



THE JUDGES 1



Lesson 5

Judges 1 - 5

What happened before?

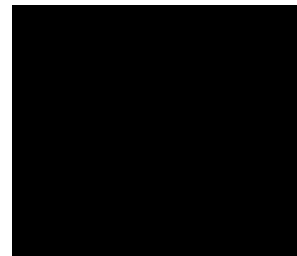
Even though the Israelites had moved into the land of Canaan, they had not driven out all the people of that land. The Israelites were living among people who worshipped idols. Joshua called the people together and reminded them of all the things God had done for them. He warned them not to get involved with the people in the worship of idols. As their leader, Joshua set the example for them by saying, "Choose you this day, whom you will serve. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." The people responded, "We will serve the Lord for He is our God."

Joshua died at age 110. Israel served God all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who lived and worked with him.

BIBLE STORY

After the death of Joshua, the people of Israel wanted to know who would go up first against the Canaanites to fight against them. The Lord said Judah would be the one to go up first and that He had delivered the land into his hands. Judah asked Simeon, his brother, to help him, and in turn he promised to help Simeon fight for Simeon's territory. They did fight for the land and Judah succeeded in driving out the people from its portion. Many of the other tribes did not drive out the people in their land but lived among them.

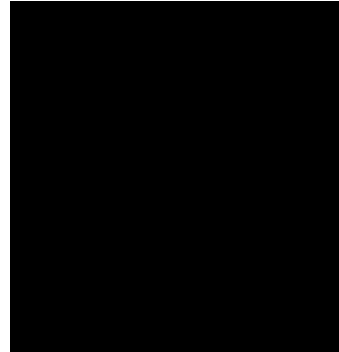
The people living in this land were called Canaanites. They did not believe in the true God, but worshipped false gods instead. The Israelites allowed their sons and daughters to marry Canaanites and soon they forgot the promise they had made to serve only the true God and started bowing down to the false gods of the Canaanites. The Lord was very angry with Israel and told them that He would no longer protect them from their enemies as long as they were disobedient to Him.



Many times the Lord would get very angry with Israel when they refused to serve him. He would allow them to be treated badly by their enemies, but when they repented, He was always willing to take them back and would send judges to deliver them from their enemies. They would serve the true God until prosperity came then they would go back to idolatry and the cycle continued.

In the book of Judges, there are 13 different judges listed who were raised up by the Lord to rule over Israel. Some of them we know a lot about, others we know very little. Each one of them, though, won a great victory for Israel; they freed them from their oppressors and brought them back to God.

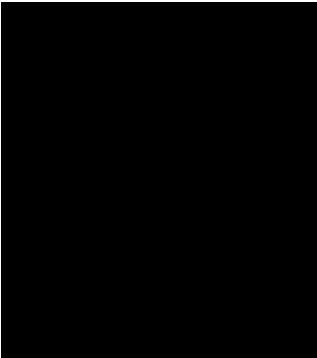
Othniel was the first judge of Israel. He was the son-in-law of Caleb. The children of Israel did evil in the sight of God so He delivered them into the hands of the king of Mesopotamia. It was a hard life. They served that king for eight years. When Israel cried up to the Lord, He chose Othniel to lead the battle against the king of Mesopotamia. He went to war and the Lord delivered the king into his hands. After he drove out the enemy, the land had rest from war for 40 years.



After Othniel died, the Israelites again did evil in the sight of God. To punish them, God permitted the king of Moab to come into the land and make them subject to his rule. The Israelites served Eglon, the king of Moab, for 18 years. When Israel could not take the oppression any longer, they remembered how good God had been to them. They prayed again that God would help them. God sent them another leader who became their judge. This second judge was named Ehud.

Ehud had a plan to get rid of king Eglon. He made a sword about 18 inches long with sharp edges on both sides. Then he went with a number of other Israelites to carry the tribute money to Eglon, which the foreign king made them pay. When he had given the tribute to the king, he sent all the others away. He told Eglon he had a message from God for him. When Ehud was alone with Eglon, Ehud drew his hidden sword and thrust it into Eglon. The king was dead, and Ehud went out the door quietly and locked it, then he hurried out the back way. After he left the room, the servants came and found the door locked. They thought the king wanted to be left alone, so they did not bother him. After a long time they grew worried and forced open the door. Their king lay dead before his throne.

Ehud sounded the alarm by blowing the trumpet in the mountains of Ephraim. The children of Israel joined him. The men of Ephraim rushed down to the fords of the Jordan. When the Moabites saw their king was dead, they ran toward the Jordan to get across into their own country. But the Israelites were already there and cut them down as fast as they came up. They killed 10,000 of the enemy so that not a one of them escaped. In this way Ehud freed Israel from their oppressors and the land had rest from war for 80 years.

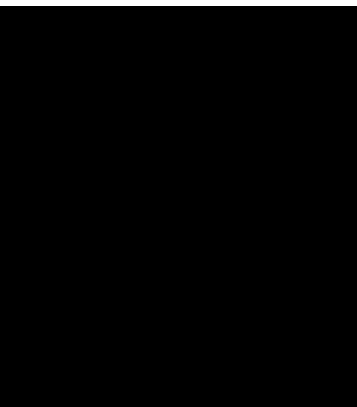


The third judge is mentioned in only one verse (Judges 3:31) “After him was Shamgar, the son of Anath, who killed six hundred men of the Philistines with an ox goad; and also delivered Israel.” (An ox goad is a long-handled, pointed instrument used to urge oxen while plowing.)

After their experiences with idolatry the Israelites should have remained true to God. But, they did evil again, and God allowed the Canaanites under Jabin and Sisera, to oppress them.

Deborah was a prophetess who lived in the hill country of Ephraim near Bethel. The people came to her for advice. God chose her to be the fourth judge of Israel.

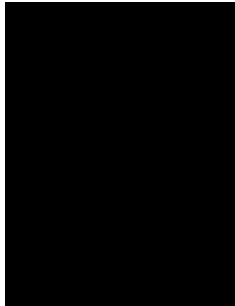
Deborah sent word to Barak (the captain of Israel’s army) who lived at Kedesh in the country of the tribe of Naphthali, far north of Bethel. She asked Barak to come to Mount Tabor with an army of 10,000 men whom he should call from the tribes of Naphthali and Zebulun. Barak sent back word that he would do this if Deborah would go with him, but he would not attempt it alone. Deborah promised to go with him, so Barak soon raised an army of ten thousand men.



The commander-in-chief of the Canaanites was named Sisera. His scouts brought him word that the army of the Israelites had gathered at Mount Tabor. Sisera immediately started moving his powerful army toward them. As they were coming, Deborah ordered Barak to attack. She told him that God would give them victory over the Canaanites. Barak led his men down from Mount Tabor and attacked. God helped the Israelites, and they soon had the Canaanites on the run. When Sisera saw the battle going against him, he jumped out of his chariot and ran away on foot.

As he ran, he came by the tent of Heber. Heber’s wife, Jael was alone in the tent at the time. Sisera knew this was not a camp of the Israelites, so when Jael invited him in, he went into her tent. Sisera asked for something to drink and eat. Jael gave him milk and covered him with a rug. He asked her to stand in the door of the tent and tell anyone who came up that there was no one else in the tent.

When Sisera fell asleep, Jael went quietly to where he lay and drove a tent pin through his temples. When Barak came up, Jael met him and told him that she had the man he was looking for. She took him into her tent



and showed him the dead Canaanite captain. The Israelites had overcome the Canaanites and were free from oppression.

Deborah was a good soldier. She planned a battle and gave orders that brought victory over a powerful enemy. Deborah was the deliverer used by God to overthrow the Canaanites. After the battle was won, Deborah wrote a song celebrating the victory. It is recorded in Judges 5:1-31.

Just as God punished the Canaanite nations for their evil ways, He punished the children of Israel when they participated in those evil ways. We have seen how the idolatrous people influenced the children of Israel to do wrong. We have also seen the great power of the Lord in all the victories given the people. These victories preserved the nation of Israel as God prepared to fulfill the seed promised made to Abraham.

