

Othniel—Ehud—Deborah

(Judges 1—5:31)

A very good way to get a better understanding of the Old Testament is to divide it into time periods. For example, consider the period from Adam to Noah as “Beginnings”. With Noah and the flood a whole new generation began...and became very wicked again. So make “Noah” the second period. With Abraham began a third period as God selected a people to be his very own, through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the “Patriarchs” (or fathers). So Genesis has 3 periods: Beginnings, Noah, and Patriarchs.

Exodus begins with a 4th period, the Captivity in Egypt. After Egypt came the Wilderness wandering period (#5). The 6th period was the Conquest period as the Israelites, led by Joshua, set about to subdue or drive out the Canaanites. After things became fairly well settled (although not entirely) God established a system of Judges (7th period) to rule the Israelites.

Judges 3 records the selection of the first Judge, OTHNIEL, nephew of Caleb. The book of Judges is a book of cycles. A pattern of behavior was repeated over and over---some 15 times. The Israelites had failed to obey God’s instructions to drive out the idolatrous nations from Canaan. Instead, the Israelites, time after time, turned to worship of the idols of their neighbors. To punish them, God allowed them to be overcome by neighboring nations, who mistreated them badly. In the next step the people cry out to God for deliverance., promising to serve him instead of idols. Next step: God raises up a judge to deliver from their oppressors. Next step: after a while the people go right back to idolatry. Then back to crying out to God and a new Judge brings deliverance. (One would think that the people would eventually get it right...but they never did---a pattern that began in the wilderness and continued throughout the Old Testament.)

Some Judges were more prominent than others. EHUD, a left-handed Judge, delivered the people from Moab domination, personally killing Eglon, the Moabite king. DEBORAH was the only woman judge. Judges 4 records the interesting story of Deborah’s role in the deliverance from Jabin, the king who had oppressed Israel for 20 years. Her commander, Barak, would not go into battle unless she went along (a really courageous sort of guy!) She went---and they won. (Check out the full story!)