

The Book of Judges

Lesson 6 - Chapters 3 and 4

As we continue with Judges chapter 3, we'll be introduced to the 2nd Judge of Israel **Ehud**. The first **Shophet** (Shofet, Judge) was **Othniel** from the tribe of Judah, and he fought with **Kushan-Rish'atayim** to eject him from the southern tribal area of Canaan. The evidence is that Kushan was from the southern desert regions known as Edom. The pattern demonstrated by Othniel was the classic pattern of the Judges: first, the people of Israel sin (and the sin is invariably idolatry). Second, God sees their sin, becomes angry and allows a gentile neighbor to oppress Israel. Third the people of Israel eventually cry out to Yehoveh and He hears His people and has pity on them. Fourth, He raises up a savior (a deliverer) that is called a Judge, puts His Holy Spirit upon the Judge and enables the Judge to deliver Israel from their oppressors. Thereafter the Judge will rule for a time and during that time the people of Israel will be obedient to God (at least they stay away from worshipping the Canaanite gods) and thus have rest and shalom as a blessing for their obedience. When the Judge eventually dies the people quickly fall away into idolatry and the cycle starts all over again.

Now what we'll see this week is that not every Judge fits that mold, and not every Judge fulfilled the same function. This is why there are differences between who the Jewish scholars generally agree qualify as a **Shophet** versus who the majority of Christian scholars will classify as a Judge, and there are good arguments on both sides.

Let's take up our study at chapter 3 verse 10.

READ CHAPTER 3:10 – end

Othniel ruled for a generation, 40 years, and then died and soon after the people of Israel fell into sin and idolatry again; this is the 2nd of the 7 cycles of the Judge pattern that the book of Judges will tell us about.

In response to Israel's apostasy the Lord divinely energized a new oppressor Eglon king of Moab. And like every kingdom Moab had its allies, in this case it was Ammon and Amalek. This new oppressor attacked and took the city of Date-Palms (who some say is Jericho but I think is another place a little farther south), which was an important place both politically and economically for Israel. Eglon brought this area of Israel under subjugation and after taking the city of Date-Palms Eglon would rule them for another 18 years.

As per the pattern the Lord chooses a man and separates him away to be His servant for the purpose of delivering Israel from their oppressors; his name is Ehud. Ehud is of the tribe of Benjamin. What we know right away then is that Benjamin was the tribe most under the

pressure from the enemy, and we know that similar to the reason for the choice of Othniel's being raised up, this trouble is also occurring in the southern end of the tribal territories.

Ehud was of the clan of Gera. It is prominently mentioned that he is left-handed, a trait that was apparently rather common among the tribal members of Benjamin but not often present in the other 11 tribes. Interestingly it doesn't SAY he was left handed, rather it says that he was "bound up on the right". In the Bible era the right side of anything was seen as the "correct" side, the strong side, and the best side. The right hand was used for blessing. The royal scepter was always held in the right hand because it denoted power and authority. So for people of that era, a person who was left-handed was considered as having a defective right hand. Not being strong and coordinated in one's right hand meant that person had a disability. So in that era for a left-handed person to be used by God was another example of the Lord using the person with the least human ability to do His divine will, which is why it was even mentioned that Ehud was a lefty.

It is really rather ironic that Benjamin apparently had so many genetically disposed to left-handedness, because the name Benjamin means, "son of my RIGHT hand". This so-called disability would prove to be quite helpful for Ehud.

Verse 15 begins the story by saying that Ehud had gone to deliver a present to Eglon; the present is better translated as in the CJB as tribute. We have discussed at some length on a number of occasions that one of the main goals of one nation conquering another was to gain tribute, taxes, wealth from the conquered people. The tribute could be anything from animals, to produce, to precious metals. Whatever that particular people had that the ruler prized would be the tribute.

Ehud devised a plan; he would assassinate King Eglon, thereby causing turmoil and political instability among Moab and their allies, and thus Israel would have an opportunity to be freed. So Ehud fashioned a specially designed sword that was unusually short in length: about 1 cubit or 18 inches. He hid it under his clothes by strapping it to his upper right leg. The advantage was that since he was left-handed he would reach across his body to draw the sword and do it in the unsuspecting King. This particular weapon was kind of a hybrid between a dagger and a sword; it had no cross piece at the top and thus it could lay flat against Ehud's thigh.

Records indicate that very few people were left handed and so even when Ehud made his move, it was with his left hand and thus would not have caused the King to suspect a coming attack; that deception would provide an extra second or two for Ehud to reach under his garment to grasp his sword and kill Eglon.

As was typical Ehud went with several other Israelites to deliver the tribute (we don't know what it was but likely it was produce of some kind) as was standard. If Ehud had come alone it would have raised suspicion. So after the proper respect was given to Eglon, Ehud left with all the others. But at a place called the quarries at Gilgal, Ehud turned back, alone, and said that he had a secret message to report to Eglon. Quarries is probably not the best choice of translation here; the Hebrew word is *psillim* and it more literally means, sculptured statues. These were by definition god images, statues of the Moabite gods and goddesses. That they

were located at Gilgal is quite telling because it was at Gilgal where Joshua had erected the memorial stones in honor of what Yehoveh had done for Israel in bringing them across the Wilderness, across the Jordon River, and into the Promised Land. Very likely the god statues were located next to the Joshua memorial stones because this was standard operating procedure of a conqueror. A conqueror would move quickly to place his gods at the holy places of the conquered people as a way of demonstrating that his gods were obviously the more powerful. It was a form of constant humiliation and reminder of who was in charge.

Ehud returns alone and when he tells the King there is something he must tell him in private, the King believes him. Eglon was so confident in Ehud's loyalty that he dismissed his royal guards. They were in a two-story building, and the king (who is said to be fat) was upstairs because a desert breeze would blow through making it cooler for him.

Eglon, anxious to hear what juicy piece of news Ehud had for him rose out of his chair and Ehud struck. He reached across his body with his left-hand, pulled out the stealthily concealed weapon and ran Eglon through with it. We're given some rather gory details, such that because the weapon had no cross piece at the top, the entire length of the sword entered Eglon's body and the fat engulfed what little of a handle there was. In fact the sword went completely through his body and poked out the other side.

Ehud left the sword embedded in the dying enemy and left, closing the doors and locking them behind him. Yes, they did have rudimentary door locks and keys in those days. The key was a flat piece of wood that was fitted with pins corresponding to the holes in a hollow bolt. The hole in the door gave access to the bolt, which was located on the inside. Inserting the flat key into the bolt pushed out the pins of the lock and this allowed the bolt to be removed from its sockets in the doorpost. The way it operated Ehud could have locked the door WITHOUT A KEY, but it would have required a key to gain entry.

When the king's servants noticed that Ehud had gone, they went up to check on the king but the doors were closed and locked. They assumed (as it says in verse 24) that he was (as it says literally) "covering his feet". This is a Hebrew euphemism that means he was using the toilet. So the servants patiently waited, and they waited, and they waited but the door never opened. Finally they reached the point where they felt that they had to risk bothering the king at a rather private moment and when he didn't respond they got the key, opened the door, and found him lying on the floor dead. But the delay had given Ehud more than ample time to make good his escape.

Ehud went back the same route he came, through the area where the god images had been erected in Gilgal. I suspect he looked upon those statues with a sense of dark satisfaction knowing that these gods certainly had not protected the king who worshipped them. From there he crossed to Se'irah, which would have been on the border of the territory of Ephraim. Once safe back in Canaan, he went into the hill country and began sounding the shofar; this was a battle cry, a call to arms. Ehud certainly realized that now was the favorable moment for Israel to strike at their oppressors while uncertainty amid a vacuum of leadership was the mood in Moab. The people of Israel responded and volunteers flooded in; Ehud, naturally, would be their leader.

Their first move was to capture the fording points of the Jordan, and thus not only allow no Moabite reserve troops to come to Israel and fortify the garrison there, but it also served to cut-off the escape route of the Moabite soldiers stationed in Israel. Ehud led the slaughter of 10,000 coalition troops from Moab, Ammon, and Amalek. The back of Moab's oppression over the southern Israelite tribes was broken and the land then had rest for two generations, 80 years.

We must assume from the pattern and what comes at the beginning of the next chapter that Ehud judged the southern tribes of Israel that entire 80 years of rest and must therefore have been a very young man when he assassinated Eglon. No other period of rest was nearly as long in the remaining accounts of the era of the Judges.

Immediately in the very next verse (31) we are told in exceedingly brief terms the name of the next Judge in line: **Shamgar**. **Shamgar** is not Hebrew; it is a Hurrian name. **Shamgar**, however, was a Hebrew; and as the family name is Anath, we see the terrible influence of the Canaanite pagan society on the tribe of Israel. Anath is the Canaanite goddess of sex and war. So here is a Hebrew man, given a gentile name, and his father's family name was made in honor of a pagan god. Nonetheless Yehoveh picked THIS man to deliver Israel from a period of oppression from the Philistines. We're told that he must have been quite a warrior because he personally killed 600 Philistine soldiers, and his weapon of choice was an ox goad.

Many scholars of the Judges era have speculated on why we find the use of improvised weapons mentioned prominently in the book of Judges, especially as concerns Shamgar and later on Samson. Samson, you recall, killed a boatload of Philistine troops using the jawbone of a donkey as his weapon. Every conqueror had a little different method of subjugation; and one of the Philistine methods was to carefully and completely disarm those whom they conquered; so regular weapons like bows, spears, and swords would have been banned.

An ox goad, though not designed as a weapon, was deadly and formidable nonetheless. It was used to train teams of oxen. It was an 8 or 9 foot-long wooden pole with a sharp metal point, much like a spear, on one end and a sharpened chisel-like end on the other for scrapping dirt off of the plow.

Shamgar is a good example of how the characteristics of a Judge cannot always be so easily defined. There is no mention of God raising him up or putting the Ruach HaKodesh upon him; there is no mention of how long he ruled, and in fact he is never called a Judge, but he is referred to as a savior of Israel.

There is also the matter that although it says Shamgar came AFTER Ehud, it doesn't say it was after Ehud died. And this fuzziness is continued in the first verse of Judges 4 when it begins with, "But after Ehud died" Israel did what was evil and was handed over to a king from the north that was based in Hatzor. So the common sense of this is that Shamgar delivered another and different region of Israel during Ehud's lifetime. The Philistines were located along the Mediterranean Coast and bedeviled the tribe of Dan and Judah in particular because of their proximity. This was on the opposite side of Israel from where Moab had conquered sections of Canaan. So very probably Ehud and Shamgar were contemporaries.

Let's move on to Judges chapter 4.

READ JUDGES CHAPTER 4 all

We now get the 4th cycle of the 7 cycles of Judges, and it involves a name common even for Sunday School children: Debra, or **Devorah** in Hebrew. So let's review: to this point we have watched Israel capture Canaan under Joshua, because Joshua led Israel to be obedient to YHWH, and then rapidly upon his death Israel slid into idolatry. God punished Israel with oppression by a nation from the area of Edom, and God raised up Othniel to combat that. Othniel died some years later and Israel went right back to it's lax ways and idolatry. God responded by allowing Moab to oppress the southeastern tribes but then raised up Ehud to break the oppression. After 8 decades of peace, Ehud died and immediately Israel went right back to it's idolatry. On the west coast of Israel another and different group of tribes learned nothing from what happened to their brothers to the east and so they began to worship idols and God responded by opening the door for the Philistines to conquer them. Again the Lord took pity and raised up Shamgar who pushed the Philistines out of Israelite territory. And here we are in Chapter 4 right back at square one, with yet another region of the tribes of Israel going off the reservation and doing what was evil in God's eyes. Amazing.

I told you in the introduction to Judges that what was underlying all these cycles of apostasy and deliverance was the Lord convincing Israel that they could not operate without a king. And folks I'm sorry to tell you that goes for all mankind and not just Israel. Of course what Yehoveh wanted was for Israel to have a king in the mold of Yehoshua, Joshua, who was a servant both to God and to the people. But as we'll see at the end of Judges and as we move into Samuel, that even though they finally recognized their need for a king they wanted one that operated in the mode of their gentile neighbors. Why would they want to leave behind the freedoms of the tribal structure that they have for the central government ruled by a king? It was inevitable because of their human nature.

Here is where we need to look into the mirror of God's Word and apply it to our day and our lives. We are reliving the era of the Judges, but generally refuse to see it. Look at the Western cultures of today, with the USA as the leader (although that leadership is very shaky and becoming questionable). We revel in the notion of having created the most free, wealthiest society the world has ever known. We have done it with a kind of self-rule that we call democracy, employing an economic system called capitalism, and certainly America was created that way intentionally because the whole point was to get out from under the rule of a king and serfdom. At first it was Christians who came to America for freedom of religious expression and so godly principles were what we strove for. But every year of our existence as a nation those principles have slowly eroded.

Rome was an even earlier attempt at self-rule, although having an emperor certainly meant it was no democracy as we think of it. Even so, every society of any kind of rule has eventually failed as certainly as monarchies have failed. Why? Because no society that is not obedient to God Almighty, no government body that does not abide by the principles of the Torah, is going to survive for long and that is the stark but undeniable lesson of Judges.

And I know that many Believers, especially we older ones, who have lots of sleepless nights as we watch our nation dash headlong towards a secular based government and society that wants nothing to do with God except to pay lip-service (and even that is waning rapidly). The end result is predictable. Let me tell you something that may not have dawned on some of you yet: the world wants a king. The world is looking for a king to save us from where we all instinctively know we're heading: world war and worldwide calamity. All that European style socialism is, is an intermediate step along the road back to dictatorship or monarchy. And American is catching up to Europe quickly.

Anyone who is an Evangelical Christian has been taught about the Anti-Christ and the end of days. The Bible makes it very clear that the entire world will be in such a mess (soon), and the earth's population so confused and fearful that we will INSIST that we turn it all over to one man to save us and to rule over us. While he will probably not have the title of king, he most definitely will be a king. A king with more power and authority than history has ever seen.

Now of itself, that is the way mankind must be ruled.....by a king. That is what God is going to great lengths to show Israel during the era of the **Shophetim**. It is our nature and it is the way the universe was created that it be so. All humans inherently know that we need a leader, a strong leader. The problem is, man has his definition of a king, and God has His and the two are light years apart.

The king that men always eventually insist upon is created in our image. We want him to have the best at his disposal, we want him to be regal and handsome, we want him to take control and make rules that addresses whatever the current dilemma. We only want to go about our lives, pursue enjoyment and leave the details and hard things to him. The kind that men want inevitably wants personal power and great personal wealth.

But the king that God wants is a sacrificial servant; his appearance is irrelevant; the rules he should employ in every situation have been ordained by the Creator since eternity past and they do not change or shift with the situation or times or our needs or moods. This kind of king seeks only the Lord's will, and serves in an attitude of humility putting the people's need before his own. The world has known exactly ONE of these kind of kings (and he also didn't have the title of king) in all its history, Yehoshua son of Nun, and we will someday have one more king in this mold but this one will rule forever: Yehoshua son of Yoseph, Messiah of God.

While we don't need to be accepting of what we see Israel doing in Judges, we do need to be understanding because we are on the same path, and are getting there the same way they did. Notice something else: in Judges whenever the people of Israel repented of their evil ways, and cried to the Lord, God sent a Savior. Some Christians think that we can stave OFF the coming of Messiah and all the bittersweet happenings that will accompany His return by repenting. I say not so. The Biblical pattern is that by our being obedient and crying out to the Lord and repenting it can only hasten the return of Messiah Yeshua. What an irony we are living: don't repent and we assuredly will have a king, soon; the Anti-Christ. Do repent and we assuredly will have a king, soon: the Son of the Living God. Ancient Israel made the wrong choice much too often and it was horribly costly and painful. Either road they chose they WOULD have a king in time, but down one path was oppression and servitude, and down the

other was blessing and shalom.

Up to this point in the Book of Judges it is the southern tribes that have been dealt with; the scene now shifts northward in Judges 4. Yavin, King of Hatzor, was ruling ruthlessly over the tribes of Israel that resided in the north of Canaan. Yavin is not actually this king's personal name; like with the title Abimelech, Yavin is the dynastic title of a line of kings to rule from Hatzor. Thus about 150 years earlier we find in the book of Joshua that Israel fought against Yavin at Hatzor and burned the city. But, Israel did NOT inhabit it. So some years later Hatzor was rebuilt and the descendants of the same royal family ruled again over a group of people called Canaanites. Do not think that this means that Yavin ruled over all Canaanites; Canaanite is just being used as a general and generic term for any group of gentiles living in Canaan.

Yavin was king, but his military commander was Sisera; Sisera lived in a place called Harosheth HaGoyim, which translates to the Woodlands of the Gentiles. Exactly where this place is has not been identified but it is not far from Hatzor, and Hatzor has been discovered. In fact many of you who have been on a Torah Class tour to Israel have been to the very same Hatzor that we are reading about in these passages.

Hatzor is located north of the Sea of Galilee at the southern end of the Hulah Valley. It was a strategic location along the ancient trade superhighway called the Via Maris. Via Maris was the most important trade route of those times as it began in Egypt and wound all the way to Western Asia. As constituted here in Judges, Hatzor was the lead nation in a coalition of other Canaanite nations that were located to the north. This was actually a role that Hatzor played off and on for centuries. It is a large site for such an ancient one; more than 200 acres that archeologists say was home to around 40,000 people.

The army that Sisera commanded was enormous, well-funded and well-equipped as indicated by what for that day was a simply staggering number of iron chariots at his disposal: 900. And it was by means of these devastating weapons platforms that Sisera, Yavin and the other coalition kings were able to keep the northern tribes of Israel under their control so thoroughly. This latest oppression had gone on for 20 years.

Now we must keep in sight that there was a duality occurring here: from an earthly/human standpoint it was Sisera's military might that permitted these Canaanites to subjugate Israel. But from a heavenly/spiritual perspective this was only possible because the Lord ordained precisely this as a punishment for these northern Israelite tribes' idolatry and apostasy.

So, as was par for the course, the Lord took pity on these northern tribes and raised up a judge; interestingly it was a female judge, **Devorah**. Now the Hebrew says she is **ishah neviah**, which literally translates to "a woman of prophesy". This identification as **ishah neviah** is rare in the Bible and is attached only to **Devorah** and two other women: Moses' sister **Miriam**, and a righteous woman named **Huldah** in the time of the kings. These women were true prophets of God and were greatly respected by the men. In fact when we're told that Lappidoth is her husband that is about the last we'll know of him; all else concerning Devorah's husband is apparently unimportant.

Jewish Tradition says that Lappidoth and Barak are the same person and Lappidoth is more of a poetic characteristic than a personal name. The Rabbis say that Lappidoth means torches and Barak means lightening, and that these are merely descriptive of Barak. But there is really no evidence of that and I'm going to proceed based on the assumption that Lappidoth and Barak are two different persons.

We now come to yet another of those times when the nice and neat version of who a Judge is and what role they perform takes a detour. Because Debra is called a judge but is never called a savior or deliverer; but Barak is. In fact I've made of point in earlier lessons of explaining that these Shophetim, Judges, were NOT people who held court and made judicial rulings. Yet Devorah is an exception; verse 5 explains that people came to here from far and wide for the purpose of judgment. And the Hebrew word used is ha-mishpat, which means "justice", as in a ruling of law. So it appears that Debra had two roles: she indeed was a judicial judge who decided cases and she was a prophet who brought messages of God to whomever God directed her.

We'll talk some more about Devorah next week.