

Week #:	190	Series:	God's Judgment	Title:	Judges Review of #1-5 & the Cycle of Apostasy
Scriptures:	Judges 1-8				
Songs:	Battle Belongs – Phil Wickham (4:48)				
	Revelation Song – Kari Jobe (5:59)				
	PRAYER:	Famous For (I Believe) – Tauren Wells (4:04)			
Videos:	Judges Song – What's in the Bible #4 (Time- 31:31-33:25)				

Cycle of Apostasy:

Judges is an encouraging book with one victory after another. It is also a depressing book in that they continually turn away from God again and again. It's kind of the glass half empty and half full kind of story.

It serves as a warning as to the consequences of having this kind of a cycle as the norm in their lives as Christians. It was the norm for the Israelites and it can become the norm for the believer as well where Christians never experience that victorious life. They're constantly somewhere at some level in that cycle of sin – or the *Cycle of Apostasy*.

The book of Judges teaches those who are in that cycle how to break it. It is breakable. There is a way to get out of that rut, and the book of Judges gives us the keys to doing that. We will call them the three R's:

Repent >>> Return >>> Repeat

We see this in the letter to the church of Ephesus in Revelation 2 where they were admonished because of leaving their first love. You could say they were in a rut, and the exhortation to them is this three-fold approach to go back and do what worked in the beginning: repent, return, and repeat. When we get into this three-prong cycle, then we can effectively break that cycle of apostasy that we find throughout the book of Judges.

Throughout this book there are 12 deliverers sent by God to help the people return to God. Our deliverer is more powerful though, and it only takes the power of Jesus Christ. When Jesus, as our deliverer, breaks the cycle, then His Word as our daily bread keeps us from going back.

Proverbs 26:11 says:

¹¹ Just as a dog returns to his vomit, a fool repeats his folly.

This is a graphic and disgusting proverb. Yet it is what God feels like when He sees us get stuck in this cycle just as Israel did for so many years.

We are encouraged by Paul in Hebrews 3:12

¹² Watch out, brothers, so that there will not be in any one of you an evil heart lacking trust, which could lead you to apostatize from the living God!

God does not want us to get stuck in this foolish cycle. He gives us the way out.

David says in Psalms 119:11

¹¹ Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You.

David knew the key to staying faithful to God through not just the good times, but through the hard times as well. He knew that God's Word was living and life breathing.

Psalms 119:105

¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

The whole of Psalm 119 is all about the Word of God. If you want to know how to break that cycle, it can only be done by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit in your life. You've got to get into the Word and the Word has to get into you.

God doesn't want us to live this life of up and down, back and forth, chaos. His desire is to have us remain with Him.

Throughout the book of Judges Israel will stay in this sin cycle because of their low regard for the Word of God – the commands of God. A Christian who has a high regard for the Word of God is a Christian who will live and walk in victory. It is said that sin will keep you from the Bible, but the opposite is true too – the Bible will keep you from sin! It's a shield and protection. We need the Word of God daily.

Israel took possession of the land under Joshua. The land was divided amongst the tribes. Then it says that the people served Adonai throughout the life of Joshua. And then, when he was 110 years old, Joshua died. The people's leader died. They, once again, prove here that they need a spiritual leader. First, they had Moses, then Joshua, and now both are gone. The newer generation does not remember all God has done for them. Joshua outlived a lot of people, so when he died, the people no longer had those around who had *been there - done that* with Joshua when they were taking over the land.

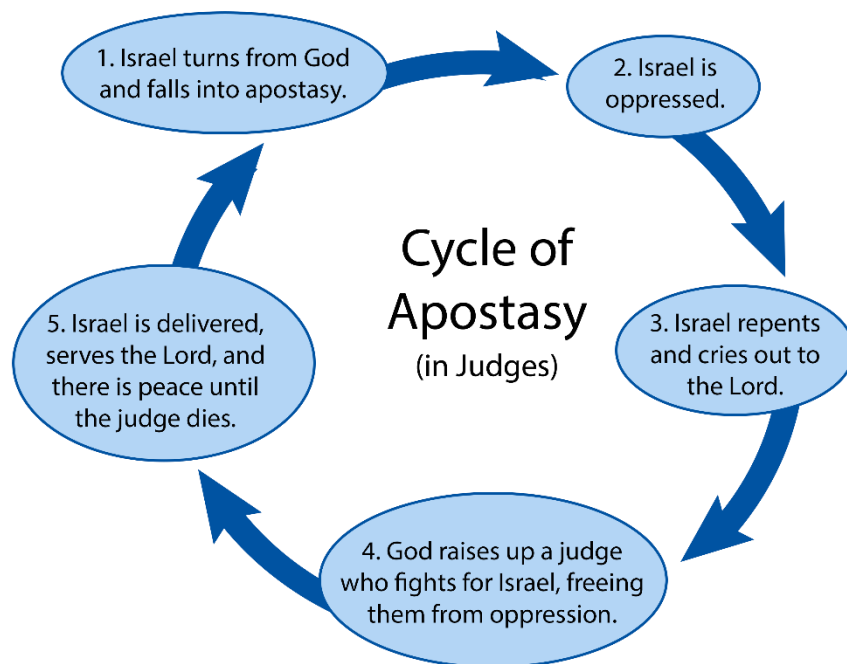
Israel saw nothing wrong in their approach to settling Canaan. They saw nothing wrong in their approach to battle, their new goal being making peace with their neighbors instead of driving them out or destroying them completely. They began to participate in their neighbors' festivals and customs, gave respect to their former enemies' beliefs and even to their false gods, and as a result enjoyed a measure of rest and fruitfulness that was mostly manmade, and thus bore little resemblance to what Godly rest and fruitfulness looked like. Inter-marriage between Canaanites and Hebrews became an everyday affair with little resistance or thought, and most saw it as a good thing. Israel was blind to their condition and would not accept that they had broken faith with their God because they felt so good about themselves and their ability to contrive their own morality WITHOUT the direction of the Lord.

They thought they were going to be fine if the people stayed. In the end though, God had a purpose for this requirement – He knew that these people and their culture of false gods would invade the hearts and minds of Israel. And in time it did. The people gave in to the false god worship that was around them from the people who they did not drive out of the land. God had chosen these people to be **HIS PEOPLE**, yet they turned away from Him and to false gods.

God was angry! Rightly so! He was so mad that he backed off and let them fall into captivity and oppression to the Canaanites who they did not drive out of the land. This is a perfect example of **God is a jealous God**. He desires His people to choose Him. God pulled His hand of protection back, and they began to lose battles instead of winning, as they had been when they were walking uprightly with God.

This is the **Cycle of Apostasy** that we see throughout the book of Judges. God would raise up judges, who would rescue them. They people would turn back to God for a time – usually until the judge died. Then when they no longer had a human leader, they would turn away from God again.

We see here that they need a physical leader. They need a Moses, a Joshua. This will eventually lead to **they need a king**. This book sets up the future of Israel when God



will bring on the kings.

Judges #1-5 Review

Judge #1: Othniel

Othniel was the nephew of Caleb – the same Caleb who stood with Joshua as ten other spies who were sent into the land by Moses gave a negative report. Caleb and Joshua instead saw all that Adonai wanted for them as a nation in this Promised Land.

Caleb and Joshua were the only two from that generation who entered the land. Everyone else had to die in the desert because of their negative outlook on what God wanted to do.

God raised up Othniel, who went to war on behalf of Israel, freeing them from the bondage of the King of Aram [Mesopotamia]. Othniel is an interesting individual in that his judgment covered a transitional period connecting the leaders of the past to the leaders of his time. He was related to Caleb, who had left Egypt as a freed slave and entered the Promised Land as a leader. Very few could boast of such family connections during this time in the land of Israel.

The name **OTHNI-EL** is derived from the ancient Hebrew words for **LION** and **GOD**. Thus his name means: **God's Lion**, and he was truly used in this fashion.

Othniel did not marry into the culture of the *-ites* who surrounded them. Because of this decision, and because He stepped up to become the judge Adonai needed, He was blessed with a wife, two sons, and a large amount of land (the upper and lower springs).

Othniel kept the peace in this region until his death, 40 years later. Israel got to see the blessings of God during this time.

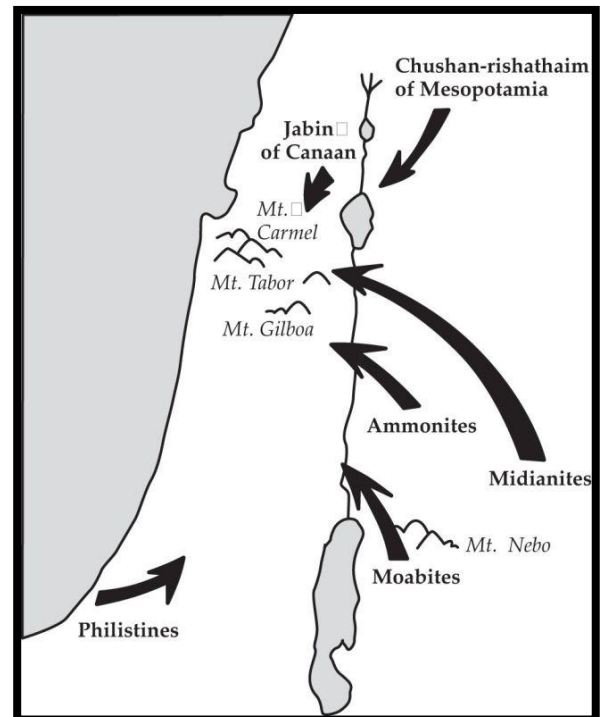
Judge #2: Ehud

The first attack, before Othniel, came from the north, the area of Mesopotamia, and King Cushan-Rishathaim. The second attack against Israel came from the Moabites in the south. King Eglon attacked and took over the City of Date Palms, oppressing the Israelites for 18 years.

God raises up a man by the name of **Ehud** to help free them from this oppression brought on by Eglon the King of Moab. It specifically says that he is left-handed, and this is significant because it is this physical feature that will set him up for what he is going to do.

Left-handed people are rare. They say that throughout history only about 10-13% of all people are left-handed. (About 1% are ambidextrous.) This makes for a very rare and special attribute that Ehud would use to get the job done. Ehud had this distinction and was able to accomplish what others would not have been able to because of this physical feature.

Ehud was selected as the one to take a special tribute to King Eglon. He made a special sword that he strapped to his right leg, and he was able to get past the security without being found out because of this special physical feature. They didn't think to pat down his right leg, otherwise they would have found that sword. Ehud was able to get his weapon into the palac.



Ehud made his tribute presentation, then he asked for a moment to tell the king something in confidence, and so the king allowed Ehud to join him in a private chamber. This is when Ehud was able to get close enough to the king to drive his sword into the king's belly, killing him. Then he snuck out, locked the doors, and left.

By the time the servants found the king, Ehud had time to escape and blow the shofar to rally the people of Israel to fight. They stopped the Moabite armies at the Jordan River, blocking any of the soldiers from crossing, and thus limiting their ability to go around and attack from behind. They were cut off from anything but a forward-facing attack, and Israel was prepared for this fight. With God's help, they were able to kill 10k highly trained soldiers without even one person escaping.

While this is one of the more graphic Biblical accounts, it is also very insightful. We can see God's powerful hand throughout. I think the most profound take-away from this story of Ehud is this: When they turned back to God, it did not take God long to change their story. In a matter of a day, they went from being oppressed to being free!

Judge #3: Shamgar

What scripture says about Shamgar is almost like one of those newsbreaks sandwiched between regular programming on radio or television. The writer slips him in between Ehud and Deborah in the briefest sort of way. Yet it says, "he too saved Israel." So, if anything, we have a salvation break.

The Philistines began to overtake Israel, and we do not know how long this went on, but eventually the Israelites turned back to God and God rose this man up, Shamgar, who took action against the Philistines. With an ox-goad, he killed 600 men. We don't know if he fought alone or if he led a contingency of men. All we know is that he was known to slay 600 with a farmer's tool called an ox-goad.

An ox-goad is a wooden tool, approximately eight feet long, fitted with an iron spike or point at one end, which was used to spur oxen as they pulled a plow or cart. It often had an iron scraper at the non-pointed end to clear clods of earth from the plowshare when it became weighed down.

Little else is known concerning Shamgar. His period of leadership bridged the time between Ehud and Deborah. God used one man with one simple weapon to rescue His people from oppression.

Judge #4: Deborah

Israel once again falls into the Cycle of Apostasy. God's hand of protection lifts, and they are brought into bondage, once more, by one of these people they did not drive out of the land when they took possession. In this case it is the Canaanite King Yavin [Jabin] of Hatzor. He has a commander named Sisera, who had 900 iron chariots, and who oppressed the people of Israel with a cruel hand for 20 years.

Finally, after 20 years of oppression, the people turn back to God, and cry out for Adonai's help. He raises up someone who is going to lead them to victory against King Yavin [Jabin].

Deborah is a prophetess of Adonai. She is known throughout the region for sitting under a specific date palm called Deborah's Palm, and presiding over disputes. She was a well-respected lady, married to an influential man, and she was doing what Adonai had called and purposed her to do. She was walking in her anointing here. Just as Moses had done before, Deborah would listen to the dispute and tell the people what Adonai wanted them to do. She guided these people in the ways of Adonai, and tried to bring as much peace to their lives as she could.



It also says that she was not just a judge, she was a prophetess, and Adonai had a job for her to do in that role. Deborah sends for Barak, who lives north of King Yavin [Jabin], and calls him to come down to Ephraim where she lives. She delivers a message from God that he is to go to Mount Tabor with 10k troops from the tribes of Zebulun and Ephraim and they are to come against Sisera's army, and Adonai will deliver them to Israel.

We know Deborah as the fourth judge, but God intended this job for Barak. Barak was called by Adonai to lead this contingency of 10k men, and to free the Israelites from the power of Sisera / Yavin [Jabin]. Barak, however, was scared and thus dropped that calling. He felt inadequate. He felt he knew better than Adonai. He was willing to go only if someone else would take the lead. If he had had the strength of character to take the lead, perhaps he would have been listed as the fourth judge of Israel instead of Deborah. But as we see in the book of Judges, God listed Deborah as the fourth, and only woman, judge of Israel.

Deborah's name means, in essence, *sweetness of God's provision*. God provided what was needed at the time – someone strong enough to lead – when the one He had called and purposed, and even named for that purpose, did not want to live up to his calling. Deborah was already fulfilling her purpose for Adonai – she was presiding over the people as a judge. She was willing, though, to step into a new role immediately and fulfill this dropped purpose as well, because she had already been studying God's Word. She had already been praising God and spending time in prayer. She was already prepared for whatever God needed her to do.

Judge #5: Gideon

After a period of peace for 40 years following Deborah, the Midianites came from the region of Egypt and began taking over the land in a manner the scripture says, "like locusts." They came in and overran everything, killing Israelites and taking the crops, burning the fields and cities, and leaving a mass of chaos and fear in their wake.

This is where we are introduced to judge #5 – Gideon. He is threshing wheat in a wine press. He is in such fear of the Midianites that he is hiding out in a cave, trying to separate the usable portion from the unusable portion of the wheat stalks in a place where grapes were pressed to produce wine. These are two vastly different processes, and shows us the fear Gideon possessed because of the Midianites.

Gideon did not trust God's calling at first, and questioned God twice asking for God to prove through a fleece that this was truly what God desired him to do. Finally, he trusted God and called for the Israelites to form an army. 30,000 men showed up, but God whittled that army down to only 600 men, and with those 600 soldiers God brought about a miracle battle where they overtook 150,000 Midianite troops (and their nomadic families), taking back possession of the land.

It is because of Gideon's trust in God that he is known as God's valiant warrior instead of a fearful farmer who was hiding in a cave. God's journey with Gideon leads the nation of Israel into another 40 years of peace.