, "the people lifted up their voices and wept. And they called the name of that place Bochim; and they sacrificed there to the Lord" (Judg 2:4-5). The name Bochim means "weepers." The fact that the people offer sacrifice to the Lord suggests that Bochim might have been near Shiloh, which is the central place of sacrifice. The people's temporary repentance seems to have done little good as we continue with the story. Of course, repentance and weeping for sin is good and beneficial, but repentance has two components: (1) a sincere sorrow for sin and change of heart, and (2) a turning around to go in a new direction. The change should not be temporary or merely emotional—it needs to be permanent and real. St. Ambrose says that in the Church, "there are water and tears: the water of Baptism and the tears of repentance" (Epistle 41, 42).

### The Third Proclamation of Joshua's Death

We have now arrived at the final section of the author's introduction and transition from the time of Joshua to the period of the judges—from conquest and possession to apostasy and punishment. We are now told for the third time that Joshua dies (Josh 24:29-31; Judg 1:1, 2:6-9). The fact that his death is emphasized three times points to the importance of this watershed event. Three of anything in the Bible is significant and needs to be noted. One example is in the New Testament when the first Gentile is converted and baptized. The salvation of Cornelius is also such a watershed event that it is recounted three times in the book of Acts. The death of Joshua is a huge turning point, a transition that is emphasized in Scripture. It is almost as though it is hard to get past it, sad to leave it, before moving on to the new period of decay that soon follows the death of Israel's champion.

Joshua's obituary—already provided at the end of Joshua (Josh 24:29-31)—is again inserted in Judges 2, after which the period of the judges really begins:

"When Joshua dismissed the people [presumably referring to the last convocation gathered in Joshua 24:1-28], the people of Israel went each to his inheritance to take possession of the land. And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work which the Lord had done for Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of one hundred and ten years. And they buried him within the bounds of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim." (Judg 2:6-9)

Even as the stones are placed over the body of Joshua, the clouds of disaster are looming large on the horizon. Even as the elders who outlived Joshua are buried in the ground, the impending storm darkens the sky. We read, “And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them, who did not know the Lord or the work which he had done for Israel” (Judg 2:10).

## Without Joshua and the Elders, Israel Falls

Next comes the most disappointing of observations, the first of seven times mentioned in Judges: “And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals; and they forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; they went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were round about them, and bowed down to them; and they provoked the Lord to anger” (Judg 2:11-12).

Baal means “lord” which explains precisely how the Israelites fell. They exchanged THE Lord—the true and living God of the heavens and the earth—with the “lords” of the pagans who were infiltrating their society. Baalim, or “Baals,” the actual word used here, is plural for all the gods and lords of the pagans, whom Israel chased after like lascivious men drunk with desire chasing harlots through the night. This same descriptive example is used by the prophets over and over again (e.g., Josh 2:17, Ezek 16:1-59, Hosea 2:1-13, Rev 17:1-6).


The practice of idolatry among the Israelites, God’s chosen people, was considered the gravest betrayal of the true and living God. (This, of course, is no different today.) Corrupt or demonic forces often inspired the worship of false gods, which frequently involved reprehensible immoral acts, such as prostitution, orgies, and child sacrifices. The response of the Lord God was predicted and predictable.

We are told in Judges 2:14, “The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them; and he sold them into the power of their enemies round about, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies.” The cycle of rise and fall in Israel had begun. Here, in chapter two we see a general depiction of Israel’s fall and the Lord’s response. In chapter three, we will see the first of six actual cycles of apostasy and redemption. The Israelites’ betrayal and wickedness made God angry, and he kept his promises in the negative as he had done in the positive: “If you cleave to me I will bless you; if you betray me I will be against you.”

Now we come to the passage that explains the title of the book of Judges:

“Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the power of those who plundered them: And yet they did not listen to their judges; for they played the harlot after other gods and bowed down to them; they soon turned aside from the way in which their fathers had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the Lord, and they did not do so. Whenever the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge, and he saved 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 afflicted and oppressed them. But whenever the judge died, they turned back and behaved worse than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them; they did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways.” (Josh 2:16-19)

The word “judge” means more in this context than the English word “judge,” which brings to mind a man in a black robe pounding his gavel on the bench with witnesses in the docket. The word “judge” is shofet in Hebrew and has a double meaning: (1) defending and delivering, along with (2) avenging and punishing. The “temporary office” of shofet is one of judge and governor, political and religious leader, general and warrior, all wrapped into one. He (or she in regard to Deborah) is an instrument



of God, the invisible king, to act on his behalf. The judge is not inferior to a king but is raised up by God on a temporary, periodic basis without any thought to dynastic succession. The nation of Israel at this time is a theocracy, for God alone is their king (cf. 1 Sam 8:6-7, 12:12).

### **The Promise of Just Retribution**

At Joshua's last convocation before his death, the people of Israel had ratified a covenant with God and sworn an oath of fidelity to him and him alone, and a great stone had been set up as a witness against them (cf. Josh 24:16-27). The stone would serve as a reminder of the covenant to future generations. But it is hard to pass the faith on to the next generation. There is a maxim: "God has no grandchildren." How many parents have wept in prayer over their children or grandchildren who have failed to adhere to the family's Christian tradition, who have turned from the Catholic truth they have been taught? Parents are responsible for the education of their children, but children are also responsible to pick up the baton and carry it to the next generation.

When one party to a covenant violates the agreement, the offended party has the right to act in just retribution. God is the offended party. He has made promises for obedience; he has also warned against violations. In the case of Israel, the violations have been egregious, and the covenantal curses must now go into effect:

"So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel; and he said, "Because this people have transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not obeyed my voice, I will not henceforth drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died, that by them I may test Israel, whether they will take care to walk in the way of the Lord as their fathers did, or not." (Josh 2:20-22)

God has not given up on his people, but like a father with a belligerent son, he will continue to discipline, punish, and work with his son Israel as long as there is hope and a possibility of future restoration. God made promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and he intends to keep them in spite of their rebellious progeny. He will use the Canaanites as a rod for the back of the Israelites. They will be his means of disciplining his rebellious son.

Chapter three embarks on the first of the six cycles of sinning, suffering, supplication, and salvation. The rest of Judges proceeds like a roller coaster, as one generation after another learns its lesson the hard way. In the end, Samuel will arise as the last judge and first prophet, who will usher in a new beginning for Israel.


### **Study Questions**

It is best to read the entire Scripture passage for this lesson (Judg 1:1-2:23) and the Points to Ponder before responding to the study questions below.

1. How do the people of Israel determine the surest strategy for fighting the Canaanites to take possession of their land? Who guarantees their victory? (See Judg 1:1-4)



2. What does Judah's army do to the pagan king Adoni-bezek, and what is most interesting about his response to their actions? (See Judg 1:6-7, Points to Ponder)
3. Judah and Simeon also capture Jerusalem and burn the city to the ground. Is Jerusalem now in Israel's full possession? When will this finally happen? (See Judg 1:8, Judg 1:21, 2 Sam 5:6-9, Points to Ponder)
4. What is the common theme running throughout Judges 1:16-36, and what divine visit does it prompt at the beginning of Judges 2? (See Points to Ponder, Judg 2:1-3).



5. How many times is Joshua's death mentioned in the opening chapters of Judges, and why is this significant? (See Points to Ponder, Judg 2:10-11)

6. Who or what are "the Baals," and how are they "a snare" to Israel? (See Judg 2:11-13, Points to Ponder)

7. Who are the "judges," and how does God use them? (See Judg 2:16-19, Points to Ponder)





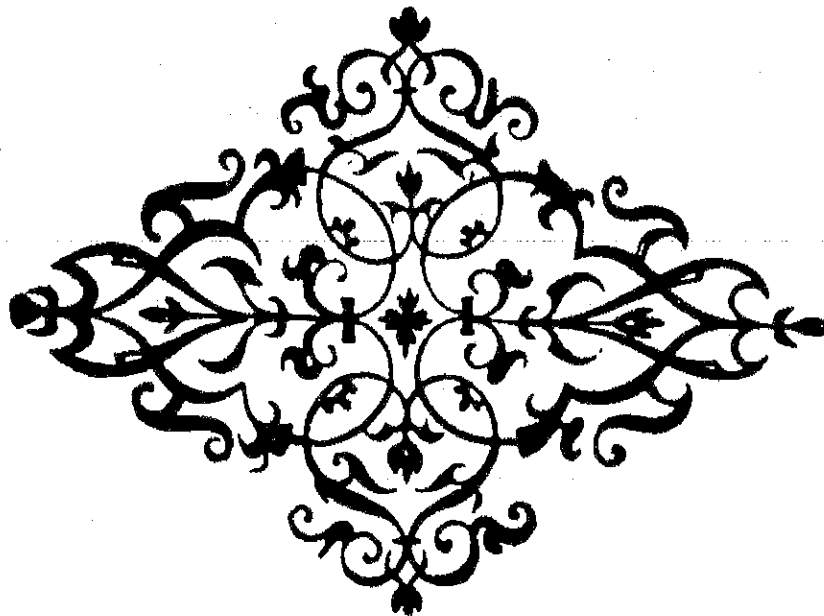
## Catechism Connections

- CCC 1897-1899 discusses the necessity of legitimate authority figures within human society to maintain order and ensure the common good.
- CCC 1431 describes the proper disposition and intention of those who experience true interior repentance for sin.
- CCC 1429 explains the essential relationship between the call to conversion and the necessity of repentance within the Church.

## Rome to Home

“What is authority really, for us Christians? ...Human authority is never an end in itself but always and only a means and that, necessarily and in every age, the end is the person, created by God with his own inviolable dignity and called to relate to his Creator, both along the path of his earthly journey and in eternal life; it is an authority exercised in responsibility before God, before the Creator. An authority whose sole purpose is understood to be to serve the true good of the person and to be a glass through which we can see the one and supreme Good, which is God. Not only is it not foreign to man, but on the contrary, it is a precious help on our journey towards a total fulfilment in Christ, towards salvation.”

—Pope Benedict XVI, *“The Essential Tasks of a Priest: Authority and Hierarchy in the Church—Service Lived in Pure Giving,”* General Audience, May 26, 2010



## Summary

In lesson one, we observed:

1. After the death of Joshua, the people of Israel inquire of the Lord who shall go up to fight against the Canaanites. Judah and Simeon combine forces to conquer the lands still occupied by the Canaanites and Perizzites.
2. Adoni-bezek is captured at Bezek and his thumbs and toes are cut off. He acknowledges this act as divine retribution for his own tyranny against other kings of the land.
3. The men of Judah take and burn the city of Jerusalem, among other Canaanite-occupied territories in the hill country and lowland.
4. The story of Caleb's occupation of Hebron, overthrow of Debir, and wedding gifts of a field and springs of water to his daughter Achsah is recounted.
5. The descendants of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, settle with the people of Judah. The men of Judah take possession of many territories but cannot drive out the inhabitants of the plain because they had chariots of iron.
6. The men of Benjamin do not drive out the Jebusites from Jerusalem; they remain in the land to dwell among them.
7. The house of Joseph attacks the inhabitants of Bethel, but spare one man, who assisted them as a spy, along with his entire family. The man builds a city in the land of the Hittites and calls its name Luz.
8. The tribes of Manasseh, Ephraim, Zebulun, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan fail to drive out all the Canaanites and Amorites from their land, choosing to dwell among them and subjecting some to forced labor.
9. The angel of the Lord goes up from Gilgal to Bochim and tells the people of Israel that the Lord will no longer protect them from their adversaries because they have broken their covenant with him by intermingling with the pagan inhabitants of the land.
10. In response to the message of the angel of the Lord, the people lift up their voices, weep, and make sacrifices.
11. Joshua's death at the age of 110 years is recounted. He is buried within the bounds of his inheritance in Timnath-heres in the hill country of Ephraim.
12. After the death of Joshua and the elders, another generation of Israelites arise who do not know the Lord or the work he has done for Israel.
13. The post-Joshua generation forsakes the Lord and provokes his anger by doing what is evil and worshiping the false gods of the pagan peoples who dwell among them.
14. The Lord sends judges to save them, but the people do not listen and fail to obey the commandments of the Lord. A brief summary of the period of the judges is provided.
15. The people of Israel repeatedly enkindle the anger of the Lord, and the Lord decides to use the Canaanite nations to test Israel so that they may again walk in the way of the LORD as their fathers did.