

A False Start

Judges 1:1-3:5

Background Briefing

The book of Judges begins after the death of Joshua, Israel's great military leader. Just before he died he gathered the Israelites and gave them a pep talk.

Look at Joshua 23:4-7.

What does Joshua say will happen after his death? What does he urge the Israelites

4 Remember how I have allotted as an inheritance for your tribes all the land of the nations that remain--the nations I conquered--between the Jordan and the Great Sea in the west. 5 The LORD your God himself will drive them out of your way. He will push them out before you, and you will take possession of their land, as the LORD your God promised you. 6 "Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left. 7 Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them. 8 But you are to hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have until now.

to do?

Starting with a Bang...

Read Judges 1:1-18

1. Would Joshua have been surprised at how things are working out in Judges 1:1-18?

In v 5-15 we get two 'snapshots' which give us an insight into the kind of things that happened during Judah's campaign.

2. The first snapshot talks about Adoni Bezek (v 5-7). What happens to him?

3. Did Adoni-Bezek get what he deserved?

4. As a representative picture, what does this gory little snapshot tell us about Judah's campaign?

In v 12-15 we meet the first of a number of prominent women who feature in the book of Judges

5. What kind of character is Achsah?

6. Would God approve of her request? Why/Why not?

Grinding to a Halt...

Read Joshua 1:19

7. Would Joshua have been surprised to read verse 19? Why?

At first Judah has lots of success. With Adoni Bezek we see that they are God's instruments of justice, giving the Canaanites the kind of treatment they deserved. Achsah shows their resourcefulness and determination in taking the land. But they can't handle the iron chariots. This may seem reasonable at first glance, but coming straight after a reminder that God himself is with them, it makes you wonder. Can't God handle chariots? From what Joshua said before he died, it didn't sound like anything was going to stop God giving Israel the land.

Ending with a whimper ...

Read Judges 1:20-36

8. How does the campaign go for the rest of the tribes?

9. Does the story about Joseph capturing Luz remind you of any other Old Testament Story?

The well known story of Rahab helping the Israelites to conquer Jericho has lots of similarities with the conquest of Luz (if you want the details, check Joshua 2:1-14). But there are also differences. Look at the end of the Rahab story in Joshua 6:25

25 But Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho--and she lives among the Israelites to this day.

10. Compare the way Rahab and the man from Luz react to being spared by the Israelites. What do you notice?

11. What is the significance of the man going and building a new city of Luz?

Apart from Judah, the Israelite campaign is ineffective. Their attempt to destroy Luz is typical. It's not destroyed, just transplanted. Unlike Rahab, who genuinely wanted to join the Israelite cause and serve their God, the man from Luz just wants to preserving his pagan culture and religion. As we'll see, it's this surviving Canaanite religion that causes big problems for Israel.

Who's to Blame?

Read Judges 2:1-5

12. What promise are we reminded about in 1?

13. In the light of God's promise, why is it surprising that the Israelite campaign is so ineffective?

14. What is the real cause of Israel's failure to drive out the Canaanites (v2)?

God doesn't completely fulfil his promise because Israel doesn't keep their side of the agreement and obey him. The question is, how and when will God finish fulfilling his promise...

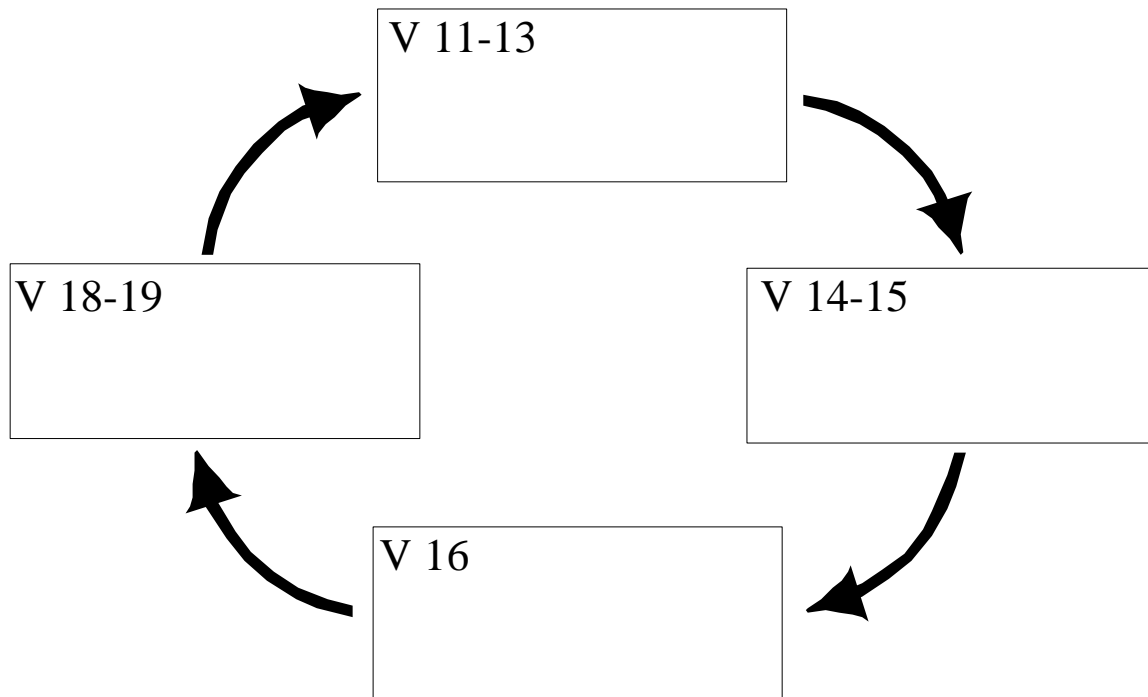
Read Judges 2: 6-19

In v 6-19 we leave the story of Israel's campaign against the Canaanites and get a summary of the whole period of the judges starting at the time of Joshua.

16. How do the Israelites start out their lives in the promise land (v7)?

17. When do things start to go wrong (v10)?

18. In v 11-19 we see the cycle which happens again and again in the book of Judges. Fill in this cycle in the boxes below.



19. According to these verses, what is a judge ?

20. How effective are the Judges? Are they the final fulfilment of God's promise to give the people the land?

The Judges clearly aren't the final fulfilment of God's promises to Israel. They do play an important role calling the Israelites to serve God and delivering them from their enemies. But as the same old cycle of rebellion and punishment happens time after time, it becomes clear that God's promises are no closer to fulfilment at the end of the book than at the beginning. This leaves us with the important question, will God ever be able to fulfil his promises to such a wayward people?

21. Thinking through the rest of the Old Testament, do you think Israel ever gets their act together?

22. Does God ever finish fulfilling his promises to Israel?

23. Has God fulfilled his promises now? Can you think of any New Testament passages which might suggest that he has?