

Beginning where Joshua leaves off in the death of Joshua (Josh. 24:29). Covering almost 450 years, Judges tells the story of how *spiritual compromise* turned victory (blessing) into defeat (curse). “Another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD” (2:10). Creating a world of such chaos where, “...everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” (Judges 21:25)

Objectives:

By the power of the Holy Spirit working through God’s Word, we will:

- Learn that God’s God calls whom He desires;
- witness how God works within the brokenness of sin by his mercy and grace to deliver and save;
- see how God uses imperfect people and situations to point to His perfect Son

Setting the Stage:

Apostasy, the denial of religious beliefs, struck throughout every Israelite tribe. Many Israelites fell into this apostasy during the half-accomplished defeat of Canaan. Even though God repeatedly told them to defeat their enemies, the Israelites still left pockets of Canaanites in every tribal area. The Israelites sometimes bypassed whole towns, each of which had its own set of gods. The most common were Baal and Ashtoreth, but there were others, too, such as Molech and Dagon.

Temple priests taught that bad luck came when anyone made Baal angry. Only human sacrifices made him happy again. Baal prized child sacrifice. So did Molech and Dagon. For Molech, priests put children onto the heated arms of his metal statue and slowly burned them to death.

Baal had a mate. She was the fertility goddess names Ashtoreth. Scholars are not sure when ancient people began to worship her, but it is evident that much of the ancient world did, and even under several different names. Commonplace at the ancient temples of Ashtoreth were the temple prostitutes. Sexual contact with them was said to bring good crops and general prosperity.

These were the gods that Israel began incorporating into their own faith practices, as well as completely abandoning their faith for the worship of these other gods. What drew the ancient Israelites to worship the false god (Leviticus 18 & 20)? Really nothing more than the most evil and sinful desire, that of making gods in their own image, to serve themselves and their desires for prosperity. Always under the auspices of Yahweh God, and His Word, being insufficient for meeting what they desired. This is the definition of making a god into one’s own image (1st Commandment). Regardless of the false god’s appeal, God wanted His people back. By disciplining Israel, they are led to repentance and God raises up Judges to save His people from themselves and thus He freely proved His intent to keep His everlasting covenant of keeping Israel holy and sacred unto himself.

A Loss of National Identity:

Time passes. Though the Bible does not say how long. Yet it is evident that somewhat “soon” the Israelites living in Canaan begin to lose their national identity. Judges 3:5-6 tell us the Israelites “lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites” (v.5). Not only did they live among them; “their daughters they took to themselves for wives, and their own daughters they gave to their sons, and they served their gods” (v.6). If they kept intermarrying with the Canaanites, the God-pleasing, holy, devout, separate and distinct Israel would cease to exist. How could they show God’s love to heathen nations if they no longer followed God’s laws? How could they be holy and pure if they were serving false gods? Though they were completely undeserving, and God would have been justified in allowing Israel to perish from the Earth, and they had broken the Covenant, according to God’s mercy He would not allow this to happen. Out of His mercy, grace and loving-kindness He would provide a means to return them to Himself.

A Note on the National Identity of Israel, useful in Biblical Interpretation:

“Israel” refers to all those who live in the Covenant relationship with God. In the Old Testament God’s covenant with Abram (Genesis 15), and his descendants after him (especially Jacob/ Israel in Gen. 35), defines this in terms of genetics—a specific ethnic and cultural group according to heritage. (Though there were certainly ways for outsiders to be “grafted in” to Israel by means of circumcision and baptism/ritual washing.)

In the New Testament Jesus makes the New Covenant in His blood (Matt. 20:28, Luke 22:20, Mark 14:24, 1 Cor 11:25). Those who are in Jesus are thereby called the “true children of Abraham” and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:29). In spiritual terms, the Church (all true believers in Christ) is now “the Israel of God” (Gal 6:16) and is composed of those Jews and Gentiles who are regenerated by means of faith in Jesus (Matt 3:9, Luke 3:8, Gal 3:6-9).

National Israel was really just the “seed” of the future Church, which will eventually restore the entire earth under God’s forthcoming dominion (Mal 1:11, Rom 4:13). The Church is now the heir and chosen nation of God upon the earth (Gal 3:29). Jesus Himself taught that the Jews would lose their privileges and be replaced by “another people” (Matt 21:43). After the Church came into existence on the Day of Pentecost, God was finished with national Israel, and today a “true Jew” is anyone born of the Spirit, and now has nothing to do with the ethnic heritage (Rom 2:28-29).

All the promises made to Israel in the Old Testament reach their fulfillment in Christ (“Israel reduced to One”) and now are the possession of the one, holy, catholic (“universal”) and apostolic Christian Church on earth, as Christ reigns on David’s throne in heaven (2 Cor 1:20).

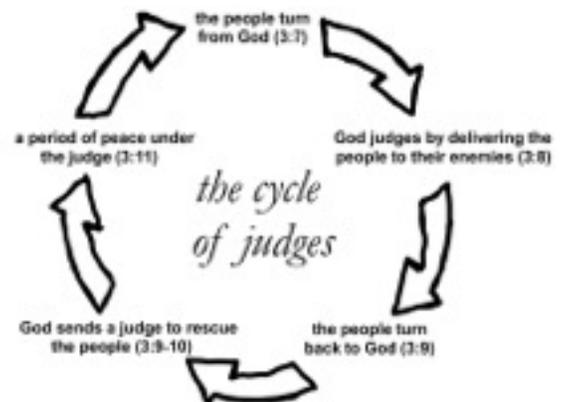
There is no one physical nation of God, or people of God, by heritage, on the Earth. Thus no one nation or people specifically has God’s favor. The Church is the nation and people of God, by the Spirit. The Church is composed of many people and found in many nations.

“There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” Ephesians 4:4-6

Ehud and Shamgar: Read Judges 3:12-31

Othniel (Judge 1 of Israel) was called the “perfect judge.” Could we apply the term to Ehud? How long of a rest period followed Ehud’s defeat of Moab?

What is surprising about the 3rd Judge of Israel, Shamgar?



Deborah and Barak: Read Judges 4

Is Judges 4 prescriptive or descriptive? What are the implications for the interpretation of this Biblical text?

What is the relationship between Deborah & Barak?

All judges have two things in common. First, original sin clings to them. Second, despite that sin, and the brokenness of the world/culture at the time, God works through them to accomplish His Divine Will to bless and save His people.

How does this knowledge impact our interpretation of this text?

The Judges:

First Oppression, Judges 3:7-11:

Sin—Idolatry

Cause—Apostasy

Punishment—Eight years

Deliverer and Judge—Othniel

Second Oppression, Judges 3:12-31:

Sin—Immorality and Idolatry

Cause—Apostasy

Punishment—Eighteen Years

Deliverer and Judge—Ehud & Shamgar

Third Oppression, Judges 4-5:

Sin—Departed from God & Laziness

Cause—Apostasy

Punishment—Twenty Years

Deliverer and Judge—Deborah & Barak

Fourth Oppression, Judges 6-8:32:

Sin—Departed from God

Cause—Apostasy

Punishment—Midianites for Seven years

Deliverer and Judge—Gideon

Fifth Oppression, Judges 8:33-10:5:

Sin—Departed from God, Sex Immorality

Cause—Apostasy

Punishment—Civil War, etc.

Deliverer and Judge—Tola and Jair

Sixth Oppression, Judges 10:6-12:15:

Sin—Idolatry increased

Cause—Apostasy

Punishment—Philistines & Ammonites,

Eighteen Years

Deliverer and Judge—Jephthah

Seventh Oppression, Judges 13-16:

Sin—Departed from God

Cause—Apostasy

Punishment—Philistines, Forty years

Deliverer and Judge—Samson