

Judges 1:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the LORD said, Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand.

Analysis

And the LORD said, Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand.

God's response designates Judah as the lead tribe, fulfilling Jacob's prophetic blessing that "the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come" (Genesis 49:10). This divine selection affirms Judah's leadership role that will culminate in David's kingship (2 Samuel 5:1-5) and ultimately the Messiah (Matthew 1:1-17). The Hebrew Yahweh (יהוה) emphasizes covenant faithfulness—God remains committed to His promises despite Israel's incomplete obedience under Joshua.

The phrase "I have delivered" (natati, נתתי) uses the Hebrew perfect tense, indicating completed action from God's perspective. Though the conquest remains incomplete from human perspective, God's promise is certain—victory is already accomplished in the divine decree. This creates profound theological tension: God has given the land (perfect tense), yet Israel must actively possess it through obedient faith. The phrase "into his hand" (beyado, בידו) signifies total control and possession, affirming God's empowerment for the task. Similar language appears throughout conquest narratives (Joshua 2:24, 6:2, 8:1).

However, the designation of a single tribe rather than unified national campaign hints at the fragmentation characterizing the judges period. Unlike Joshua's united Israel conquering Canaan (Joshua 1-12), Judges shows increasing tribal autonomy

and diminishing national cohesion. Judah's selection also foreshadows the eventual north-south division of the kingdom (1 Kings 12), with Judah maintaining the Davidic line and temple worship.

Historical Context

Judah's tribal territory was the largest, stretching from the Dead Sea westward to the Mediterranean, bounded by Dan and Benjamin in the north and Simeon in the south (Joshua 15:1-63). The terrain included the Judean wilderness (rugged desert east of Jerusalem), the Shephelah (foothills between mountains and coastal plain), and portions of the Negev (southern desert). This strategic location controlled access routes between Egypt and Mesopotamia.

Archaeological evidence confirms Canaanite presence in Judean territory during this period. Major Canaanite cities like Lachish, Debir (Kiriath-sepher), and Hebron (Kiriath-arba) required conquest. The Jebusites controlled Jerusalem, which wouldn't be captured until David's reign (2 Samuel 5:6-9). Egyptian influence was waning—the last significant Egyptian campaign into Canaan was Merneptah's campaign (c. 1208 BCE), which mentions "Israel" in the famous Merneptah Stele, the earliest extrabiblical reference to Israel.

Judah's designation as lead tribe reflects both divine sovereignty and practical considerations. Judah had the largest population among the tribes and strategic territorial position. Jacob's prophetic blessing (Genesis 49:8-12) promised Judah preeminence, describing the tribe as a lion and promising the scepter would remain in Judah until Shiloh (the Messiah) comes. This prophecy finds initial fulfillment in Judah's leadership role here and ultimate fulfillment in Christ.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does understanding victory as already accomplished in God's perspective change your approach to spiritual battles and sanctification?
2. What does Judah's selection teach about God's sovereignty in choosing leaders versus human criteria for leadership?
3. In what ways does Judah's incomplete conquest despite God's promise parallel Christian experience of 'already but not yet' victory over sin?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּאמֶר	יְהוָה ה	יְהוּדָה ה	יָעֹלָה ה	הִנֵּה ה	נֹתַתִּי
said	And the LORD	Judah	shall go up	H2009	behold I have delivered
H559	H3068	H3063	H5927		H5414
אֶת	הָאָרֶץ	בְּיָדוֹ:			
H853	the land	into his hand			
	H776	H3027			

Additional Cross-References

Revelation 5:5 (Parallel theme): And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.