

Israel Takes Possession of the Land (c. 1380 – c. 1365 BC)

Judges 1:1–19a, 20, 22–26

Joshua 15:14–19

Introduction

1 After Joshua died, the Israelites asked the LORD, “Who should lead the invasion against the Canaanites and launch the attack?”
 2 The LORD said, “The men of Judah should take the lead. Be sure of this! I am handing the land over to them.”

Judah and Simeon’s Upland Campaign

3 The men of Judah said to their relatives, the men of Simeon, “Invade our allotted land with us and help us attack the Canaanites. Then we will go with you into your allotted land.” So the men of Simeon went with them.
 4 The men of Judah attacked, and the LORD handed the Canaanites and Perizzites over to them. They killed ten thousand men at Bezek.
 5 They met Adoni-Bezek at Bezek and fought him. They defeated the Canaanites and Perizzites.
 6 When Adoni-Bezek ran away, they chased him and captured him. Then they cut off his thumbs and big toes.
 7 Adoni-Bezek said, “Seventy kings, with thumbs and big toes cut off, used to lick up food scraps under my table. God has repaid me for what I did to them.” They brought him to Jerusalem, where he died.

The Conquest of Jerusalem

8 The men of Judah attacked Jerusalem and captured it. They put the sword to it and set the city on fire.

Judah and Simeon’s Lowland Campaign

9 Later the men of Judah went down to attack the Canaanites living in the hill country, the Negev, and the lowlands.

Caleb Conquers Hebron (Kiriath Arba)

10 The men of Judah attacked the Canaanites living in Hebron. (Hebron used to be called Kiriath Arba.) They killed Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai.

Othniel Conquers Debir (Kiriath Sepher)

11 From there they attacked the people of Debir. (Debir used to be called Kiriath Sepher.)
 12 Caleb said, “To the man who attacks and captures Kiriath Sepher I will give my daughter Acsah as a wife.”
 13 When Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother, captured it, Caleb gave him his daughter Acsah as a wife.
 14 One time Acsah came and charmed her father so she could ask him for some land. When she got down from her donkey, Caleb said to her, “What would you like?”
 15 She answered, “Please give me a special present. Since you have given me land in the Negev, now give me springs of water.” So Caleb gave her both the upper and lower springs.

14 Caleb drove out from there three Anakites— Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai, descendants of Anak.

15 From there he attacked the people of Debir. (Debir used to be called Kiriath Sepher.)
 16 Caleb said, “To the man who attacks and captures Kiriath Sepher I will give my daughter Acsah as a wife.”
 17 When Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb’s brother, captured it, Caleb gave Acsah his daughter to him as a wife.
 18 One time Acsah came and charmed her father so that she could ask him for some land. When she got down from her donkey, Caleb said to her, “What would you like?”
 19 She answered, “Please give me a special present. Since you have given me land in the Negev, now give me springs of water.” So he gave her both upper and lower springs.

The Settlement of Arad

16 Now the descendants of the Kenite, Moses’ father-in-law, went up with the people of Judah from the City of Date Palm Trees to Arad in the desert of Judah, located in the Negev. They went and lived with the people of Judah.

The Conquest of Zephath/Hormah

17 The men of Judah went with their brothers the men of Simeon and defeated the Canaanites living in Zephath. They wiped out Zephath. So people now call the city Hormah.

The Conquest of the Lowland

18 The men of Judah captured Gaza, Ashkelon, Ekron, and the territory surrounding each of these cities.

Conclusion of the Judah-Simeon Alliance

19a The LORD was with the men of Judah. They conquered the hill country,
 20 Caleb received Hebron, just as Moses had promised. He drove out the three Anakites.

Joseph’s Conquest of Bethel

22 When the men of Joseph attacked Bethel, the LORD was with them.

23 When the men of Joseph spied out Bethel (it used to be called Luz),
 24 the spies spotted a man leaving the city. They said to him, "If you show us a secret entrance into the city, we will reward you."
 25 He showed them a secret entrance into the city, and they put the city to the sword. But they let the man and his extended family leave safely.
 26 He moved to Hittite country and built a city. He named it Luz, and it has kept that name to this very day.

Israel's Failure to Completely Obey God's Command (c. 1380 – c. 1365 BC)

Joshua 13:13; 15:63; Judges 1:19b, 21, 27–36

Joshua 16:10; 17:12–13

Failure of Transjordan Tribes

Josh 13:13 But the Israelites did not conquer the Geshurites and Maacathites; Geshur and Maacah live among Israel to this very day.

Failure of Judah

Josh 15:63 The men of Judah were unable to conquer the Jebusites living in Jerusalem. The Jebusites live with the people of Judah in Jerusalem to this very day.

Judg 1:19b but they could not conquer the people living in the coastal plain, because they had chariots with iron-rimmed wheels.

Failure of Benjamin

Judg 1:21 The men of Benjamin, however, did not conquer the Jebusites living in Jerusalem. The Jebusites live with the people of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this very day.

Failure of West Manasseh

Judg 1:27 The men of Manasseh did not conquer Beth Shan, Taanach, or their surrounding towns. Nor did they conquer the people living in Dor, Ibleam, Megiddo or their surrounding towns.

The Canaanites managed to remain in those areas.

28 Whenever Israel was strong militarily, they forced the Canaanites to do hard labor, but they never totally conquered them.

Failure of Ephraim

Judg 1:29 The men of Ephraim did not conquer the Canaanites living in Gezer. The Canaanites lived among them in Gezer.

Josh 17:12 But the men of Manasseh were unable to conquer these cities;

the Canaanites managed to remain in those areas.

13 Whenever the Israelites were strong militarily, they forced the Canaanites to do hard labor, but they never totally conquered them.

Josh 16:10 The Ephraimites did not conquer the Canaanites living in Gezer. The Canaanites live among the Ephraimites to this very day and do hard labor as their servants.

Failure of Zebulun

30 The men of Zebulun did not conquer the people living in Kitron and Nahalol. The Canaanites lived among them and were forced to do hard labor.

Failure of Asher

31 The men of Asher did not conquer the people living in Acco or Sidon, nor did they conquer Ahlab, Aczib, Helbah, Aphek, or Rehob.
 32 The people of Asher live among the Canaanites residing in the land because they did not conquer them.

Failure of Naphtali

33 The men of Naphtali did not conquer the people living in Beth Shemesh or Beth Anath. They live among the Canaanites residing in the land. The Canaanites living in Beth Shemesh and Beth Anath were forced to do hard labor for them.

Failure of Dan

34 The Amorites forced the people of Dan to live in the hill country. They did not allow them to live in the coastal plain.

35 The Amorites managed to remain in Har Heres, Aijalon, and Shaalbim. Whenever the tribe of Joseph was strong militarily, the Amorites were forced to do hard labor.

36 The border of Amorite territory ran from the Scorpion Ascent to Sela and on up.

God Confronts Israel (c. 1380 – c. 1365 BC)

Judges 2:1–5

- 1 The LORD's angelic messenger went up from Gilgal to Bokim. He said, "I brought you up from Egypt and led you into the land I had solemnly promised to give to your ancestors. I said, 'I will never break my agreement with you,
- 2 but you must not make an agreement with the people who live in this land. You should tear down the altars where they worship.' But you have disobeyed me. Why would you do such a thing?
- 3 At that time I also warned you, 'If you disobey, I will not drive out the Canaanites before you. They will ensnare you and their gods will lure you away.'"
- 4 When the LORD's messenger finished speaking these words to all the Israelites, the people wept loudly.
- 5 They named that place Bokim and offered sacrifices to the LORD there.

A Family Does What is Right in Its Own Eyes (c. 1380 – c. 1340 BC)

Judges 17:1–6

- 1 There was a man named Micah from the Ephraimite hill country.
- 2 He said to his mother, "You know the eleven hundred pieces of silver which were stolen from you, about which I heard you pronounce a curse? Look here, I have the silver. I stole it, but now I am giving it back to you." His mother said, "May the LORD reward you, my son!"
- 3 When he gave back to his mother the eleven hundred pieces of silver, his mother said, "I solemnly dedicate this silver to the LORD. It will be for my son's benefit. We will use it to make a carved image and a metal image."
- 4 When he gave the silver back to his mother, she took two hundred pieces of silver to a silversmith, who made them into a carved image and a metal image. She then put them in Micah's house.
- 5 Now this man Micah owned a shrine. He made an ephod and some personal idols and hired one of his sons to serve as a priest.
- 6 In those days Israel had no king. Each man did what he considered to be right.

A Levite Does What is Right in His Own Eyes (c. 1380 – c. 1340 BC)

Judges 17:7–13

- 7 There was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah. He was a Levite who had been temporarily residing among the tribe of Judah.
- 8 This man left the town of Bethlehem in Judah to find another place to live. He came to the Ephraimite hill country and made his way to Micah's house.
- 9 Micah said to him, "Where do you come from?" He replied, "I am a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah. I am looking for a new place to live."
- 10 Micah said to him, "Stay with me. Become my adviser and priest. I will give you ten pieces of silver per year, plus clothes and food."
- 11 So the Levite agreed to stay with the man; the young man was like a son to Micah.
- 12 Micah paid the Levite; the young man became his priest and lived in Micah's house.
- 13 Micah said, "Now I know God will make me rich, because I have this Levite as my priest."

A Tribe Does What is Right in Its Own Eyes (c. 1380 – c. 1340 BC)

Judges 18

Joshua 19:47

Dan's Failure to Conquer Its Inheritance Leads to a Search

1 In those days Israel had no king. And in those days the Danite tribe was looking for a place to settle, because at that time they did not yet have a place to call their own among the tribes of Israel.

47a (The Danites failed to conquer their territory,

2 The Danites sent out from their whole tribe five representatives, capable men from Zorah and Eshtaol, to spy out the land and explore it. They said to them, "Go, explore the land." They came to the Ephraimite hill country and spent the night at Micah's house.

The Spies Inquire of Micah's Levite

- 3 As they approached Micah's house, they recognized the accent of the young Levite. So they stopped there and said to him, "Who brought you here? What are you doing in this place? What is your business here?"
- 4 He told them what Micah had done for him, saying, "He hired me and I became his priest."
- 5 They said to him, "Seek a divine oracle for us, so we can know if we will be successful on our mission."
- 6 The priest said to them, "Go with confidence. The LORD will be with you on your mission."

The Spies Discover and Appraise Laish

7 So the five men journeyed on and arrived in Laish. They noticed that the people there were living securely, like the Sidonians do, undisturbed and unsuspecting. No conqueror was troubling them in any way. They lived far from the Sidonians and had no dealings with anyone.

The Spies Report Back

8 When the Danites returned to their tribe in Zorah and Eshtaol, their kinsmen asked them, “How did it go?”

9 They said, “Come on, let’s attack them, for we saw their land and it is very good. You seem lethargic, but don’t hesitate to invade and conquer the land.

10 When you invade, you will encounter unsuspecting people. The land is wide! God is handing it over to you—a place that lacks nothing on earth!”

Some of the Danites Decide to Migrate

11 So six hundred Danites, fully armed, set out from Zorah and Eshtaol.

12 They went up and camped in Kiriath Jearim in Judah. (To this day that place is called Camp of Dan. It is west of Kiriath Jearim.)

13 From there they traveled through the Ephraimite hill country and arrived at Micah’s house.

They Acquire Micah’s Priest and Idols

14 The five men who had gone to spy out the land of Laish said to their kinsmen, “Do you realize that inside these houses are an ephod, some personal idols, a carved image, and a metal image? Decide now what you want to do.”

15 They stopped there, went inside the young Levite’s house (which belonged to Micah), and asked him how he was doing.

16 Meanwhile the six hundred Danites, fully armed, stood at the entrance to the gate.

17 The five men who had gone to spy out the land broke in and stole the carved image, the ephod, the personal idols, and the metal image, while the priest was standing at the entrance to the gate with the six hundred fully armed men.

18 When these men broke into Micah’s house and stole the carved image, the ephod, the personal idols, and the metal image, the priest said to them, “What are you doing?”

19 They said to him, “Shut up! Put your hand over your mouth and come with us! You can be our adviser and priest. Wouldn’t it be better to be a priest for a whole Israelite tribe than for just one man’s family?”

20 The priest was happy. He took the ephod, the personal idols, and the carved image and joined the group.

21 They turned and went on their way, but they walked behind the children, the cattle, and their possessions.

Micah’s Futile Pursuit

22 After they had gone a good distance from Micah’s house, Micah’s neighbors gathered together and caught up with the Danites.

23 When they called out to the Danites, the Danites turned around and said to Micah, “Why have you gathered together?”

24 He said, “You stole my gods that I made, as well as this priest, and then went away. What do I have left? How can you have the audacity to say to me, ‘What do you want?’”

25 The Danites said to him, “Don’t say another word to us, or some very angry men will attack you, and you and your family will die.”

26 The Danites went on their way; when Micah realized they were too strong to resist, he turned around and went home.

The Conquest of Laish

27 Now the Danites took what Micah had made, as well as his priest, and came to Laish, where the people were undisturbed and unsuspecting. They struck them down with the sword and burned the city.

28 No one came to the rescue because the city was far from Sidon and they had no dealings with anyone. The city was in a valley near Beth Rehob. The Danites rebuilt the city and occupied it.

29 They named it Dan after their ancestor, who was one of Israel’s sons. But the city’s name used to be Laish.

30 The Danites worshiped the carved image. Jonathan, descendant of Gershom, son of Moses, and his descendants served as priests for the tribe of Dan until the time of the exile.

31 They worshiped Micah’s carved image the whole time God’s authorized shrine was in Shiloh.

47b so they went up and fought with Leshem and captured it. They put the sword to it, took possession of it, and lived in it. They renamed it Dan after their ancestor.)

Chronological Notes

1) Judges 1:1–2:5.

- A) In a previous reading, we derived a date of c. 1380 BC for the death of Joshua. The next chronological notation we have is of the Mesopotamian oppression mentioned in Judges 3:8 which lasted for 8 years. How many years elapsed between Joshua’s death and the beginning of that first oppression?
- B) One indication of the length of this interval is found in Joshua 24:31: “Israel worshiped the LORD throughout Joshua’s lifetime and as long as the elderly men who outlived him remained alive. These men had experienced firsthand everything the LORD had done for Israel” (cf. Judges 2:7). Who are these men? Clearly, they cannot be part of the Exodus generation—that entire group of people wandered in the wilderness until they died (Num 14:26–35; 26:64–65). They must be those men who were under the age of 20 at the time of the Kadesh-barnea rebellion (military service age—cf. Num 14:29), most likely in their late teens (ages 17–19).
- C) For the sake of argument, let’s say that the elderly men who outlived Joshua were 19 at the time of the Kadesh-barnea rebellion of 1445 BC (Joshua was 45 at the time and so around 26 years older). This means that they were 84 when Joshua died in 1380 BC and thus already old. Most of them would have died within the next 5–10 years. This moves the calendar to c. 1375–1370 BC.
- D) The other relevant piece of textual data is found in Judges 2:10–11: “That entire generation passed away; a new generation grew up that had not personally experienced the LORD’s presence or seen what he had done for Israel. The Israelites did evil before the LORD by worshiping the Baals.” Once the elderly men who outlived Joshua died, another generation took their place. This generation consisted of the young men who had been growing up during the last years of the elders. If we allow 5–10 years for this generation to mature and fall into idolatry, the calendar has now moved to c. 1370–1360 BC, with 1370 representing the lower estimate of 10 years and 1360 representing the higher estimate of 20 years.
- E) In conclusion, we estimate approximately 15 years between Joshua’s death and the beginning of the first oppression—a date of c. 1365 BC.

2) Judges 17–21.

- A) Commentators agree that the two appendices of Judges (Judg 17–18 and Judg 19–21) are set in the same general period as the judge narratives from Othniel to Samson, but do not follow them chronologically.¹ The principle pieces of evidence offered in support of this view are the mention of “Jonathan the son [or descendant²] of Gershom, son of Moses” (Judg 18:30) and “Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron” (Judg 20:28). Unless both genealogical notations have been compressed, these references suggest that the events described in Judges 17–21 took place relatively early in the post-conquest period, probably within a century of the death of Joshua.³ For this reason, I have placed Judges 17–21 after Judges 2:5 in the reading plan and dated them c. 1380 – c. 1340 BC.

Textual Notes

1) Concerning Judges 18:30.

- A) The KJV, NASB, and LEB read “Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh.” The ESV, NIV, HCSB, NET, and NLT read

¹ Barry G. Webb, “The Book of Judges,” *NICOT*, pp. 35, 419. So also Dale Ralph Davis, *Judges: Such a Great Salvation* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2000), p. 211 n. 1; Daniel I. Block, “Judges, Ruth,” *NAC*, p. 511; Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, pp. 178–180; Herbert Wolf, “Judges,” *EBC*, Vol. 3, p. 489; Mark J. Boda, “Judges,” *EBC, Rev. Ed.*, Vol. 2, p. 1239; S. Talmon, *King, Cult and Calendar*, pp. 45–48; Arthur E. Cundall and Leon Morris, “Judges and Ruth,” *TOTC*, p. 176; F. Duane Lindsey, “Judges,” *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 408. C. F. Keil & Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 2, p. 176; Israel P. Loken, *The Old Testament Historical Books: An Introduction*, p. 70.

² The term “son of” (*ben*) usually indicates a direct father-son relationship, but it can also mean “descendant of,” as in the case of 1 Chronicles 4:1. In this verse, the sons of Judah are given as Pharez, Hezron, Carmi, Hur and Shobal. We know from Genesis 46:12 that Hezron was the son of Pharez, so Hezron was actually the *grandson* of Judah, not his direct son.

³ Daniel I. Block, “Judges, Ruth,” *NAC*, 511.

“Jonathan the son of Gershom, son of Moses.” Why the difference of translation? “It appears that certain scribes were uncomfortable with the association between this young Levite and Moses’ clan, and so they opted to connect him to the northern tribe of Manasseh by alluding to that idolatrous southern king Manasseh (2 Kgs 21), whose behavior caused the exile of the southern kingdom (2 Kgs 21:10–15; 23:26–27; 24:1–4).”⁴ Most scholars agree that the original text identified Jonathan as a direct descendent of Moses.

⁴ For more detail, see the Note on v. 30 in Mark J. Boda, “Judges,” *EBC rev. ed.*, p. 1253 and Block, p. 513.