

Exegetical Notes - Judges 3:1-6
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Background: When Joshua died, the conquest of The Promised Land was only partially completed. In large part, Israel had followed the instructions of YHWH regarding the taking of the land and the destruction of the indigenous population who lived there, but Israel had not followed God completely. Large sections of the indigenous population remained and were not under Israeli control.

From the time of the occupation (around 1380 BC) until the beginning of the Monarchs (1050 BC) Israel was a THEOCRACY, a nation whose king was God. Israel was supposed to listen to and follow the word of the Lord, but as we have already seen, Israel was not good at following the instructions of YHWH. Her failure to do so left her in trouble time and again. Partial obedience to the word of the Lord is disobedience to the word of the Lord and always leads to disaster. "Judges provides many examples of the principle that OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW BRINGS PEACE, WHEREAS DISOBEDIENCE MEANS OPPRESSION AND DEATH" (Charles Ryrie). This is the constantly repeated lesson of the Book of Judges. Judges is the story of the time in Israel's early history when "Every man did what was right in his own eyes" (17:6 and 21:25). This always results in chaos and disaster.

In the Book of Judges a recurrent theme emerges: Step one - The people are following the will of YHWH; Step two - The people stop obeying the word of the Lord; Step three - An enemy arises that oppress the people of God; Step four - The people cry out to God for help; Step five - God answers Israel's prayer by sending them a deliverer (a judge to lead her, a Messiah); Step six - The people repent and return to the Lord. Then, the process begins again. Judges simply repeats this pattern over and over again. God's people are "stiff necked and disobedient." God is forever faithful. If God's people would follow God's word, they could save themselves hardship, worry, pain, etc. But, they choose to do what seems right in their own eyes.

Judges 3:1-6

Verses 1-4

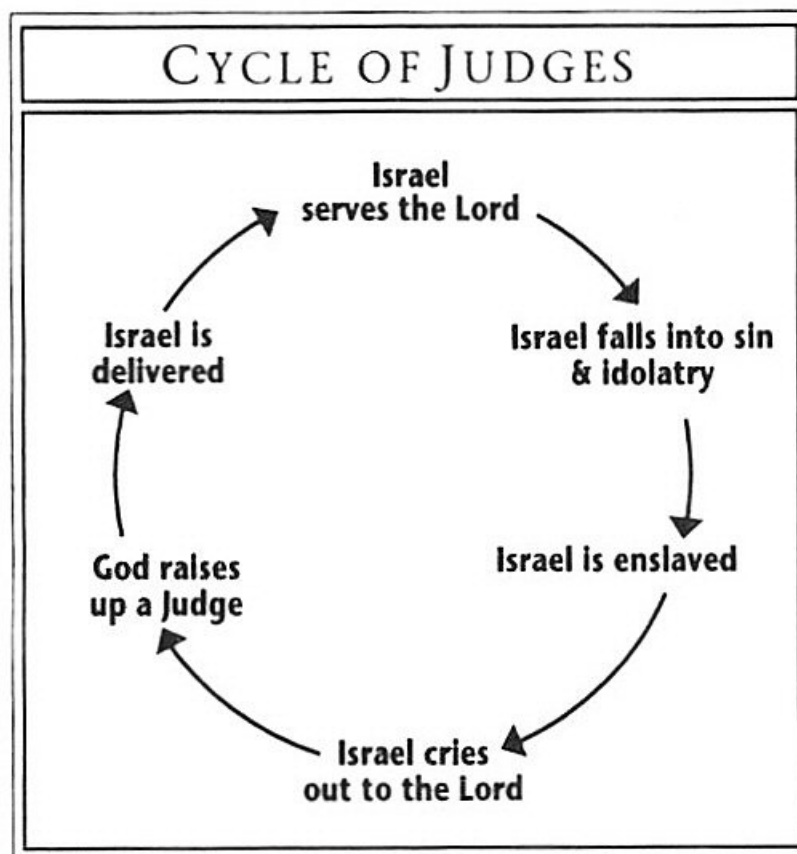
These are the nations the LORD left to test all those Israelites who had not experienced any of the wars in Canaan ² (he did this only to teach warfare to the descendants of the Israelites who had not had previous battle experience): ³ the five rulers of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites living in the Lebanon mountains from Mount Baal Hermon to Lebo Hamath. ⁴ They were left to test the Israelites to see whether they would obey the LORD's commands, which he had given their ancestors through Moses.

- There are two populations of non-Jews in the ancient world. Those who live within the Hebrew community and those who do not. Those non-Jews living within the Hebrew community are to be treated fairly by the Hebrews. They are not to be regarded as outsiders. There is to be one law in the Hebrew community for Jews and non-Jews alike (see Exodus 22:21, Leviticus 19:33-34 and 24:22, Numbers 15:14). However, those non-Jews living in the Promised Land but outside of the community of the Hebrews were under the judgment of God. Because they did not worship God and live according to the laws of God and would become a snare and a stumbling block for the Hebrews, God ordered the Hebrews to totally destroy this group of non-Jews and to have absolutely nothing to do with them. But the Jews did not follow God's instructions. They did what seemed best in their own eyes and allowed this group of non-Jews to live and to continue to occupy territory in the Promised Land. This is the dilemma confronted by Israel in the Book of Judges. Because they did not follow God's command, they have become ensnared. They are worshipping the gods of the people they should have destroyed and living their lives so as to fit into these ungodly cultures.
- Even though he warned the Hebrews that this would happen God was not "caught off guard" when Israel failed to obey him. He knew that they would. So, he built their rebellion into his plan. He used those who had not been destroyed as a tool to teach the Hebrews who had not been involved in the wars of conquest how to fight. The implication is that they would learn that success in battle depended on two things: (1) faith in God and (2) obedience to his plan.

Verses 5-6

⁵ *The Israelites lived among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.* ⁶ *They took their daughters in marriage and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods.*

- But, Israel still did not obey YHWH. Instead of staying away from these people as God had commanded, they moved into their cultures through intermarriage and began to worship the gods of these nations just as God had said they would. They did not trust God and obey God. They did what seemed right in their own eyes.



(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *The Importance of Committed Leaders*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship*, Coatesville, Pennsylvania, & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. They are used here by permission.)