

The book of Judges records several characteristic episodes in the lowest period in Israel's history -- roughly a 300 year stretch of time from the death of Joshua until just before the rise of Samuel and king Saul (1400-1100 BC). It takes its name from the 12 men and 1 woman who were raised up by God to deliver Israel from the hands of their oppressors. Time and time again God's people walk in disobedience and compromise. That rebellion leads to political, moral and spiritual captivity. Instead of enjoying the peaceful well-being that was promised by God if they would obey His words, the tribes of Israel end up living in chaotic misery.

In Judges we see the pervasive consequences of apostasy -- falling away from His calling to be different from all the nations round about them. The personal and national corruption is overwhelming. The triumphs of Gideon and Samson are offset by the distortions evidenced by Micah, the self-appointed priest of a paganized cult that mixes elements of truth with false worship; or, the grotesque episode of murderously minded bisexuals who collectively violate a woman (to death) because they can not get to the man for whom they lust.

The key verse in this tragic anthology of Judges reminds us that without a higher authority to which we hold ourselves accountable, we will compromise the truth and adopt an individualistic standard of morality and spirituality:

In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right
in his own eyes. Judges 21:25

God is a deliverer. Despite all the sinfulness and rebellion exhibited by His people, God still rescues them whenever they cry out to Him in sincere repentance. Amid the apostasy, the confusion, the degradation, the carnality and the perversion of Israel's history, God remains faithful to His covenant. When the people cry out in their misery and bondage, He delivers them.

Chapter 4

vs. 1-2 "... the sons of Israel again did evil ... and the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin ..."

v. 3 "... the sons of Israel cried ... for he had 900 iron chariots, and he oppressed the sons of Israel severely."

v. 4-5 "Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. ... and the sons of Israel came up to her for judgment."

- v. 6 "Now she sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam ..."
- v. 7 'If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go.'
- v. 14-15 "Arise! For this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hands; behold, the LORD has gone out before you ...'And the LORD routed Sisera ..."

Chapter 5

- v. 2 "That the leaders led in Israel, that the people volunteered, bless the LORD!"
- v. 3 "Hear, O kings; give ear, O rulers! I-- to the LORD, I will sing, I will sing praise to the LORD, the God of Israel."
- v. 9 "My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel, the volunteers among the people; Bless the LORD!"
- v. 13 "Then survivors came down to the nobles; the people of the LORD came down to me as warriors."
- v. 15 "There were great resolves of heart."
- v. 16 "There were great searchings of heart."
- v. 18 "Zebulun was a people who despised their lives even unto death."