

**Episode:** Promised Land Series No. 16

**Narrator:** Deborah

**Primary Scriptures:** Judges 3-5

**Story Summary:** The first four judges of Israel: Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar and Deborah

**Location:** Canaan

**Time:** c. 1406 BC The Israelites enter Canaan

c. 1209-1169 BC The rule of Deborah

c. 1075-1055 BC The rule of Samson

**Suggested Memory Scriptures:** Judges 3:1-2, 7; 4:4

Judges 2-3 sets the stage for the rest of the book. God tests the generations of people who followed Joshua. The conquerors of the Promised Land did not drive out all of the original inhabitants as God had specifically instructed. God chooses to leave those surviving peoples as a test for the Israelites. The test consists of following the laws of Moses in at least two ways: will the Israelites refuse to intermarry with those peoples, and will the Israelites refuse to worship false gods?

Judges 3:6-7 summarizes how miserably the Israelites failed God's test. The Israelites took their daughters in marriage and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods. The Israelites did evil in the sight of the Lord; they forgot the Lord their God.

The rest of the book of *Judges* is a tiring cycle of God's merciful response. God allows the Israelites to suffer until they call out and repent, God raises a savior in the form of a "judge," the people come back to God, and then the people fall away from God. Modern readers are surprised that the judges are not always righteous, blameless people. They are not saviors in the sense that Jesus is a savior, but in the sense that they deliver people from bondage.

The first judge of Israel was Othniel, the nephew (or possibly brother) of Caleb. Othniel had previously answered Caleb's challenge to conquer Kiriath Sepher, and thereby won the hand in marriage of Caleb's daughter.<sup>1</sup> Othniel delivered the Israelites from the King of Aram.

The second judge was Ehud, a left-handed man, who delivered Israel from the hugely obese Eglon, king of Moab. The somewhat humorous story of deliverance hinges on the physical characteristics of these men. The third judge, Shamgar delivers the Israelites from the Philistines using only an ox goad.

The fourth judge, Deborah, was also a prophetess. She delivered the Israelites from the king of Hazor. The story of Deborah has one of the best plot twists in the whole Bible. It is proof that God uses the least of people if they are willing to be faithful.

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<sup>1</sup> Judges 1:12-13

### Discussion Questions:

1. Judges 3:1-4 says the Lord left Canaanites in the land to give the rookie Israelites battle experience, and to see if they would follow the Lord's commandments. Do you think he would have left them there if the Israelites had proven to be more faithful when they first entered Canaan and started conquering it?
  2. Judges 3:7 says the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord. What did they do? What did the Lord do? How long did it take them to repent?
  3. The Israelites did evil, eventually repented, and God sent Othniel as a deliverer. What happened then?
  4. Judges 4:4 describes Deborah as a prophet. What does that mean? When you first read Judges 4:9, what are you left to think?
  5. Judges 5:4 might be giving you some important information. What might that be?
2. They worshiped the gods of the Canaanites, and did not worship. The Lord allowed them to be conquered and become servants. They waited eight years before they repented. 3. The Israelites stayed faithful until Othniel died forty years later. 4. That Deborah will be the woman will be that woman. 5. That God miraculously made it rain. So, the chariots of Judges 4:15 got stuck in the mud of the Jezreel Valley, which made them useless and their riders became defenseless.

### Application Questions:

1. Judges 3:5-6 describes the Israelites living among the Canaanites, intermarrying with them and serving their gods. This behavior was expressly forbidden by God. Can you think of anything you are doing that is against the commands of God? What excuses are you giving for doing so?
2. The first judge was Othniel. The Israelites stayed faithful to God until Othniel died. Then they went back to their old ways. If you are a Christian, you are a new creation. Even so, what could tempt you to go back to your old ways?

### Application Questions for Teens:

1. Describe the cycle of obedience, disobedience, punishment, and deliverance in Judges 3. Why did the Israelites not learn their lesson? Do you ever go through this same type of cycle? Why don't you learn your lesson?
2. In Judges 3:15, Ehud is described as being left-handed. Why is that detail important to the story?
3. Why do you think some people like the story of Shamgar?