

Understanding the Old Testament 6  
The Period of the Judges (1375 BC – 1050 BC)  
Judges, Ruth, part of 1Samuel

The period of the Judges is a sad chapter in Israel's history. Although they conquered much of the territory God had given them, they left big pockets of resistance. The enemy was determined and Israel was not as determined. How does that apply to our lives? The Angel of the Lord told them that because they had disobeyed, the people remaining in the land would be thorns in their sides. Judges 2:1-5 Aren't the areas we let slide thorns in our sides as well?

The rest of chapter 2 is a summary of the book of Judges. Let's read it. We see that God's promise to drive out the people of the land was conditional. The Israelites did not pass on their faith to their children, and the result was constantly being oppressed by their neighbors. The reason God allowed the oppression was to turn them back to God. Does God allow difficulty in our life to cause us to turn back to a serious relationship with Him?

One of the first Judges was Joshua's nephew Othniel. (3:9-11) Each godly Judge arrived on the scene when Israel cried out to God. Ehud and Shamgar followed Othniel. The story of compromise with idolatry and crying out to God is repeated again and again. Is that a picture of some Children of God today? Of you personally?

Deborah was a female Judge. Barak served under her as a general. The land was subjugated to the Canaanites at the time. She told Barak that the Lord commanded him to defeat the Canaanites. He wouldn't go into battle without her, so God gave the glory of killing the Canaanite king to a woman. God caused the Canaanites chariots to get stuck in the mud caused by a great rainstorm. The Israelites came off a mountainside and defeated them. The king fled on foot and found refuge in a tent. When he went to sleep, the woman of the tent drove a tent peg through his head, fulfilling the prophecy that a woman would get the glory.

Gideon was the next great judge. He was very reluctant but obeyed after God gave him a number of signs. There are a number of powerful lessons in the story. This time, the Midianites were oppressing Israel. Gideon called the men of Israel together and God said there were too many. The Midianite camp looked innumerable, but God wanted a small band of Israelites so that He would get all the glory. The Lord told him to have the men take a pot with a torch inside in one hand and trumpet in the other and attack at night. When the signal was given, they all broke their pots so that the light shone and blew their trumpets. In the confusion, the Midianites fought themselves. Gideon and his 300 men chased them, collecting the spoils and defeating their kings. In the end, Gideon would refused become a king, but he did make a grave mistake by casting the golden earrings into a golden ephod. The Israelites worshipped it instead of God that gave them the victory.

There is a revelation of another name of God in Judges 6:24, Jehovah Shalom, or the Lord is Peace. This was the revelation Gideon had. It was God's heart for them to have peace if they would set their hearts on the true God. When we look to God, He helps us defeat our enemies. He becomes our peace. Jesus said, "My peace I give

unto you." We have peace with God, peace with our own hearts, and peace with our neighbors when we seek God.

There were a series of Judges that weren't very influential until Samson. Samson's parents were notified by the Angel of the Lord that they would have a son who was to be a Nazarite. He was to vow not to touch wine and let his hair grow. God endowed him with supernatural strength, but he had one weakness that dominated his life, women. Samson was a plague to the Philistines. He single handedly took on their forces and won victories. The Philistines knew the only way to defeat him was his weak area. The infamous Delilah kept after him until he finally told her the fact that if his hair were to be cut, he would lose his power.

His eyes were put out and he was made to grind meal. When his hair grew back, the Philistines had a great party and brought him out to poke fun at him. He brought the building down on them all, killing more in his death than he did in his battles.

The enemy of our soul knows he cannot defeat us in a front on attack. The Lord is our strength. So he uses the tactics he taught the Philistines. He works on our weakness. We all have a weak area. It is there to keep us humble and dependent upon God. Will we give in when he keeps up the attack on our weak area? Even in defeat, we can be successful to some extent.

At this low point in Israel's history, there is the sad story of the destruction of the tribe of Benjamin. A Levite's wife was brutally raped and killed in a town of Benjamin. He asked Israel for justice. The other tribes gathered against Benjamin and eventually almost exterminated them. They took the women as captives so the remaining men of Benjamin had no wives. The Israelites then set up an opportunity for the men of Benjamin to steal wives during a celebration so that the tribe could continue.

In the book of 1 Samuel we have the story of the last judges. Eli was the high priest. His sons assisted him, but they were very corrupt. Samuel was put into Eli's care when he was weaned. He grew up in the Tabernacle and learned to hear the voice of the Lord. Eli's sons took the Ark of the Covenant into battle and they were killed. The Ark was taken. When Eli heard of this he fell backward, broke his neck, and died. Samuel was now the high priest and final Judge.

Samuel had a powerful presence and was feared by the people. Samuel's sons were much like Eli's sons. The people of Israel, worried about what would happen upon Samuel's death, decided they wanted a king. This greatly disturbed Samuel because he saw it as turning from God's rule to that of man. God told them that the people were not rejecting Samuel. They were rejecting God. God directed Samuel to anoint Saul as the first king of Israel.

What is the difference between a Judge and a King?  
What is the danger of one-man rule?  
How does that apply to the church today?