The Background to David Becoming King over Israel
Part 1

A study in the life of David is not just important for deepening our knowledge of the Bible. It shows how the history of a people group is powerfully impacted by poor decisions and sinful behavior of previous generations. And yet, in spite of this pattern of failures and human flaws within the nation of Israel, God demonstrated His sovereignty over history by accomplishing His will. Most notably, that was manifested by turning the nation's desire for a king into the foundation for bringing about the Messiah as the Son of David and the Redeemer of sinful humanity.

In order to understand how David became Israel's renowned king, we first have to consider the full context that led to that moment. In our previous studies, we covered the entire Torah, spanning the time from Creation to the end of the wilderness wanderings of Israel. And then we covered the book of Joshua, which records Israel's transition from a nomadic nation in the wilderness to a settled people in the Promised Land. That transition included leadership of the nation from Moses to Joshua, who, then, leads the military conquest of the land of Canaan. That conquest was followed by the allocation of the inheritance of that land according to the tribes.

The book concludes with Joshua's farewell message, in which he challenges the people to "Choose this day whom you will serve" (Josh 24:15). In response, the people swore a covenant promise to serve Adonai alone. In essence, they were declaring their submission to Adonai as their king. Joshua, then, died at the age of 110, and the book closes with Israel securely established and faithful.

The transition from Joshua to Judges shifts abruptly from an era of unified victory to an era of tribal fragmentation and spiritual decay. This outcome was the result of three key factors:

1. The Leadership Vacuum

Joshua failed to train or appoint a single, centralized successor to take his place. In the days of Joshua, Israel functioned as a unified national army under one commander. In the days of Judges, the nation fragments into isolated tribes, leaving them vulnerable to external military pressure and internal political chaos.

2. The Unfinished Business

While Joshua broke the backbone of major Canaanite military resistance, he did not completely eradicate the pagan population. He left individual tribes responsible for clearing out the remaining locals within their own borders. Judges 1 opens with this exact mandate, but the tribes quickly compromise by using the Canaanites for forced labor rather than expelling them.

3. The Generational Disconnect

Joshua 24:31 notes that Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua and the elders who outlived him. However, because the primary eyewitnesses to God's miracles died without successfully passing their faith to their children, Judges 2:10 introduces a tragic pivot:

> "All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know Adonai, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel."

This spiritual ignorance instantly triggered the tragic cycle of idolatry, oppression, and chaos that defined the entire period of the Judges.

The Incomplete Conquest of Canaan (Judges 1:1–36)

Initial Success Under Judah's Leadership (1:1–20)

- **Consulting the Lord:** After Joshua's death, Israel asks who should fight first; God appoints Judah (1:1–2).
- **The Alliance with Simeon:** Judah partners with Simeon to defeat the Canaanites and Perizzites (1:3–10).
- **The Cruelty of Adoni-Bezek:** A pagan king is captured and mutilated, acknowledging his own poetic justice from God (1:5–7).
- **Caleb's Incentive:** Othniel (the first future judge) captures Kiriath-sepher and wins Achsah as his wife (1:11–15).
- **The Iron Chariot Obstacle:** Judah takes the hill country but fails to drive out valley inhabitants due to their iron chariots, showing an early lack of faith (1:19).

The Progressive Failure of the Remaining Tribes (1:21–36)

- **Benjamin's Failure:** Fails to drive out the Jebusites from Jerusalem (1:21).
- **Joseph's House:** Takes Bethel through betrayal but allows the informant to escape and rebuild a Hittite city (1:22–26).
- **The Pattern of Compromise:** Manasseh, Ephraim, Zebulun, Asher, and Naphtali fail to expel the inhabitants, opting instead to put them to forced labor (1:27–33).
- **The Amorite Pushback:** The Danites are physically forced into the hill country by the Amorites, losing their geographic foothold (1:34–36).

The Spiritual Verdict and The Pattern of the Era (Judges 2:1–23)

The Confrontation at Bochim (2:1–5)

- **The Angel's Indictment:** The Angel of the Lord reminds Israel of His covenant and rebukes them for breaking their command to destroy pagan altars (2:1–3).
- **The Consequence:** God declares He will no longer drive out the nations; they will become thorns and traps (2:3).
- **The People's Weeping:** Israel weeps and offers sacrifices, naming the place Bochim ("Weeping"), but shows no lasting repentance (2:4–5).

The Transition to a Faithless Generation (2:6–15)

- **The Death of Joshua:** Joshua dies at 110; the people served the Lord only as long as his eyewitness generation lived (2:6–9).
- **The New Generation:** A generation arises that "did not know the Lord or the work he had done" (2:10).
- **Apostasy Into Baal Worship:** Israel abandons God to serve Baal and the Ashtaroth, provoking God's anger (2:11–13).

The Cycle of the Judges Defined (2:16–23)

- **Divine Compassion:** God raises up judges to save them from plunderers (2:16).
- **Systemic Rebellion:** Israel refuses to listen to the judges, quickly turning back to idolatry once a judge dies (2:17–19).
- **The Testing Grounds:** God leaves the remaining nations alive specifically to test Israel's obedience to His ways (2:20–23).

The First Judges: Othniel and Ehud (Judges 3:1–31)

The List of Nations and Intermarriage (3:1–6)

- The nations are left to teach warfare to generations who hadn't experienced it (3:1–2).
- Israel compromises completely through intermarriage and worshiping foreign gods (3:5–6).

Othniel: The Ideal Judge (3:7–11)

- **The Sin:** Israel forgets God and serves the Baals (3:7).
- **The Oppression:** Sold to Cushan-rishathaim of Mesopotamia for 8 years (3:8).
- **The Deliverer:** Othniel, empowered by the Spirit of the Lord, defeats the oppressor (3:9–10).
- **The Result:** The land enjoys rest for 40 years (3:11).

Ehud: The Left-Handed Assassin (3:12–30)

- **The Oppression:** King Eglon of Moab oppresses Israel for 18 years (3:12–14).
- **The Secret Weapon:** Ehud, a left-handed Benjamite, hides a double-edged sword under his clothes (3:15–16).
- **The Assassination:** Ehud delivers a "secret message" to the obese King Eglon in his private room, plunging the sword completely into him (3:17–23).
- **The Escape and Victory:** Ehud escapes while servants wait, rallies Ephraim at the fords of the Jordan, and slaughters 10,000 Moabites (3:24–29).
- **The Result:** The land has rest for 80 years (3:30).

Shamgar: The Minor Deliverer (3:31)

- Kills 600 Philistines with an oxgoad, saving Israel from a coastal threat.

Deborah, Barak, and the Defeat of Jabin (Judges 4:1–24)

Unlike other figures in the book who are primarily military deliverers *(moshia),* Deborah is the only person explicitly described as actively holding court and resolving legal disputes (Judges 4:4–5). Her leadership was based on wisdom, prophecy, and spiritual authority rather than physical might. The text presents her authority as naturally accepted by the people, including the military commander Barak, who refused to go to battle without her presence.

Her role is consistent with a recurring theme in the book of Judges that also relates to David becoming king, and that is how God continually uses unexpected, marginalized, or unconventional

leaders to deliver Israel. In the patriarchal context of the ancient Near East, appointing a woman as a national leader was a powerful statement of divine sovereignty. It demonstrated that God's empowerment is not restricted by human social hierarchies or cultural norms.

The Canaanite Oppression (4:1–3)

- After Ehud's death, Israel sins again; God sells them to Jabin, king of Canaan (4:1–2).
- The military threat: Sisera, commander of Jabin's army, commands 900 iron chariots and oppresses Israel for 20 years (4:2–3)

The Summoning of Barak (4:4–10)

- **Deborah's Role:** Introduced as a prophetess and active judge, holding court under the Palm of Deborah (4:4–5).
- **The Command:** She summons Barak, ordering him to take 10,000 men to Mount Tabor to face Sisera (4:6–7).
- **Barak's Hesitation:** Barak refuses to go unless Deborah accompanies him (4:8).
- **The Prophecy:** Deborah agrees but declares the glory of the victory will go to a woman, not Barak (4:9–10).

The Battle at the Kishon River (4:11–16)

- Sisera rallies his 900 iron chariots to the river Kishon (4:12–13).
- Deborah gives the battle order; the Lord throws Sisera's army into a panic before Barak's charging men (4:14–15).
- Sisera abandons his chariot and flees on foot while his army is annihilated (4:15–16).

Jael's Unlikely Execution (4:17–24)

- Sisera flees to the tent of Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite, expecting safety due to an alliance (4:17).
- Jael offers him milk, covers him, and waits for him to sleep from exhaustion (4:18–19).
- **The Fatal Blow:** Jael takes a tent peg and a hammer, driving the peg through Sisera's temple into the ground (4:21).
- Barak arrives to find the dead commander, fulfilling Deborah's prophecy (4:22–24).

The Song of Deborah and Jael (Judges 5:1–31)

Praise for Leadership and Cosmic Intervention (5:1–5)

- A poetic celebration of leaders taking the lead and people offering themselves willingly (5:1–2).
- Recalling God's dramatic march from Sinai, causing earthquakes and torrential downpours (5:4–5).

The Desolation Before the Uprising (5:6–11)

- Describing life under oppression: highways abandoned, village life ceasing until Deborah arose as a "mother in Israel" (5:6–7).
- The complete lack of shields or spears among 40,000 in Israel (5:8).

The Roll Call of the Tribes (5:14–18)

- **The Faithful:** Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir (Manasseh), Zebulun, Issachar, and Naphtali risked their lives in battle (5:14–15, 18).
- **The Cowards:** Reuben stayed among the sheepfolds; Gilead stayed across the Jordan; Dan and Asher remained by their ships and coasts (5:15–17).

The Theological Reality of the Battle (5:19–23)

- The stars from heaven fought against Sisera; the torrent of Kishon swept the Canaanite chariots away (5:20–21).
- A curse pronounced on Meroz for failing to help the Lord against the mighty (5:23).

Exalting Jael vs. The Grief of Sisera's Mother (5:24–30)

- Poetic description of Jael’s strike, praising her above all tent-dwelling women (5:24–27).
- The tragic irony of Sisera's mother looking out the window, wondering why his chariot delays, assuming he is merely dividing the spoils of war and captive women (5:28–30).

The Concluding Prayer (5:31)

- A cry for all God's enemies to perish, and for His friends to shine like the sun, leading into 40 years of rest.