

LESSON SIX

JUDGES (Continued)

A. **THE FIRST SERVITUDE: (Judges 3:5-11).**

The people of Israel served the Lord as long as Joshua lived and also as long as the elders lived who saw the miracles of God under the ministry of Joshua (Judges 2:7). However, soon after they began their decline into Apostasy. It was only a short time before the Israelites began marrying into heathen families, forsaking the Lord, worshipping Canaanite gods, and falling into terrible immoralities.

The first punishing oppressor came from the far northeast. This was an invasion from Mesopotamia and the name of the leader was Cushan Rishathaim. He was the only oppressor who came from such a distant land. During this first servitude the Israelites were kept in bondage for a period of eight years.

The deliver was Othniel. The first judge was a younger brother of Caleb (Joshua 15:17). He won the daughter of Caleb, Achsah, winning the battle against Kirjath-sephar.

No record is given of how he won the victory against the Mesopotamians except the statement, *"The Spirit of the Lord came upon him"* (Judges 3:10).

After this victory, the land had rest forty years before the next oppression.

B. **THE SECOND SERVITUDE: (Judges 3:12-31).**

The second nation to oppress Israel was the nation, Moab. Moab lay immediately across the Dead Sea from Judah. It was their king, Balek, who had brought Balaam from the north to curse Israel. Now, with some help from the Ammonites and the Amalekites, the Moabites crossed the Jordan River, and used the former site of Jericho as the headquarters. They inflicted great suffering on the eastern tribes, as well as Benjamin and all that dwelt near Jericho. This servitude continued for eighteen years.

The king of the Moabites was Eglon, who was a very fat man.

When Israel cried to God for help, the Lord raised up another deliverer, Ehud of Benjamin. He brought deliverance not through warfare, but through an act of deception in which he succeeded in slaying King Eglon. When Eglon was killed the Moabites retreated, and Ehud's men slew 10,000 of them. This brought a lengthy peace of eighty years to Israel. This was the longest period of peace enjoyed during the period of the Judges.

During this eighty years of peace Shamgar lived as a third judge. We are not told much about this man except that he won a great victory over the Philistines. On one occasion he slew 600 Philistines with nothing but an ox-goad as a weapon.

C. **THE THIRD SERVITUDE: (Judges 4 & 5).**

The third oppression came from the Canaanites within Palestine, whom the Israelites should have driven out in the first place. Jabin, king of Hazor, was the leader, and Sisera was his general. The city of Hazor had been defeated by Joshua but again had become strong. Sisera had 900 chariots of iron. They had attacked Zebulum and Naphtali and had reduced them to a condition of servitude for twenty years.

This time Israel's deliverer was a woman. Deborah was both a judge and a prophetess (Judges 4:4). The people came to her for counsel. She received people under a palm tree between Ramah and Bethel, some sixty miles south of where the battle with Sisera would take place. She called Barak who lived in the north in Kedesh of Naphtali. She instructed him to raise an army of 10,000 men from Zebulum and Naphtali and to fight Sisera. Barak agreed to do so if she would go with him. Deborah consented and they fought Sisera west of Megiddo on the banks of the Kishon. The Lord miraculously gave victory and Sisera fled northward. On the way, he took refuge in the tent of a Kenite named Jael, who lived near Barak's hometown of Kedesh. Jael killed Sisera by driving a tent peg through his head. This brought forty years of peace to Israel.

In Judges chapter five is recorded the triumphant song of victory of Deborah and Barak. In Judges 5:7 she calls herself a "mother of Israel."

D. THE FOURTH SERVITUDE: (Judges 6 & 7).

After a period of forty years, the old corruption broke out again. Another invasion was sent as punishment. The Midianites, aided by Amalekites and "children of the east," came pouring into the land each year at the time of harvest. They plundered the country and depleted the land of both livestock and grain. The Israelites were so fearful that they took refuge in caves.

Gideon was the deliverer. He lived in Ophrah, a village of Manasseh. The people of Ophrah had accepted Baal worship so completely that they had built their own Baal altar. God's first commandment to Gideon was to destroy this idolatrous altar. This he did showing courage and faith. The people first wanted to kill Gideon but later accepted him as leader.

When he called for troops to fight the Midianites there were 32,000 who responded from the tribes of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulum, and Naphtali. These seemed too few to fight the Midianites, which numbered 135,000. However, God instructed Gideon that his army should be reduced, first by permitting all who were fearful to return home, and then testing to see which men would drink from a brook in a manner showing readiness for battle. He was left with 300 men. Gideon armed his men with trumpets and empty pitchers containing lamps. All blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers at the same time. The enemy was taken by surprise and fled in panic.

Gideon was invited to become the King of Israel but he would not listen to the proposal. He knew that God was Israel's King. He acted as judge for 40 years.

Gideon had seventy-one sons. One of his sons was Abimelech, by his concubine at Shechem. He wanted what Gideon had refused to become king. He murdered sixty-nine of his brothers. Only Jotham, his youngest brother escaped. The Shechemites crowned Abimelech and he ruled for three years. A woman finally killed him in battle.

E. THE FIFTH SERVITUDE: (Judges 10 - 12).

The Ammonites ravaged the tribes east of Jordan and Judah, Benjamin and Ephraim, west of Jordan. When the children of Israel cried out for deliverance, God taunted them, telling them to cry to their heathen gods. Finally the Israelites showed the fruit of repentance and put away the strange gods. God then raised up Jephthah to be their deliverer. Jephthah was the son of Gilead and a harlot. His life was overshadowed with the truth and his brethren cast him out. In Tob he became a bold and successful captain, and he was accepted as captain over the army against the Ammonites. He entirely defeated the army.

Jephthah is especially remembered because of his foolishness. Due to the influence of the idolatrous worship around him, he vowed that he would sacrifice to the Lord whatever should first meet him on returning home, should he win the victory. It turned out to be his daughter. This vow was neither sanctioned by the Mosaic ritual nor acceptable to God.

F. THE SIXTH SERVITUDE: (Judges 13 - 16).

The Philistines brought the last great oppression. They were able to impose their will on Israel for forty years, the longest of any of the oppressions.

God's man to fight against the Philistines was Samson. His father's name was Manoah, a Danite. An angel announced Samson's birth. Samson was to be a Nazarite. He was never to drink wine or strong drink, and never to cut his hair. He enjoyed great physical strength, but he proved to have a weak will.

Some of his feats of strength were:

1. Killed a lion with his bare hands;
2. Slew thirty Philistines taking their changes of clothing;
3. Caught 300 fox and tied firebrands to their tails and burned the Philistine crops;
4. Killed 1,000 Philistines with the jawbone of an ass.

Samson served as judge for twenty years until he fell victim to lust and sinned with a harlot (Judges 16:1-3). He finally lost his hair, and was blinded and lost his strength. Later, when his hair had grown out, he accomplished the great feat of pulling down the temple of the Philistines, killing them and himself.

G. CIVIL WARS:

During the time of Judges there were four periods of civil confusion that caused internal wars.

1. THE JEALOUSY OF EPHRAIM: (Judges 8:1-32).

The Ephraimites were jealous of Gideon and refused to give him and his men food when they were faint and weak. When the battle against Midian was completed, Gideon fought and subdued the Ephraimites. This was the beginning of a deep-rooted division in Israel that finally ended in the division of the kingdom under Jeroboam and Rehoboam.

2. ABIMELECH: (Judges 9:1-52).

Abimelech's ambition to set up a dynasty led to a civil war.

3. THE SECOND JEALOUSY OF EPHRAIM: (Judges 12:1-7).

Ephraim was jealous again following Jephthah's victory over the Ammonites. This terminated in the slaughter of the Ephraimites who could not say "Shibboleth."

4. THE PUNISHMENT OF BENJAMIN: (Judges 19 - 21).

The tribe of Benjamin was severely punished because of a lewd crime. The entire tribe was almost destroyed because of this.

LESSON SIX

SELF HELP TEST

State whether the following are TRUE or FALSE:

1. _____ Eglon was a very fat man.
2. _____ Jethah was the son of Manoah.
3. _____ Gideon lived in Ophrah.
4. _____ Deborah and Barak fought Sisera.
5. _____ Gideon had seventy-one sons.
6. _____ Abimelech slew sixty-six of his brothers.
7. _____ Shamgar slew 600 Philistines with an ox goad.
8. _____ Jael killed Sisera with a tent peg.
9. _____ The first judge was Jair.
10. _____ The Moabites afflicted Israel for eighteen years.
11. _____ King Ehud was slain by Eglon.
12. _____ During the judges there were four periods of civil confusion.
13. _____ Samson used 500 foxes to burn the Philistine crops.
14. _____ Gideon sacrificed his daughter because of a vow.
15. _____ Samson was of the tribe of Dan.
16. _____ Othniel was a younger brother of Caleb.
17. _____ Samson served as judge for twenty years.
18. _____ Sisera had 1,000 chariots of iron.
19. _____ Deborah called herself a "mother in Israel."
20. _____ Jotham was killed by Abimelech.