

JUDGES 1-5 CYCLE OF LIBERATION AND OPPRESSION; FIRST JUDGES



We begin this study with the book of Judges, the second book of the section in the Bible, "The prophets." Remember, there are 7 *sections* in the Bible (seven represents perfection in Scripture): three in the Old Testament and four in the New Testament. Christ mentioned the three in the Old Testament as "the law of Moses, the prophets, and psalms" (Luke 24:44). The four in the New Testament are: Gospels, Acts, Epistles and Revelation.

The name of the book, Judges, is in Hebrew, *Sophetim*, and more accurately means "ruling liberators." As *Bible Knowledge Commentary* explains, "The title [judges] is appropriate as long as the English concept of legal arbitration is expanded to *general administrative authority* including *military deliverance from Israel's enemies*."

This book was probably written by the prophet Samuel, as the Jewish *Talmud* affirms. "Identifying Samuel, as the author of Judges, "says the same commentary above," harmonizes with the internal evidence mentioned above and the known fact that Samuel was a writer (1 Sam. 10:25)."

The date of the book begins around 1350 B.C., based on Judges 11:26, 1 Kings 6:1 and Acts 13:20. "The elders who outlived Joshua (Josh. 24:31; Jud. 2:7)...the oldest of them would have died about 1354 B.C. (Having been born in 1464 B.C. or later, and living no more than 110 years of age would date their deaths at 1354 B.C.). The idolatry leading to the first oppression in Judges 3:8 seems to have begun *after these elders died*" (*Bible Knowledge Commentary*).

The first chapter of Judges basically repeats what the end of Joshua says, and the second chapter even mentions the death of Joshua (2:8). After his death, there were some 25 years where the elders who witnessed the miracles in Egypt were faithful to God. But once they died, there arose a new generation "who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel. Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals, and they forsook the God of their fathers" (2:10-12).

In these roughly 300 years, there are some seven apostasies, or major departures from the faith, and God has to rescue them every time, raising 13 judges and liberators to guide them.

"They forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtoreths [female gods]. And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel. So He delivered them into the

hands of plunderers...and He sold them into the hands of their enemies...Wherever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for calamity, as the Lord had sworn to them. And they were greatly distressed. Nevertheless, the Lord raised up *judges* who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them. Yet they would not listen to their judges, but they *played the harlot* with other gods, and *bowed down to them*. They turned quickly from the way in which their fathers walked, in obeying the commandments of the Lord...And when the Lord raised up *judges* for them, the Lord was with the judge and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed them.

"And it came to pass, *when the judge was dead*, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. *They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn ways*. Then the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel; and He said, 'Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and has not heeded My voice, I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, so that through them I may test Israel, whether they will keep the ways of the Lord, to walk in them as their fathers kept them, or not'" (2:13-22).

In this period of Judges, we see a clear *historic cycle* found Israel and in world history—a pattern repeated time after time. It consists of 7 stages – 1. *Oppression*; 2. *Repentance*; 3. *Liberation*; 4. *Obedience & High Moral Standards*; 5. *Prosperity*; 6. *Opulence & Decadence*; 7. *Punishment & Invasion* – and then the cycle begins again with 1. *Oppression*.

In Israel, the cycle began in Egypt 1. *Oppression*; 2. *Crying out and Repentance*; 3. *Liberation under Moses*; 4. *Obedience and High Moral Standards under Joshua & his elders*; 5. *Resulting Prosperity*; 6. *Opulence and Decadence of next generation & finally* 7. *Punishment & Invasion*.

In world history, a similar 7-step cycle has run its course in Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, Barbarians, Catholic Middle Ages, Absolute Monarchies, Revolutions, Democratic Republics and its final outcome--Modern Liberalism and moral laxness leading us to #7--what will probably come next will

be punishment & invasion (in the Great Tribulation).

Why did this next generation forsake their faith?

The Bible gives us at least four reasons and these are important spiritual lessons for us in the church.

1. Lack of faith led to the remnants of the Canaanites being left in the land with their pagan religion that rivaled God's spiritual and moral commandments and was easier, and more carnal, sensual and comfortable to follow. "It was a great temptation for the Israelites to respect the native Canaanite gods that were supposed to control the fertility of the land and its inhabitants. Additionally, the Canaanite religion was far less demanding than the strict Israelite laws and rituals. No Canaanite laws have been found resembling the 10 commandments. Many Israelites eventually yielded to the temptation. The result was a gradual backsliding toward the disasters registered in the books of Kings" (Bible Encyclopedia, p. 153). The Israelites also intermarried with them and adopted their religion.

2. This generation of Israelites inherited all the wealth from their parent's conquests *with little work* from their part, not having earned it. God had warned them, "Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, lest—*when* you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell *in them*; and *when* your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God...then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth'" (Deut. 8:11-17).

3. There was a lack of strong leadership after the elders of Joshua's generation had died. No resolute leader arose from the next generation, and so the national will weakened and began to drift, everyone deciding and doing what they wanted, regardless of the negative consequences.

4. Judges 2:10 said a new generation of Israelites arose who did "not know the Lord nor the work He had done for Israel." As often happens, the previous generation was busy in prolonged wars and did not have time to properly rear their children, leaving that primarily to the mothers, who lacked the masculine teaching skills and discipline attributes that fathers have. Something similar happened after WWII, with the baby boom generation in U.S. and Europe. Soldiers came back to their homes and didn't want

their children to suffer the rigors they did, and went to the other extreme, spoiling them. As a result, a new generation arose where many became selfish and rebellious, leading to moral laxness and the drug culture of the 1960's. We are still suffering many negative results of it.

Now, in chapter 3 we read of the Canaanites that remained in the land. "Now these *are* the nations which the LORD left, that He might test Israel by them, *that is*, all who had not known any of the wars in Canaan (*this was* only so that the generations of the children of Israel might be taught to know war, at least those who had not formerly known it), namely, five lords of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites who dwelt in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal Hermon to the entrance of Hamath. And they were *left*, that He might test Israel by them, to know whether they would obey the commandments of the LORD, which He had commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses. Thus the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites... And they *took their daughters* to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons; and they served their gods" (3:1-6).

Othniel, the first judge and liberator

The first judge was Othniel, a grandnephew of the faithful and brave Caleb. "So the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD. They forgot the LORD their God, and served the Baals and Asherahs. Therefore the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and He sold them into the hand of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia; and the children of Israel served Cushan-Rishathaim *eight years*. When the children of Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the children of Israel, who delivered them: Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. *The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel*. He went out to war, and the LORD delivered Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed over Cushan-Rishathaim. So the land had rest for forty years. Then Othniel the son of Kenaz died" (3:7-11). Almost 50 years passed during this time.

Ehud, the second judge

And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD strengthened Eglon king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD. Then he gathered to himself the people of Ammon and Amalek, went and defeated Israel, and took possession of the City of

Palms [Jericho]. So the children of Israel served Eglon king of Moab *eighteen years*. But when the children of Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for them: Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man” (3:12-15).

Ehud killed Eglon the king with a dagger, and liberated Israel from the Moabites. “And it happened, when he arrived, that he blew the trumpet in the mountains of Ephraim, and the children of Israel went down with him from the mountains; and he led them. Then he said to them, ‘Follow *me*, for the LORD has delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand.’ So they went down after him, seized the fords of the Jordan leading to Moab, and did not allow anyone to cross over. And at that time they killed about ten thousand men of Moab, all stout men of valor; not a man escaped. So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest for *eighty years*” (3:27-30). That was the longest period of peace during all the time of the judges.

Shamgar, the third judge

“After him was Shamgar the son of Anath, who killed six hundred men of the Philistines with an ox goad; and he also delivered Israel” (3:31).

“Shamgar’s judgeship,” says the *Bible Knowledge Commentary*,” appears to have transpired after Ehud’s deliverance but before his death...That he saved Israel marks him out as a judge though the only item recorded is that he struck down 600 Philistines with an ox goad. Whether this tally was a lifetime total or the number in a single episode is not indicated. His weapon was a sharp metal-tipped stick about 8 feet long used to direct animals. The other end had a chisel-like blade for cleaning a plow.”

Deborah the judge and Barak liberate Israel

“When Ehud was dead, the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army *was* Sisera, who dwelt in Harosheth Hagoyim. And the children of Israel cried out to the LORD; for Jabin had nine hundred chariots of *iron* [Israel did not possess this technology], and for *twenty years* he had harshly oppressed the children of Israel. Now *Deborah*, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time. And she would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the mountains of Ephraim. And the children of Israel came up to her for judgment. Then she sent and called for Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to

him, ‘Has not the LORD God of Israel commanded, ‘Go and deploy *troops* at Mount Tabor; take with you ten thousand men of the sons of Naphtali and of the sons of Zebulun; and against you I will deploy Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his multitude at the River Kishon; and I will deliver him into your hand.’ And Barak said to her, ‘If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go! So she said, ‘I will surely go with you; nevertheless there will be no glory for you in the journey you are taking, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.’

“Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh. And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; he went up with ten thousand men under his command, and Deborah went up with him...And they reported to Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor. So Sisera gathered together all his chariots, nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people who *were* with him, from Harosheth Hagoyim to the River Kishon. Then Deborah said to Barak, ‘Up! For this *is* the day in which the LORD has delivered Sisera into your hand. Has not the LORD gone out before you?’ So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him. And the LORD routed Sisera and all *his* chariots and all *his* army with the edge of the sword before Barak; and Sisera...fled away on foot. But Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth Hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not a man was left’ (4:1-22).

As Deborah had predicted, the ultimate victory went to a woman, since general Sisera is killed in his tent by Jael, an Israelite woman. As a result, Israel was saved from its oppressors for *forty years*. In chapter 5, Deborah composes, as Miriam had done with the victory at the Red Sea, a beautiful song about their victory, giving God all the glory.