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Isra’el’s Failure to Conquer the Land 1:1 to 3:6

ADONAI, the Judge



These verses form a two-part introduction to the book (**to see link click Ai - The Failures of the Southern Tribes**) and (**Aj - The Failures of the Northern Tribes**). It tells us how **the Israelites** fared as they tried to complete the conquest of **Canaan** by occupying the areas that had been allotted to **them** by **Joshua** (see the commentary on **Joshua Bq - The Settlement of the Land**). Like the biblical accounts of the careers of **Sha’ul**, **Solomon**, and **Uzziah**, it begins well but ends badly. It begins with **Isra’el** wholeheartedly seeking **the LORD**. **The Israelites asked ADONAI, “Who will be the first to go up and fight for us against the Canaanites.”** God replied: **Judah will go up; behold, I have handed the Land over to him (1:1-2)**, and it ends with **them** weeping before **Him** (see **Al - The Angel of ADONAI Confronts Isra’el**). The intervening verses recount the activities, successes, and failures of the individual tribes, beginning with **Judah** and **Simeon in 1:9**, and ending with **Dan in 1:34**.

Of particular interest is the strategic repetition of the Hebrew verb *ala*, **to go up** in **1:1** to **2:5** as a whole. In **1:1-2** **the Israelites** asked: **Who will be the first to go up?** The account of the fortunes of **the southern tribes** begins when **Judah**

“goes up” in **1:4**. The corresponding sections dealing with the northern tribes begins when **Joseph “goes up”** in **1:22**, and the conclusion is reached when **the Angel of ADONAI “goes up”** in **2:1**. This is partly a simple matter of topography – a movement up into the central hill country. Then there is a subsequent **“going down”** in **2:9**. However, **the “going up”** has more significance than this. The repetition of *a/a* unifies the passage as a whole, helps to delineate its parts, and shows us that the end comes in **2:1-5** rather than at the end of **Chapter 1**. When **the Angel of ADONAI “goes up”** in **2:1**, a climax is reached. All that has gone on beforehand is reviewed and evaluated, and this evaluation produces the weeping of **2:4**. While there have been some successes in **Chapter 1**, overall it has been a chronicle of failure.⁵