

The Book of Judges

I. THE ANGEL OF THE LORD (CHRIST HIMSELF).

- A. He speaks to Israel (Jdg. 2:1-5).
- B. He speaks to Gideon (6:12, 20-22).
- C. He speaks to Samson's parents (13:3, 6, 9, 13, 15-18, 20-21).

II. THE SPIRIT OF GOD

- A. He comes upon Othniel (3:10).
- B. He comes upon Gideon (6:34).
- C. He comes upon Jephthah (11:29).
- D. He comes upon Samson (13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14).

III. AN EVIL SPIRIT (JUDGES 9:3)

IV. TWELVE MILITARY REFORMERS---THE JUDGES.

- A. First judge: Othniel (1:12-13; 3:8-11). Othniel was both the nephew and the son-in-law of Caleb (1:13).
 - 1. Oppressing nation: Mesopotamia
 - 2. Length of oppression: eight years
 - 3. Years of peace he gave: forty years
 - 4. Accomplishments:
 - a. He captured a strong Canaanite city.
 - b. He drove out the Mesopotamian invaders.
- B. Second judge: Ehud (3:12-30).
 - 1. Oppressing nation: Moab
 - 2. Length of oppression: eighteen years
 - 3. Years of peace: eighty years
 - 4. Accomplishments: This left-handed Benjaminite warrior, after carrying Israel's annual tax tribute to Jericho (the Moabite capital), manages to kill Eglon, the fat Moabite king. He then gathers an army, slaughters 10,000 enemy soldiers, and ushers in a long reign of peace.
- C. Third judge: Shamgar (3:31).
 - 1. Oppressing nation: Philistia
 - 2. Length of oppression: unrecorded
 - 3. Years of peace: unrecorded
 - 4. Accomplishments: With an ox goad this soldier killed 600 Philistines.
- D. Fourth judge: Barak (as helped by Deborah, Jdg. 4-5).
 - 1. Oppressing nation: northern Canaanites
 - 2. Length of oppression: twenty years
 - 3. Years of peace: forty years
 - 4. Accomplishments: The king of Hazor had cruelly oppressed Israel by the hand of Sisera (his five-star general), who commanded 900 iron chariots. At the encouragement of Deborah (an Israeli prophetess), freedom-fighter Barak mobilizes an army of 10,000 and attacks the enemy from the heights of Mt. Tabor. Sisera's armies are totally routed and he himself is later killed while taking refuge in the tent of a woman named Jael. Deborah and Barak then compose and sing a duet of praise to God to celebrate the victory (Jdg. 5).
- E. Fifth judge: Gideon (Jdg. 6-8).
 - 1. Oppressing nation: Midian
 - 2. Length of oppression: seven years
 - 3. Years of peace: forty years
 - 4. Accomplishments:
 - a. As he threshes wheat behind a wine press, Gideon is commissioned by the angel of God to raise an army and defeat the Midianites. Gideon obeys by building an altar to Jehovah-Shalom ("the Lord sends peace") and by destroying the Baal god idol his family had been worshipping (6:11-32).
 - b. After a twofold casting of the fleece (6:36-40), he raises an army of 32,000, only to see God cut it down to 10,000 and finally to 300. With these 300 he would face 135,000 enemy troops (7:1-7; 8:10).
 - c. On the eve of battle he is reassured of victory by overhearing a conversation between two enemy soldiers (7:9-15).
 - d. He then divides his army into three companies, and upon the signal each man blows a trumpet, breaks a clay jar, raises up a blazing torch, and shouts. "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon" (7:16-22). The Midianite army is thrown into panic and completely routed (7:22).

- e. During the battle, Gideon is forced to appease the anger of the jealous tribe of Ephraim (8:1-3). He then punishes several transjordan cities which had refused to aid him in pursuing the enemy (8:4-21).
 - f. After the victory he refuses an offer by Israel to become king, but may have had aspirations for the priestly office, as he asked for a golden ephod. An ephod was part of the apparel worn by a high priest. This later proved to be a snare for Israel, as they began worshipping it (8:22-32).
- F. Sixth judge: Tola (10:1-2).
- 1. Oppressing nation: unrecorded
 - 2. Length of oppression: unrecorded
 - 3. Years of peace: twenty-three years
 - 4. Accomplishments: unrecorded
- G. Seventh judge: Jair (10:3-5).
- 1. Oppressing nation: unrecorded
 - 2. Length of oppression: unrecorded
 - 3. Years of peace: twenty-two years
 - 4. Accomplishments: He and his thirty sons delivered thirty Israeli cities from oppression.
- H. Eighth judge: Jephthah (10:6--12:7).
- 1. Oppressing nation: Ammon
 - 2. Length of oppression: eighteen years
 - 3. Years of peace: six years
 - 4. Accomplishments:
 - a. At this time God once again severely rebukes Israel for their sin of forsaking Him (10:10-16). He had already done this on two previous occasions. (See 2:1-5, 11-23; 6:8-10.)
 - b. God now raises up Jephthah, the son of a harlot, to deliver Israel from the Ammonites (11:1-11).
 - c. On the eve of battle, Jephthah makes a rash vow he will soon bitterly regret (11:30-31).
 - d. The next day a confident and courageous Jephthah totally routs the enemy. But his victory celebration is short lived, for when he rides into Mizpah (his hometown), the first person to greet him is his only daughter (11:32-38).
 - e. At the end of a sixty-day mourning period a heartbroken Jephthah keeps his vow (11:39-40).
 - f. After all this, Jephthah's troubles were not yet over, for he was provoked into battle by the jealous tribe of Ephraim (12:4-7). This tragic battle, won by Jephthah, resulted in the loss of 42,000 Ephraimite troops. Many of those troops lost their lives due to their inability to pronounce the word Shibboleth (Hebrew for "stream") correctly.
- I. Ninth judge: Ibzan (12:8-10).
- 1. Oppressing nation: unrecorded
 - 2. Length of oppression: unrecorded
 - 3. Years of peace: seven years
 - 4. Accomplishments: unrecorded
- J. Tenth judge: Elon (12:11-12).
- 1. Oppressing nation: unrecorded
 - 2. Length of oppression: unrecorded
 - 3. Years of peace: ten years
 - 4. Accomplishments: unrecorded
- K. Eleventh judge: Abdon (12:13-15).
- 1. Opposing nation: unrecorded
 - 2. Length of oppression: unrecorded
 - 3. Years of peace: eight years
 - 4. Accomplishments: unrecorded
- L. Twelfth judge: Samson (Jdg. 13-16).
- 1. Opposing nation: Philistia
 - 2. Length of oppression: forty years
 - 3. Years of peace: twenty years (16:31)
 - 4. Accomplishments:
 - a. Samson's mother is visited by the angel of the Lord, who tells her of his future birth (13:2-3).
 - b. This heavenly messenger instructed the parents that their child was to be raised a Nazarite (13:4-5). According to Numbers 6:1-6, the Nazarite had three restrictions placed upon him.
 - (1) He was not to touch wine.
 - (2) His hair was to remain untouched by a razor.
 - (3) He must not touch a dead body. Note: Samson's mother was also commanded not to drink wine (13:4, 14).
 - c. On this occasion Samson's parents prayed a prayer all expectant Christian parents should pray (13:8, 12).

- d. Samson was born and empowered by the Holy Spirit even as he grew up (13:24-25).
 - e. He determined to marry an unbelieving Philistine girl, to the dismay of his parents. Already Samson's carnal nature is seen coming to the surface. In spite of his sensuality, God used him for his glory (14:1-4).
 - f. En route to Philistia Samson kills a lion. Later he discovers that a swarm of bees had chosen the carcass of the lion to make honey in. At his wedding feast Samson uses this experience as a basis for a riddle (14:12-14). The guests eventually would dishonestly solve this riddle, getting the answer from Samson's bride. He becomes furious at this and pays his debt to the wedding guests, but only at the expense of thirty Philistine victims (14:15-19). He then goes back home to live with his father and mother.
 - g. He returns only to find that the girl's father had given his bride to Samson's best man! In an act of revenge, the Hebrew strong man does the following (15:4-5).
 - h. He then killed many Philistines (15:8). After this, the Philistines threaten to destroy the tribe of Judah unless Samson is bound and delivered to them. Samson meekly allows himself to be tied up, but as the enemy comes in view he breaks the ropes, grabs the jawbone of an ass, and slaughters 1,000 Philistines (15:9-17).
 - i. He then prays one of his only two recorded prayers. Both are totally carnal and self-centered. (Compare 15:18 with 16:28.)
 - j. At Gaza (a Philistine city) Samson once again avoids capture, this time by ripping apart the iron gate of the city (16:1-3). Samson is finally done in by a Philistine woman named Delilah, who discovers the source of his great strength (16:4-20).
- Note: At this point, Samson has violated all three Nazarite vows. He had touched the carcass of a lion (14:8-9). He had drunk wine (14:10). He had allowed his hair to be cut (16:19).
- k. Samson now learns the high cost of low living (16:21).
 - l. In prison he regains his strength as his hair grows out again. He is then allowed by God to destroy thousands of Philistines who had gathered in their heathen temple for a drunken orgy. In the following destruction Samson himself perished (16:22-31).

V. A BLOODY BUTCHER--ABIMELECH (JUDGES 9)

- A. Abimelech was the son of Gideon by a concubine in Shechem (8:31). He arranged for the brutal murder of sixty-nine of his seventy half-brothers and was crowned "king" of his mother's hometown, Shechem (9:1-5).
- B. Jotham, the half-brother who escaped, relates one of the two fables in the Bible (for the other, see 2 Ki. 14:9), and directs it at Abimelech (9:8-15).
- C. Three years later God stirred up trouble between King Abimelech and the citizens of Shechem. In the ensuing struggle, Abimelech was killed (9:22-57).

IV. AN IDOL-WORSHIPPING SON--MICAHA (JUDGES 17-18).

Micah, a thief and idol worshiper, is encouraged by his indulgent mother to "start his own religion." This he does by (among other things) hiring his own personal priest, a money grabbing Levite from Bethlehem (17:1-13). This perverted "private pastor" is later enticed by the tribe of Dan to become their official priest (18:1-31).

VII. A COWARDLY LEVITE (JUDGES 19-21),

- A. These three chapters are among the most depressing in all the Bible. The story began when a Levite and his unfaithful concubine wife stopped overnight in Gibeah, a city located in the tribal territory of Benjamin (19:11-15).
- B. The couple stayed with an old man. That night his house was surrounded by a group of sex perverts who demanded the Levite come out and partake of their disgusting and degrading actions. The cowardly Levite saved himself by giving his wife over to this miserable mob. By morning time the perverts had sexually murdered her (19:16-27).
- C. The Levite (who apparently was emotionally sick himself) thereupon cut her dead body into twelve pieces, and sent a bloody chunk to each tribe in Israel along with the story of what happened (19:28-29).
- D. Israel was enraged at this sexual crime and gathered an army of some 400,000 troops to punish the guilty perverts of Gibeah (19:30--20:11).
- E. The citizens of Benjamin, however, refused to surrender the criminals and a civil war broke out. After an especially bloody three-battle war in which Israel lost 40,000 men, Benjamin was defeated. When the body "dead count" was in, only 600 out of some 26,000 soldiers of Benjamin were left alive. A sobered and saddened Israel then provided wives for these 600, lest the very name of Benjamin disappear from the face of the earth (20:12--21:25).