

Adult Bible Class

The Book of Judges

Lesson 2 - Chapters 2 - 3

Judges Chapter 2

In our last lesson we were introduced to the book of Judges, learning that the book is divided into three parts - the prologue or introduction (Judges 1:1 to 3:6), the main body (Judges 3:7 to 16:31), and the epilogue (Judges 17:1 to 21:25). Today we will finish the prologue and begin the main body of the book which describes the ups and downs - the cycle of Israel forsaking her God, the Lord sending oppressors to get her attention, and the Israelites calling on God for help. Twelve judges are mentioned in response to Israel calling on the Lord in time of trouble. Six are mentioned only briefly - Shamgar, Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon. The other six are the major judges and more of their story is given to us in the main part of the book - Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson.

The Hebrew word for *judge* is “shaphat.” Today we think of a judge as someone dressed in a black robe making legal decisions in a court of law. However, “shaphat” describes a hero who led Israel - for a limited period of time - and put to right what had gone wrong. Each judge had his own gifts and callings for his own particular situation.

The people of Israel during the time of the judges had great obstacles - primarily because they did not remove all the Canaanites from the land that God gave them. Therefore, they were living among people who worshiped idol gods. This involved terrible immorality and wickedness which tempted Israel to partake of the same sins. Each future generation in Israel must decide for itself to serve the Lord - and to reject the foreign idol gods of the land.

The Book of Judges is certainly a picture to us of the tendency of each generation to forget God and disobey Him. Each generation must call on God for itself. Each generation must love and serve God for itself. Each generation must learn to “fight battles.” A wise person learns from the mistakes of others in history. An unwise person will allow history to repeat itself without learning and taking heed.

Judges Chapter 2

Israel's Disobedience

Judges 2:1 Then the Angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said: “I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers; and I said, ‘I will never break My covenant with you. **2** And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.’ But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this? **3** Therefore I also said, ‘I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you.’” **4** So it was, when the Angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voices and wept.

5 Then they called the name of that place Bochim; and they sacrificed there to the Lord. **6** And when Joshua had dismissed the people, the children of Israel went each to his own inheritance to possess the land.

God made a covenant with Israel, and He kept His part of the agreement. However, the Israelites did not keep their part. God asked them, “*Why have you done this?*” Therefore, God said that He would not drive out the rest of the inhabitants (it had been God all along that gave them victory). They would remain to be thorns and snares (Numbers 33:50-56).

The people wept because of this judgment. The angel came from *Gilgal* (which means “rolled away”) and met them at *Bochim* (which means “weeping”).

Death of Joshua

Judges 2:7 So the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord which He had done for Israel. **8** Now Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died *when he was* one hundred and ten years old. **9** And they buried him within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Heres, in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash.

The first part of Judges goes back in time before Joshua dies. Notice in verse 5 that “*they sacrificed there to the Lord.*” This must have been before the tabernacle was permanently established at Shiloh.

10 When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel.

Here we see the importance of each generation having its own experience with God. We see how important it is to hear the testimony of those who have experienced great things in God.

Israel’s Unfaithfulness

11 Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals; **12** and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the Lord to anger. **13** They forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.

Baal means “lord,” and Baal was the supreme god of the Canaanites. The plural, “Baals” (or Baalim), suggests that there were several local representatives of the worship of Baal (like Baal-Berith in Judges 9:4). Baal was a fertility god who the Canaanites believed would give them abundant crops and many children.

Ashtoreth was a female deity - the moon goddess and consort of Baal. She was also known as the goddess of love and war as well as a fertility goddess. She was also called Asherah or Astarte (depending on location). Ashtoreth was represented by a tree trunk with no branches planted in the ground. The trunk was usually carved into a symbolic representation of the goddess. Because of the association with carved trees, the places of worship of Ashtoreth were commonly called “groves,” and the carved trees were called “Asherah poles.”

The worship of Baal and Ashtoreth involved horrible immoral acts with female prostitutes that were priestesses in that religion. Divination, fortune telling, and child sacrifice were sometimes a part of the worship of these idol gods.

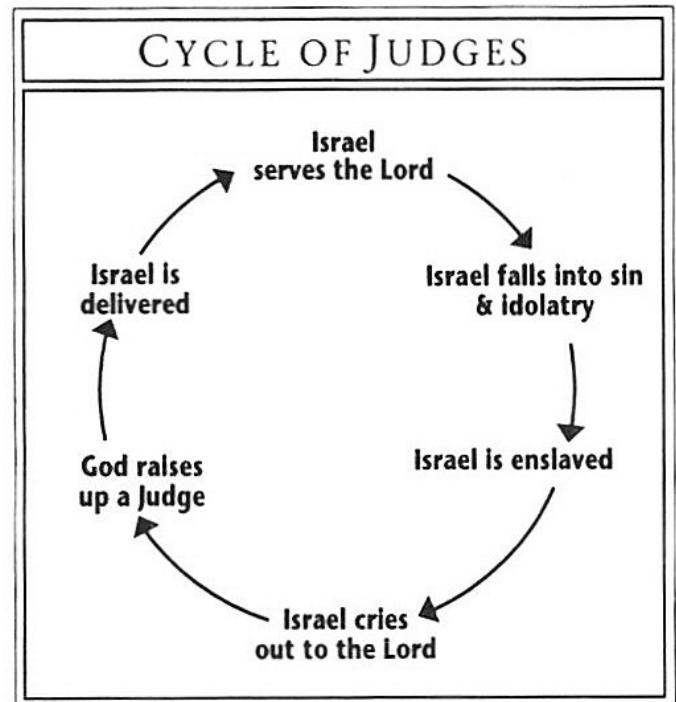
The fact that Israel did not drive out the Canaanites has now led to the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth - and the terrible, immoral, and violent acts that accompany this worship.

Judges 2:14 And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel. So He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. **15** Wherever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for calamity, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn to them. And they were greatly distressed.

16 Nevertheless, the Lord raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them. **17** 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; they did not do so. **18** 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.

19 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 way.

Here we read the cycle of sin and apostasy that is the theme of the Book of Judges. Each generation had to serve the Lord for itself. Each generation needed its own experience with God. Each generation has its own opportunity to obey the Word of the Lord and drive out the things that would cause them to sin against God. Each generation has its own tests and challenges.



20 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, **21** I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, **22** 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." **23** Therefore the Lord left those nations, without driving them out immediately; nor did He deliver them into the hand of Joshua.

Though we love to speak of the mercy of God, here we read of the anger of the Lord because of Israel's continued rebellion. God gave Israel exactly what they thought was acceptable - the Canaanites would remain in the land. They would be a test for each generation.

Judges Chapter 3

Judges 3:1 (NKJV) 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 **2** (*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), **3** *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. **4** 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.

At the end of the previous chapter we learned that God left some of these nations in the Promised Land as a test to Israel - to see if they would walk in God's ways or not. Here, we see another reason why these people were left - so that the next generation of Israelites might know war - that they would learn how to fight battles. After all, Israel was a blessed and fruitful land. Nations near to them will always be a threat. Softness and ease will only lead to carelessness which will lead to ruin. Future generations in Israel will learn battle by warring against these small pockets of people who yet remained . . . and should a mighty army of a neighboring country attack, they would be ready.

Judges 3:5 Thus the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. **6** And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons; and they served their gods.

Israel failed the test. They were specifically ordered not to intermarry with the heathen nations that worshiped false gods (Exodus 34:11-16). But Israel:

- 1) Dwelt among heathen peoples of foreign nations
- 2) Intermarried with those heathen peoples
- 3) Served the gods of those peoples

We can be sure that it didn't happen overnight. Over time Israel stopped talking about the Lord and got their eyes on other gods. They forgot the God of Israel and all that He had done, and they adopted the ways of the Canaanites.

Othniel

Judges 3:7 (NKJV) 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. **8** 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. **9** 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. **10** 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. **11** So the land had rest for forty years. Then Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

As we leave the prologue of the book of Judges and begin reading the main body of the book we are introduced to the first judge - Othniel. We have already read a little bit about Othniel of the tribe of Judah. He was Caleb's nephew who won the fair lady, Achsah, for taking the city of Kirjath-Sepher in battle (Judges 1:12-15). He was one of the tried and true warriors of Israel who had seen a thing or two in his lifetime and was well fitted to deliver Israel. The "*Spirit of the Lord*" came upon Othniel and brought the victory to Israel.

Othniel is made a judge to deliver them from Cushan-Rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia. Mesopotamia is the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (the word itself means "land between the two rivers").

As you can see from the map, Mesopotamia is northeast of Israel, and Cushan-Rishathaim could have traveled far to attack Israel. The name *Cushan-Rishathaim* means “blackness of double wickedness,” or one source says, “extra wicked.” It took Israel eight years of servitude to this king before they cried out to God. The Lord raised up Othniel as a warrior to lead Israel to victory. Then they had forty years of rest from their enemies (a generation).



It is sometimes the case that in a person's life, in a family's life, or in a church's life, the strength of *one* person keeps things in line. When that person is gone (and unless someone else replaces him), the person, the family, or even the church no longer has that restraining power present. When Othniel died, Israel went back to doing evil in God's sight. Right away we see the important influence of the judges of Israel.

Ehud

Judges 3:12 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. **13** Then he gathered to himself the people of Ammon and Amalek, went and defeated Israel, and took possession of the City of Palms. **14** So the children of Israel served Eglon king of Moab eighteen years. **15** 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. By him the children of Israel sent tribute to Eglon king of Moab.

Israel sinned again, doing “*evil in the sight of the Lord*,” so God raised up a new oppressor. It is unthinkable that Israel would once again fail God so miserably - and so soon, but it is human nature to quickly forget the misery of the past and revert to old ways. Israel didn't learn from their recent history - they forgot God once again. This new generation must learn how to fight battles.

This time, God sent an oppressor who lived a lot closer to them. Moab was situated east of the Dead Sea between the Arnon and the Zered rivers (see map next page). It was settled as a kingdom about fifty years before the conquering of Canaan. Moab received assistance from the Ammonites and the Amalekites. Ammon was located to the northeast of Moab. The Amalekites were a semi-nomadic race occupying a large area south of Judah. They were considered Israel's bitterest enemy (because they attacked Israel not long after Israel crossed the Red Sea leaving Egypt - Exodus 17:8-16). The Moabites not only oppressed the tribes east of the Jordan River, but they crossed the river and oppressed Israel in the area which lay within the tribe of Benjamin.



It was from the tribe of Benjamin that God raised up Ehud. Benjamin was the smallest and weakest of the tribes of Israel, yet from it God raised up a deliverer. Although the name Benjamin means “son of the right hand,” it appears from Scripture that most of the warriors of Benjamin were left handed. Today, about 90% of the world’s population is right handed, so it is remarkable that so many were left handed in the tribe of Benjamin. Even so, we know that it was God’s right hand that won the victory for Israel through Ehud.

Judges 3:16 Now Ehud made himself a dagger (it was double-edged and a cubit in length) and fastened it under his clothes on his right thigh. **17** So he brought the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. (Now Eglon was a very fat man.) **18** And when he had finished presenting the tribute, he sent away the people who had carried the tribute. **19** But he himself turned back from the stone images that were at Gilgal, and said, “I have a secret message for you, O king.”

He said, “Keep silence!” And all who attended him went out from him.

20 So Ehud came to him (now he was sitting upstairs in his cool private chamber). Then Ehud said, “I have a message from God for you.” So he arose from his seat. **21** Then Ehud reached with his left hand, took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly. **22** Even the hilt went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the dagger out of his belly; and his entrails came out. **23** Then Ehud went out through the porch and shut the doors of the upper room behind him and locked them.

Instead of bringing offerings to their God who loved them, Israel was forced to bring tribute to Eglon, king of Moab, who oppressed them and hated them. Ehud brought the tribute to Eglon, who no doubt was excited to receive it. It was the offering that was paid to gain his favor. Ehud used the occasion to deliver Israel. After bringing the tribute and heading home, he went back to Eglon, saying that he had a secret message. The message was actually a dagger. As a judge sent by the God of Israel, Ehud delivered Israel from Eglon.

This great king who was so pampered in luxury died a shameful and ignominious death.

Judges 3:24 When he had gone out, *Eglon’s* servants came to look, and to their surprise, the doors of the upper room were locked. So they said, “He is probably attending to his needs in the cool chamber.” [NLT: They thought he might be using the latrine in the room.] **25** So they waited till they were embarrassed, and still he had not opened the doors of the upper room. Therefore they took the key and opened them. And there was their master, fallen dead on the floor.

26 But Ehud had escaped while they delayed, and passed beyond the stone images and escaped to Seirah. **27** 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. **28** 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. **29** And at that time they killed about ten thousand men of Moab, all stout men of valor; not a man escaped. **30** So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest for eighty years.

After the judge, Ehud, brought deliverance, Israel had rest for eighty years - about two generations. This was the longest period of relief after any of the judges.

Shamgar

31 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.

Here we read of deliverance from the Philistines, enemies by the sea coast. In Judges 5:16, we read, *"In the days of Shamgar . . . the highways were deserted, and the travelers walked along the byways. Village life ceased, it ceased in Israel."* So it seems that a person couldn't even travel or go anywhere safely. Though little is said of Shamgar, we know that he was another judge sent by God to deliver the Israelites from their enemies.