

Judges

Lesson #8

Calamitous Compromise

(1: 1 – 3: 5)

Review

As we entered Lesson #7, Joshua was *“old and advanced in years”* (23: 1). He assembled all the tribes at Shechem, the village that sits between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, and he delivered his farewell address, ending by reiterating the clear choice that Moses had so vividly posed: life or death; blessing or curse.

With this dichotomy made clear, Joshua closed memorably: *“As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord”* (24: 15).

The book of Joshua is profoundly troubling in many ways, but especially in its emphatic and vivid insistence on God’s commanding the Israelites to put “under the ban” entire populations, every man, woman and child in the conquered cities. Spin it how we might, *herem*—putting a population “under the ban”—is genocide, pure and simple, the total extermination of entire populations for religious, ethnic or political purposes. As we left the book of Joshua, we examined *herem* more closely, and we sought to understand how God could possibly have commanded this.

Preview

With the land subdued (to some degree) and allocated, and with Joshua and his generation dead, who will lead Israel? Recall that Israel is to be a theocracy, with God as their king; they are not to have a person as king, a man with absolute authority ruling over all.

But consider the resulting problems. The tribal land allocations follow natural geographic and topographic boundaries, with north-to-south strata separating large groups of people: 1) the flat, coastal plain; 2) the high central mountain range; 3) the deep Jordan rift valley; and 4) the high eastern mountain range. Who will govern the land? Who will control the two international trade routes, the Via Maris and the King's Highway? Who will defend communities when outsiders invade? Who will negotiate trade agreements? Who will manage water resources and roads? Who will collect taxes? And from whom?

Preview, cont.

And consider that the Israelites did not, in fact, conquer the land. There are still a great many indigenous people living among the Israelites, and—as we might expect, in direct disobedience to God—the Israelites socialize with them, date them, and marry them:

“So the Israelites settled among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. They took their daughters in marriage, and gave their own daughters to their sons in marriage, and served their gods.”

(3: 5)

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The death of Joshua left a gaping hole in Israel's leadership. Moses had groomed Joshua to succeed him, as later in the New Testament, St. Paul would groom Timothy to succeed him. But no leader emerged upon Joshua's death.

Consequently, the Israelites consult God directly about the on-going task of subjugating Canaan.

“After the death of Joshua the Israelites consulted the Lord, asking, ‘Who shall be first among us to attack the Canaanites and to do battle with them?’ The Lord answered: Judah shall attack: I have delivered the land into his power. Judah then said to his brother Simeon, ‘Come up with me into the territory allotted to me, and let us do battle with the Canaanites. I will likewise go with you into the territory allotted to you. So Simeon went with him.”

(1: 1-3)



The book of Joshua gave the impression that the Israelite conquest of Canaan was swift and complete, an idealized, heroic account; whereas, in Judges the conquest is portrayed as a gradual, more realistic process.

This squares well with what we read earlier in Exodus:

“I will have the terror of me precede you so that I will throw into panic every nation you reach. I will make all your enemies turn from you in flight, and ahead of you I will send hornets to drive the Hivites, Canaanites and Hittites out of your way. But I will not drive them all out before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the wild animals multiply against you. Little by little I will drive them out before you”

(23: 27-30)

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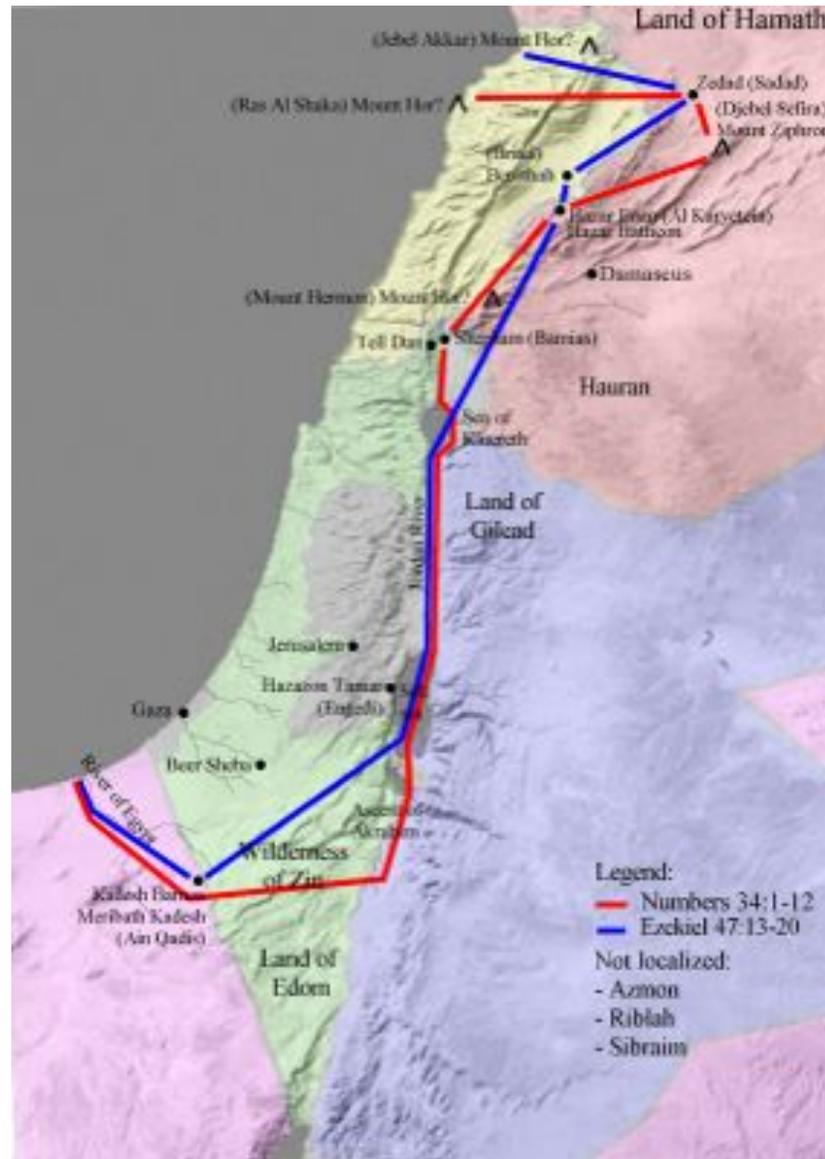


As Judges opens, the Israelites confer with God, asking, *“Who shall be first among us to attack the Canaanites and do battle with them”* (1: 1).

God replies: Judah.

The term “Canaanites” does not refer to a specific group or tribe of people; rather, it is an ethnic catch-all term for the many indigenous people living in the southern Levant, an area that includes modern-day Israel, Palestine and Jordan, as well as southern portions of Lebanon and Syria.

Check it out on a map:



The land of Canaan, as defined in Numbers 34: 1-12 (red line) and Ezekiel 47: 13-20 (blue line).

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_Land_of_Israel.jpg

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Now, consider the Israelite tribal lands as allocated in Joshua, and the number of men in each tribe, as counted in the 2nd census in Numbers:



Reuben	43,730
Simeon	22,200
Judah	76,500
Issachar	64,300
Zebulum	60,500
Ephraim	32,500
Manasseh	52,700
Benjamin	45,600
Dan	64,400
Asher	53,400
Gad	40,500
Naphtali	<u>45,400</u>
Total	601,730



I see! It makes sense that Judah, the largest of the tribes, and Simeon, which sits within the boundaries of Judah, would lead the attack.



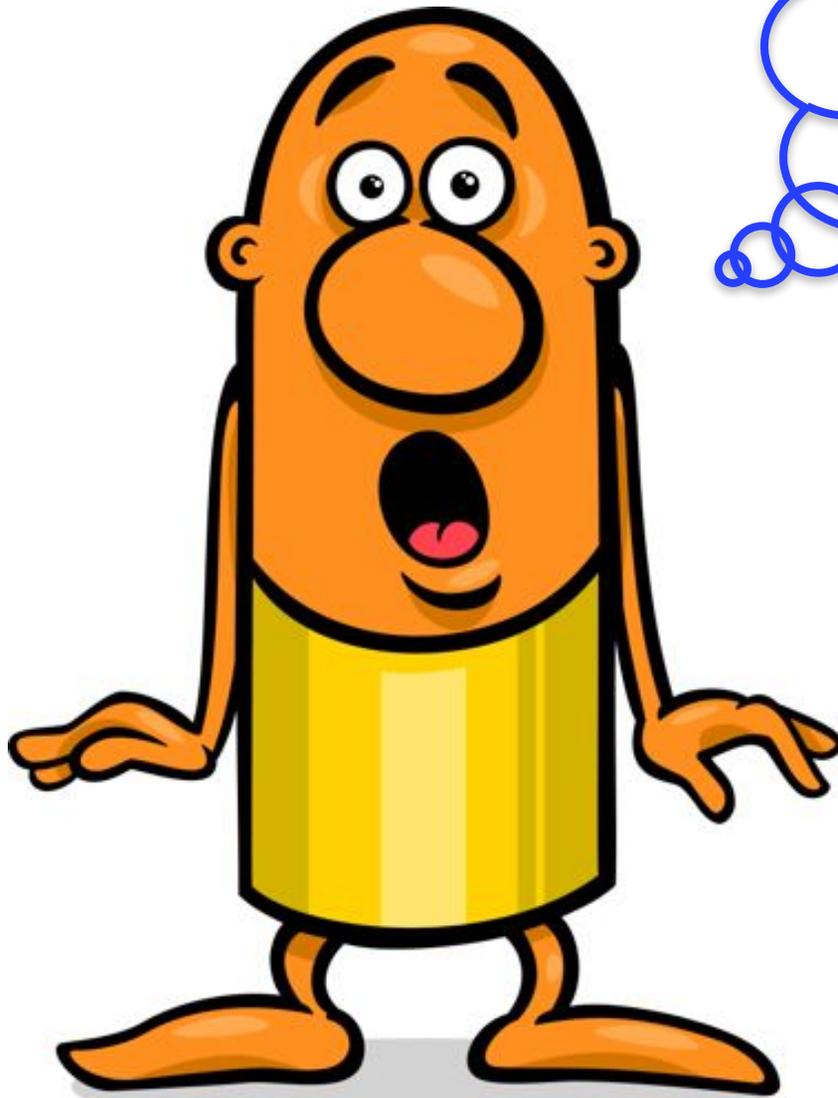
And Judah will play a prominent role in our on-going story. It is the tribe of David, and Jesus himself is from the tribe of Judah.

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“When Judah attacked, the Lord delivered the Canaanites and Perizzites into their power, and they struck down ten thousand of them in Bezek. They came upon Adonibezek in Bezek and fought against him. When they struck down the Canaanites and Perizzites, Adonibezek fled. They pursued him, and when they caught him, they cut off his thumbs and big toes. ‘Seventy kings,’ said Adonibezek, ‘used to pick up scraps under my table with their thumbs and big toes cut off. As I have done, so has God repaid me.’ He was brought to Jerusalem, and he died there. The Judahites fought against Jerusalem, captured it, and put it to the sword, setting the city itself on fire.”

(1: 4-8)

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**Holy cow!
They cut off his
thumbs and big toes!**



Now there's poetic justice!
Adonai-bezek had cut off the
thumbs and big toes of 70 kings he
had defeated, so the Israelites cut
off his thumbs and big toes. That's
a great example of *lex talionis*!

Without thumbs you can't
grasp a weapon, and without
big toes you can't run. The
Israelites render Adonai-
bezek harmless.

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miles
km

100

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Traditional tomb of Joshua.

Calamitous Compromise

“Afterward the Judahites went down to fight against the Canaanites who lived in the mountain region, in the Negeb, and in the foothills. Judah also marched against the Canaanites who lived in Hebron, which was formerly called Kiriath-arba, and defeated Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai. They marched from there against the inhabitants of Debir, which was formerly called Kiriath-sepher. Caleb said, ‘To the man who attacks Kiriath-sepher and captures it, I will give my daughter Achsah in marriage.’ Othniel captured it, the son of Caleb’s younger brother Kenaz; so Caleb gave him his daughter Achsah in marriage. When she came to him, she induced him to ask her father for some land. Then, as she alighted from the donkey, Caleb asked her, ‘What do you want?’ She answered, ‘Give me a present. Since you have put me in the land of the Negeb, give me pools of water.’ So Caleb gave her what she wanted, both the upper and the lower pool.”

(1: 9-15)

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Traditional tomb of Joshua.



Caleb said, “*To the man who attacks Kiriath-sepher and captures it, I will give my daughter Achsah in marriage*” (1: 12). Othniel does, so Caleb gives Othniel his daughter, Achsah, as a bride.

Of course, the bride expects a wedding gift from her father, Caleb, and since Kiriath-sepher (or Debir) is in the Negev desert, she asks for pools of water, a valuable resource.



Dr. C. and his intrepid Logos students exploring the Negev desert!

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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Water is the most valuable resource in the desert, so we set off in search of some.

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As we learn how to find water following animal trails, ibex stand guard, ready to warn the herd.

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Ah, ha! Water! An upper and lower spring in the Negev, a valuable and life-supporting resource.

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Now that we've found water, it's time for lunch! Is that a Hebrew National hot dog?

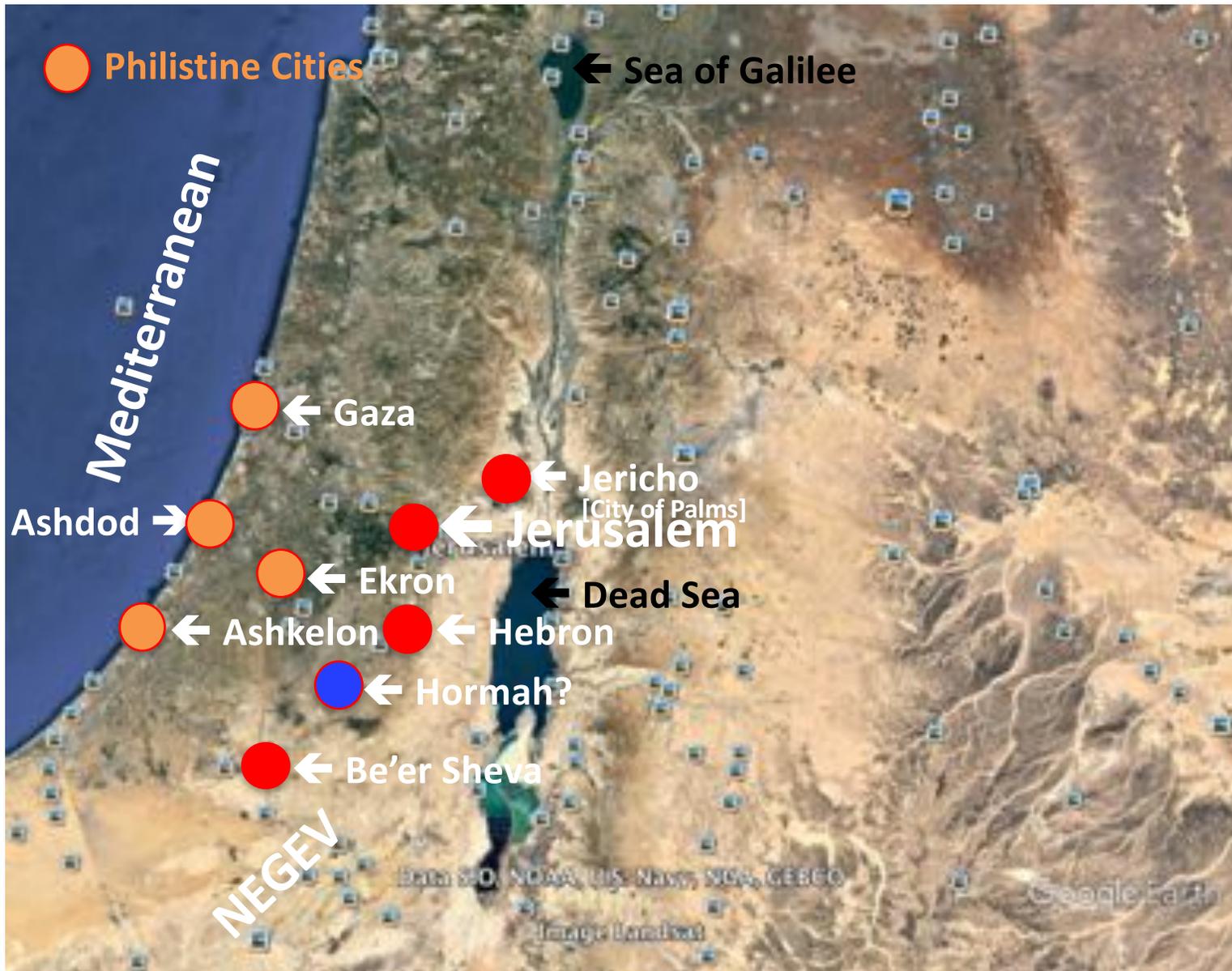
Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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“The descendants of Hobab the Kenite, Moses’ father-in-law, came up with the Judahites from the City of Palms to the wilderness of Arad, which is in the Negeb, and they settled among the Amalekites. Then Judah went with his brother Simeon, and they defeated the Canaanites who lived in Zephath. They put the city under the ban and renamed it Hormah. Judah **[did not capture]** Gaza with its territory, **Ashkelon** with its territory, **Ekron** with its territory, and **Ashdod** with its territory. The Lord was with Judah, so they gained possession of the mountain region. **But they could not dispossess those who lived on the plain, because they had iron chariots.** As Moses had commanded, they gave Hebron to Caleb, who then drove the three sons of Anak away from there. As for the Jebusites dwelling in Jerusalem, the Benjaminites did not dispossess them, so that the Jebusites live with the Benjaminites in Jerusalem to the present day.”

(1: 16-21)

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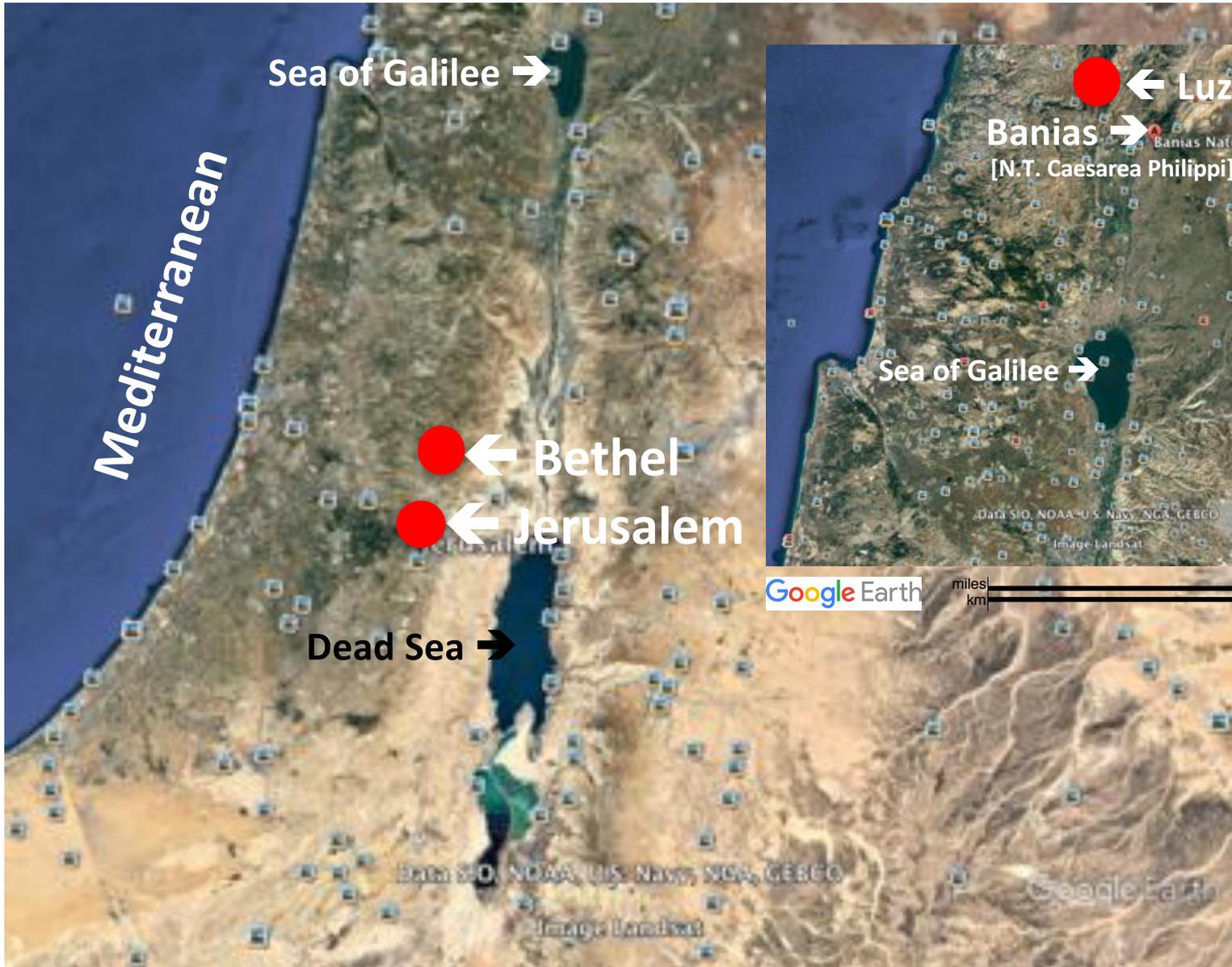
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Traditional tomb of Joshua.

“The house of Joseph, too, went up against Bethel, and the Lord was with them. The house of Joseph reconnoitered Bethel, which formerly was called Luz. The scouts saw a man coming out of the city and said to him, ‘Tell us the way into the city, and we will show you mercy.’ He showed them the way into the city, and they put the city to the sword; but they let the man and his whole clan go free. The man then went to the land of the Hittites, where he built a city and called it Luz, which is its name to this day.”

(1: 22-26)

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Traditional tomb of Joshua.



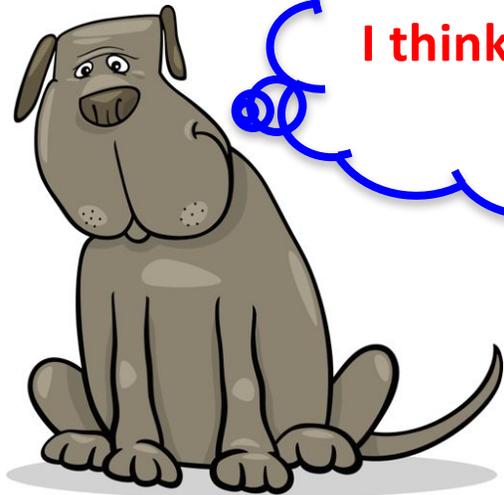
With the list of cities conquered by Judah and Simeon (plus Bethel, conquered by “Joseph”; that is, Ephraim), Judges goes on to list those cities still not conquered:

- Manasseh did not take **Beth-shean**
- Nor did Zebulun dispossess **Kitron** or **Nahalol**;
- Nor did Asher dispossess the inhabitants of **Acco** or those of **Sidon**;
- Nor did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of **Beth-Shemesh** or those of **Beth-anath**;
- The **Amorites** hemmed in the Danites in the mountain region, not permitting them to come down onto the plain.

Indeed, *“the territory of the Amorites extended from the Akrabbim pass, from Sela and upward”* (1: 36).



That's still a significant swatch of territory left to conquer. In Joshua the Israelites were battling 1,000, slaughtering ruthlessly every enemy they encountered. Judges seems much more realistic.



I think so, too!

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Not only that, but in Joshua—with the exception of Achan's theft—the Israelites never fail; they obey God consistently. That's not true in Judges.

“A messenger of the Lord went up from Gilgal to Bochim and said, I brought you up from Egypt and led you into the land which I promised on oath to your ancestors. I said, I will never break my covenant with you, but you must not make a covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you must pull down their altars. But you did not listen to me. Look what you have done! For I also said, I will not clear them out of your way; they will become traps for you, and their gods a snare for you. When the messenger of the Lord had spoken these things to all the Israelites, the people wept aloud. They named that place Bochim, and they offered sacrifice there to the Lord.”

(2: 1-5)

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Indeed, God had warned Israel repeatedly not to make any covenants with the people of Canaan and to pull down their altars, scouring the land of any vestige of Canaanite gods. Listen to Joshua:

“As for you, take great care to love the Lord, your God. For if you ever turn away from him and join with the remnant of these nations that survive among you, by intermarrying and intermingling with them, know for certain that the Lord, your God will no longer dispossess these nations at your approach. Instead they will be a snare and a trap for you, a scourge for your sides and thorns for your eyes, until you perish from this good land which the Lord, your God, has given you.”

(23: 11-13)



As long as Joshua and the people of his generation still influenced the Israelites, they seem to have done alright, for the most part.

But when Joshua and his generation died, everything changed:

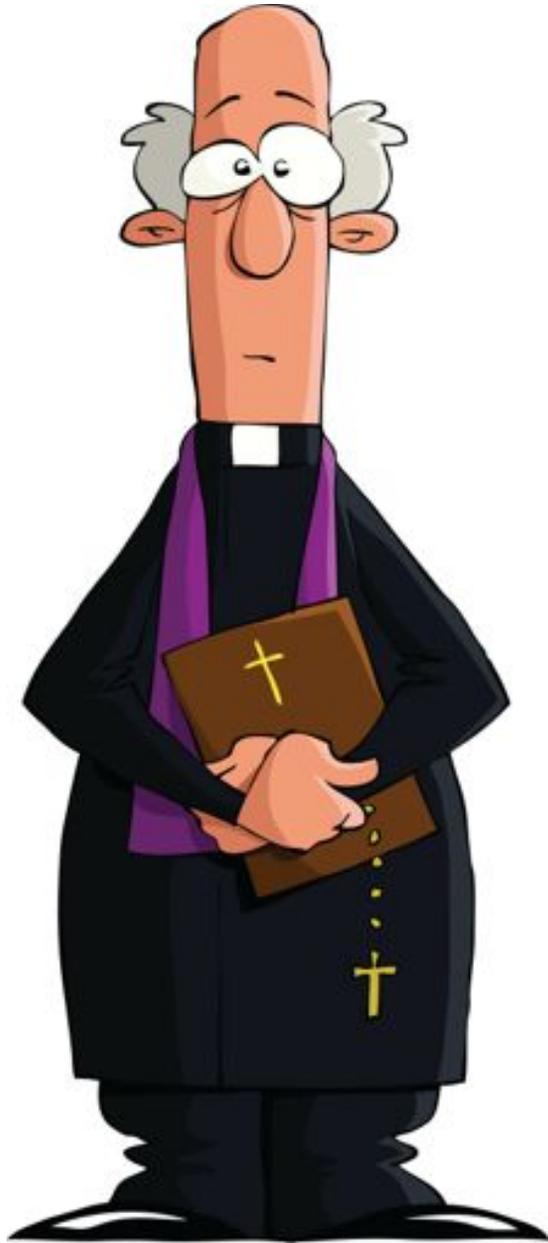
“When the rest of that generation were also gathered to their ancestors, and a later generation arose that did not know the Lord or the work he had done for Israel, the Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. They served the Baals, and abandoned the Lord, the God of their ancestors, the one who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They followed other gods, the gods of the peoples around them, and bowed down to them, and provoked the Lord.”

(2: 10-12)



God knew this would likely happen, and he warned Israel against it over and over again. As Joshua said, *“Choose today whom you will serve”* (24: 15). We’ll either serve God, or we’ll serve something or someone else.

The new generation didn’t know God because no one had ever taught them about him. They were ignorant!



Sadly, that's often the case. That's why the *Shema* is so important, so essential in Judaism:

“Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength. Take to heart these words which I command you today. Keep repeating them to your children. Recite them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them on your arm as a sign and let them be as a pendant on your forehead. Write them on the doorpost of your houses and on your gates.”

(Deuteronomy 6: 4-9)

Each generation must be taught about God, otherwise they will be ignorant of him, quickly adopting the values and customs of the pagan or secular culture in which they live.

“Because they had abandoned the Lord and served Baal and the Astartes, the anger of the Lord flared up against Israel, and he delivered them into the power of plunderers who despoiled them. He sold them into the power of the enemies around them, and they were no longer able to withstand their enemies. Whenever they marched out, the hand of the Lord turned against them, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn to them; and they were in great distress.”

(2: 13-15)



As we know, the world of the Hebrew Scriptures is a polytheistic world, in which *everyone*, including the Israelites, believed in many gods. The Israelites knew the Egyptian gods, and they had even turned to Hathor, the nurturing mother goddess of Egypt in the incident of the “golden calf” at Mt. Sinai. But who were these other gods in Canaan?



That's a good question!

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Ba'al holding a thunderbolt (limestone),
c. 15th – 13th centuries, B.C.
Louvre Museum, Paris.

Ba'al was the primary god of the Canaanites and Phoenicians. Originally referred to as Haddad in ancient Mesopotamia, he was the god of rain, storms, thunder and lightning, the god that enabled fertile land and healthy crops. We might think of him as the “god of the life force,” or what the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas called “the force that through the green fuse drives the flower.”

As Haddad's cult grew in importance, scholars believe that his name became too holy for all but the high priests to pronounce, so he came to be called Ba'al, which simply means “Lord,” much as “Adonai” was a substitute for the Israelite god YHWH or “Bel” for the Babylonian god Marduk.

In Ugaritic texts Ba'al was associated with the bull, a symbol of strength and fertility.



The goddess Astarte (alabaster, gold, terracotta and rubies),
c. 3rd century B.C. – 3rd century A.D.
Louvre Museum, Paris.

Astarte (or Ashteroth) is the Hellenized form of the Middle Eastern goddess Ishtar, the female counterpart to Ba'al, and the goddess of sexuality and fertility. Her most prominent symbol was the crescent moon or "horns," much like the Egyptian goddess Hathor.



This alabaster figurine of Astarte (the Lady of Galera, northern Spain, 7th century B.C.), holds a bowl filled with milk (poured through her head). Soft wax plugged her breasts, which when gently melted, allowed the milk to flow. It resides in the National Archaeological Museum of Spain.

“The anger of the Lord flared up against Israel, and he said: Because this nation has transgressed my covenant, which I enjoined on their ancestors, and has not listened to me, I for my part will not clear away for them any more of the nations Joshua left when he died. They will be made to test Israel, to see whether or not they will keep to the way of the Lord and continue in it as their ancestors did. Therefore the Lord allowed these nations to remain instead of expelling them immediately. He had not delivered them into the power of Joshua.”

(2: 20-23)



As God promised, so will he do. The Israelites have turned away from God, have broken their covenant with him and have turned to other gods. And all this after only one generation! We can only think of the dreadful consequences of such behavior in Deuteronomy 28: the curses!



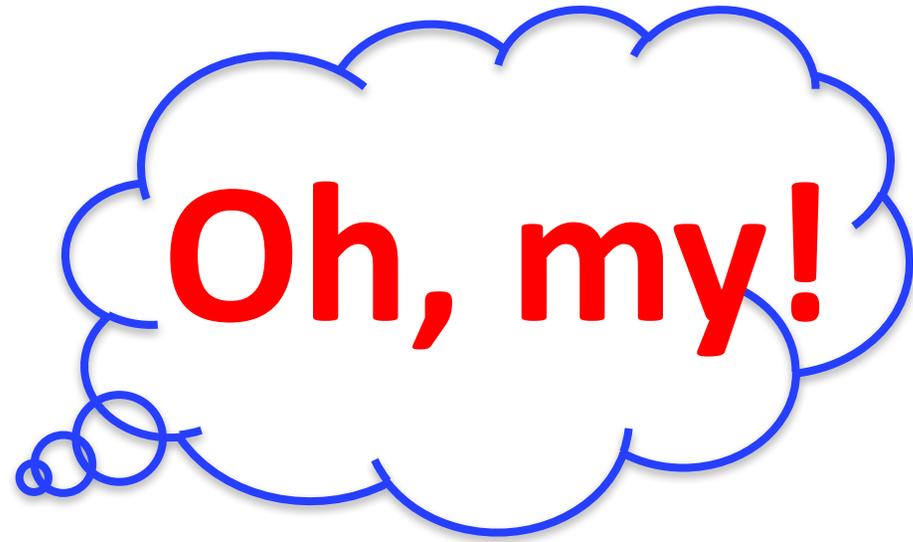
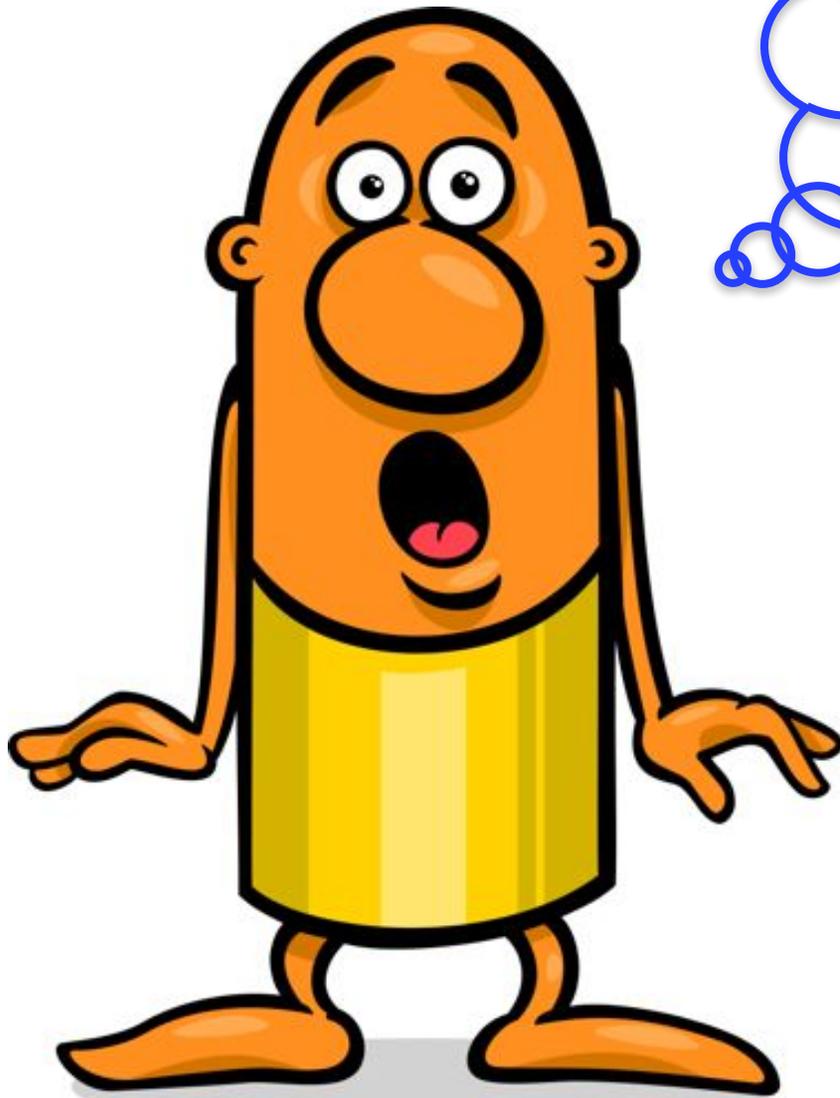
How far have the Israelites fallen?

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“These are the nations the Lord allowed to remain, so that through them he might test Israel, all those who had not experienced any of the Canaanite wars—to teach warfare to those generations of Israelites who had never experienced it: the five lords of the Philistines [the five cities on the coastal plain: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath], and all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites who lived in the mountain region of the Lebanon between Baal-hermon and Lebo-hamath. These served as a test for Israel, to know whether they would obey the commandments the Lord had enjoined on their ancestors through Moses. **So the Israelites settled among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. They took their daughters in marriage, and gave their own daughters to their sons in marriage, and served their gods.**”

(3: 1-6)

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Questions for discussion and thought

1. When the men of Judah capture Adonai-bezek, why do they cut off his thumbs and big toes?
2. Caleb's daughter asks for "pools of water" as a wedding gift. Why?
3. Why do the Israelites suddenly abandon God and do as they please?
4. Why would the Israelites worship Ba'al and Astarte, rather than God?
5. How does God punish the Israelites for abandoning him?

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