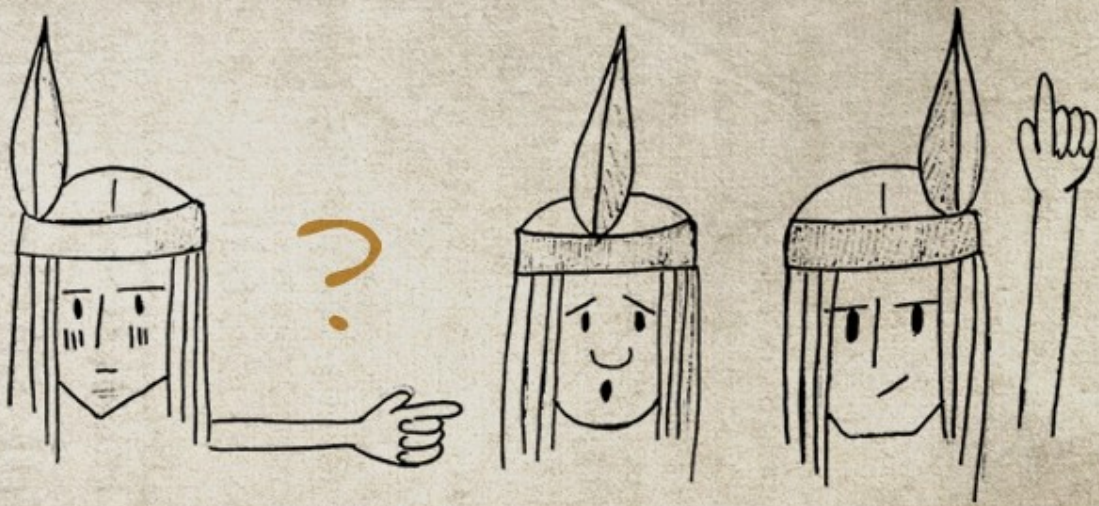


# WHO'S THE TRIBAL LEADER?



A STUDY ON THE BOOK OF JUDGES

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# Who's The Tribal Leader?

## Week 1 – Introduction to the book of Judges

The book of Judges is basically a history book concerning the life and movement of the nation of Israel throughout a 410 year period. So in eight weeks we are going to go through 410 years of time! Sounds fun!

This is a book about the mighty, the weak, good leadership, bad leadership and a lack of leadership.

The book is widely believed to be written by the prophet Samuel, but the accounts of the stories we will read through show that these are a collection of stories gathered. The stories of this book do not take place in one location, but throughout a land called Canaan. These are stories of people who have been identified as heroes or villains. People who trust God and people who reject God.

### Time & Place

At the very start of the book the scene is set. In chapter one, we see straight away that the leader of Israel has died, his name was Joshua. So it is clear where the nation of Israel is located and what has happened the years prior to this point.

### Timeline

No. of Years	State of Israel
430 years	Israel lived in Egypt eventually becoming slaves
40 years	Moses delivers Israel out of Egypt; they end up in the wilderness/desert
7 years	Under the leadership of Joshua, Israel cross into the promise land and conquer
410 years	The judges of Israel
40 years	Governed by the Priest Eli
12 Years	Governed by the Prophet Samuel
88 years	Kings Saul, David & Solomon

We see that Israel now is split up into the tribes. Different tribes possess different parts of the land. There are now no central leaders.

**Discuss – Looking at Judges 1:1-4. Who did God tell Israel to be the leader? How did that leader disobey God?**

## God's intended Leadership

God did not want one man to be the overall leader. He had instructed the tribe of Judah to be the one who went out to war against the Canaanites to be the leader. However, Judah disobeyed God and asked the tribe of Simeon to join them. It is from this moment we will see that problems start for Israel and there are no peaceful times ahead.

God wanted to be the leader of the people of Israel. He wanted them to trust in him and look to him at all times. However, they turned their backs on God and trusted in men to lead them.

**Discuss – Joshua was a good leader, but he failed in some important areas. Look at Judges 1: 27-36 & 2:1-10. What did Joshua fail to do as a leader that which affected Israel for future generations?**

## What are the Judges?

So Joshua dies and there is no leader left in Israel. Also, because Joshua failed to possess all the land that God had intended for them, there were many enemies around at the time still living in the land God had promised. Over the next several weeks we are going to learn that Israel is going to be defeated on many occasions, as a result of these defeats they will be ruled by their enemies. Then a man or a woman will rise up amongst the people and help defeat the enemies. Then for as long as that person lives they will be the leader everyone looks up to. These are the judges, or in English, the heroes who save the day.

These people did not learn from Joshua's mistakes, and did not develop leaders to take their places. So when the heroes die, the enemies once again attack the tribes of Israel and conquer them, rule over them, until another hero rises up. This happens for 450 years until Samuel rises up to bring people back to God.

The problems with many of these judges were that some of them did not know God, and some of them were not even Israelites.

## Who are the Judges?

Judge	Description
Othniel	Raised by God to defeat Cushan-rishathaim of Aramnahraraim, resulting in 40 years of rest
Ehud	Assassinates Eglon of Moab, resulting in 80 years of rest
Shamgar	Kills 600 Philistines with a plank of wood to deliver Israel

<b>Deborah</b>	A prophetess and local judge who incites Barack to raise an army among the tribes to defeat Jabin & Sisera
<b>Gideon</b>	Invested with God's spirit to deliver Israel from Midian through military campaigns, resulting in 40 years of rest
<b>Abimelech</b>	Gideon's son (not a Judge), who kills 70 brothers, becomes a warlord and is killed in battle after 3 years
<b>Tola</b>	Minor judge of Issachar who served for 23 years
<b>Jair</b>	Minor judge of Gilead with 30 sons who served for 22 years
<b>Jephthah</b>	Bandit chief invited by elders of Gilead to deliver them from the Ammonites, who also fights a civil war with Ephraim and sacrifices his daughter to fulfill a vow
<b>Ibzan</b>	Minor judge of Bethlehem with 30 sons and 30 daughters who served 7 years
<b>Elon</b>	Minor judge of Zebulun who served 10 years
<b>Abdon</b>	Minor judge of Pirathon in Ephraim with 40 sons and 30 grandsons who served for 8 years
<b>Samson</b>	Nazirite with superhuman strength whose personal adventures involve a series of Philistine women, slaughter of thousands of Philistines and a tragic end. He judged Israel for 20 years

You may have noticed that all these years do not add up to 410. Well out of the 410 years of the judges, about 250 years are ones under oppression from their enemies, where there was no one who could deliver Israel.

Over the next eight weeks we are going to look at these individuals. What was so special about them, what was wrong about them, how the people responded to them and what we can learn today in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century about their lives?

# Who's The Tribal Leader?

## Week 2 – Othniel

As we discovered in week 1; the nation of Israel had entered the promised land of God, but had failed to do all that God had commanded them. This command was to drive out all their enemies and possess all the land. They did not do this so the bible tells us that God left some of the nations who were Israel's enemies in the land in order to test Israel. In addition, after their leader Joshua dies, and the elders who were with him died, the people of Israel turned their backs on God and started to serve foreign Gods such as Baal.

This is the back ground to the rise of the judges, deliverers who will defeat the enemies of Israel in a certain region and then bring peace for as long as they live. Once they die, it is back to square one.

### **A Pattern Emerges – Judges 3:7-8**

As we look to the accounts of the first Judge of Israel, we see a pattern start that develops throughout the rest of this book.

The bible tells us that Israel did what was evil in the sight of God. They forgot about the Lord and started to worship other Gods. This enraged the Lord, so he sent a man we will call Cushan and sent them into slavery.

First, notice that God sold these people. They were God's people, yet he did not mind to sell them to someone else. The great news about the gospel of Jesus Christ is that he has bought us with a huge price. When we serve God he will buy us, but when we don't serve him, he will sell us into the hands of those who oppress us.

Secondly, we see who this man was. He was from Aram, which is modern day Syria. The Arameans possessed this land at this time. This tells us that this man was a conqueror. At this time there were many other nations around Israel (this battle centered around the tribe of Judah). The Arameans were not one of them. For them to capture the people of Israel meant they had to defeat other enemies in their way first. This man Cushan, was probably the most powerful leader in his day in this part of the world.

**Discuss – Looking at Judges 3:7-8. The Sons of Israel forgot Yahweh, causing them to worship other Gods. Do you think it is possible for us and our children to forget God? If so, what are some of the things in society today that will cause us to forget God?**

### **Time To Cry – Judges 3:9**

The people of Israel had submitted to Cushan for eight years. They were tired, wore down and oppressed. It is funny that when people forget God, their memory comes back pretty quick when they want God to intervene. So the people of Israel once again cried out to God.

What was the result? God heard them and then raised up a man to deliver them. I think it is amazing to see that God is so forgiving. All it took was a change of heart and action. These people hadn't given a second thought about God for over eight years. Now they turn back to him and he comes to their rescue.

## **A Deliverer Raised – Judges 3:9**

The result of the people's cry to God was that God used a man to deliver his people. The Bible tells us that God raised up a deliverer. True deliverers are always raised up by God. We cannot raise ourselves up. To be a true deliverer we have to be raised up by God. The good news is that Jesus came as the ultimate deliverer, meaning that no matter what we go through in life, we can find deliverance. All we have to do is call on him and he will deliver. Not only that, but because he has given his spirit to us, we can conquer with him.

The deliverer God raises up is called Othniel. This man is not one of the new up and coming studs. He is a golden oldie. The first reference the Bible gives to Othniel is in Joshua 15:17. He is one of the warriors God used to possess the land of Canaan. This is where we see he is of the tribe of Judah. Othniel is also said to be the brother of Caleb. Remember Caleb was the one who agreed with Joshua when spying out the land that they could take it. Also Caleb was the one in his old age who said give me the hill country. Caleb is already dead at this point, and even though Othniel was probably his younger brother, he wasn't a man in his 20's or 30's.

**Discuss – Why do you think God used an old man, someone who was a former star to deliver Israel?**

## **Only With God's Spirit! – Judges 3:10-11**

Verse 10 of Judges 3 tells us that Othniel was given the spirit of God. The words here used was that the 'Spirit of God came upon him'. This is interesting because we see this throughout the Old Testament. This spirit of the Lord came upon David, Samuel, Saul, Samson etc.

Firstly, this was like someone being covered with the spirit of the Lord. To come upon meant to be completely covered starting from the head through to the toes.

Secondly, this was not a temporary thing. We see that the spirit of the Lord came upon Othniel and never departed from him (unlike with King Saul).

The result was that he first rose to be the judge of Israel. The people must have seen something different about Othniel. They believed he could deliver them. They appointed him judge even while they were under the rule of Cushan. This shows that even though someone like Cushan has the title of ruler, Othniel was the real leader.

With this new found spirit, and the expectations of the people Othniel went with the power of God to war against Cushan. God gave Cushan into Othniel's hand and defeated him. Simple story really. Man cried out to God. God empowers man. Man steps out in faith for God. God is pleased and gives man what he wants.

**Discuss – Jesus Christ has given us the Holy Spirit. We already have the spirit of God. What do you believe we need to do in order to overcome oppression, bad situations and enemies in our lives?**

## **Who's The Tribal Leader? Week 3 – Ehud**

We have already discovered how God can use someone who is past their prime to be used of God. Othniel who was raised by God, covered with the spirit of God defeated Cushan of Aram.

In this chapter we are going to discover another Judge of Israel, someone who delivers them from their enemies, however, this deliver is very different from Othniel. However, the situation is very different, so it requires a different type of person.

### **Who Were The Moabites – Judges 3:12-14**

In Genesis 19:36-37, Lot the nephew of Abraham separated ways with Abraham. Lot had two daughters who got pregnant; the firstborn of the two had a son and called him Moab. He became the father of the Moabites.

The Israelites and the Moabites were distant relatives. They were not supposed to be enemies. The land God had given to Israel did not really affect the Moabites. In Judges 3:12-14 we see that Israel once again, after Othniel had died did evil in the sight of God. Because of this God gave Eglon the King of Moab strength. The result of this strength was that he joined forces with the Amorites and Amalekites and defeated the people of Israel and possessed the land they occupied. This land was known as the City of Palms which we believe is the city of Jericho. The result of this was that Israel served Eglon for 18 years.

### **The Left Handed Man – Judges 3:15-16**

Once again the people of Israel were fed up of being under the rule of Eglon. So what did they do? They cried out to God to save them. This wasn't a cry of repentance or of love unto God. It was a cry of despair. Well, God heard their cry, even though they probably didn't know it at the time. God used an everyday Joe to bring deliverance for Israel. His name was Ehud. He was from the tribe of Benjamin and the only description we have of him is that he is left handed. This seems strange to us, but to the Israelite it was very significant.

The name Benjamin, meant "son of my right hand". The writer here is very clearly trying to make a point. It is believed that the Benjamite warrior was very skillful. We see later in Judges 20:16 that the Benjamite soldiers used slings to great effect. In order to use a sling one had to use two hands, and the word here translated as left handed is really meant to say, he used his left hand. What the writer is trying to tell us is that Ehud was Ambidextrous.

Ehud was chosen to go and take a tribute (or gift) to Eglon from the people of Israel. This was a mark of respect and also so that Eglon would not oppress their lives any more. Ehud knew this was an opportunity to strike the King. Therefore the bible tells us he made himself a double edged sword which was about 18 inches in length and bound it to his right thigh under his garments.

**Discuss – What is so special about the sword being strapped to Ehud’s right thigh? What does Ehud’s uniqueness tell us about how God can use us individually?**

## **Rolls Of Fat – Judges 3:17-25**

The writer of Judges is very clear to say that Eglon was a fat man. We are not talking about a little tire around his mid-drift. We are talking about a grossly obese man. This is a bit of tongue and cheek from the writer, making fun of Eglon. However, when they described someone as a fat man what they were saying was a rounded bull or calf that had an obese mind. He would have been a man who liked the pleasures of this life. He was king of Moab, yet he was in Jericho (probably his summer home). Referring to his inflated body would have been a symbol to refer to his inflated mind, and also stupidity.

So Ehud gives him the tribute, and then tells him he has something he wants to tell him. Eglon thinking it was a military secret took him up to his cool roof chamber to talk. His was a private place for the king. A cool roof chamber was not some cool place to lie down; in fact this was more than likely his bathroom and the place he went to the toilet!

So the picture is this obese man is sitting on the toilet and is talking with Ehud. He begins to tell him that God had a message for him. At this point Eglon was not too happy and he stood! He was exposed and Ehud took the opportunity. He snatched the sword from his leg with his left hand stabbed the king in the stomach. The sword went all the way in even the handle (this is how fat this man was), to the point Ehud lost the sword, it was swallowed up by this mans fat! I’m not going to tell you what came out of Eglon, it’s gross!

Ehud then locked the door and went out of the servant’s entrance and escaped.

**Discuss – Imagine Eglon was a Christian and Ehud was the devil. What lessons can we learn from how Eglon died concerning our lives?**

## **The Hills Are Alive – Judges 3:26-30**

So Ehud escapes and runs back to the hill country where the tribe of Ephraim was located. He blew a trumpet and announced that God had given Moab into their hands. They joined him and took possession of the roads in and out of Jericho and the surrounding areas. Then they struck one Moabite at a time until

ten thousand were killed. No-one escaped and Israel defeated Moab and had peace for 80 years.

**Discuss – Israel defeated Moab by taking away the source of their food, water and supplies. How can we use this method to defeat the struggles, problems and sins in our lives?**

# Who's The Tribal Leader?

## Week 4 – Deborah

### Major Points:

- Deborah was the third Judge of Israel and the only female Judge.
- Remember that the book of Judges is the period of Israel's history following the death of Joshua. The nation experienced a lack of leadership that resulted in the Israelites losing their spiritual commitment and motivation.
- A key verse for the book is Judges 17:6 "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit".
- The Israelites began a series of cycles of:
  - Sinning
  - Worshiping idols
  - Being punished
  - Crying out to God for help
  - Being rescued by a judge sent from God
  - Obeying God for a while
  - Then falling back into idolatry.
- Deborah was a prophetess and Judge of Israel, the equivalent of a king. Her leadership was honored and she was also leader of the army of Israel.
- The story of Deborah takes place during the 3<sup>rd</sup> apostasy, or falling away from God. After God delivered the Israelites from Egypt into Israel, they went through seven apostasies.

### Judges 4

- This is the only time during the period of the judges when the Israelites enemies came from within their land. If the Israelites had obeyed God in the first place and driven the Canaanites from the land, this incident would not have happened.
- Chariots were the tanks of the ancient world. Made of iron or wood, they were pulled by horses and were the most feared and powerful weapons of the day.
- The Canaanite army had 900 iron chariots. Israel was not powerful enough to defeat such a strong army. After 20 years of unbearable circumstances, the Israelites called out to the Lord for help.

- Deborah was the best person for the job and God chose her to lead Israel. God can choose anyone to lead his people, young or old, man or woman.
- **Discuss: Why do you believe Barak asked Deborah to go with him against the Canaanites even though she wasn't a military leader? How did Deborah command such respect from the people?**
- Sisera was pleased when Jael offered him her tent as a hiding place. First, because Jael was the wife of Heber, a man friendly to Sisera's forces, he thought he could be trusted. Second, because men were never allowed to enter a woman's tent. Therefore, no one would think to find Sisera there.
- **Discuss: Why do you believe Jael killed Sisera? Why did God use Jael to kill Sisera instead of Deborah? Was Deborah's prophecy about Barek correct?**
- Following the death of Sisera and the Canaanite army, God subdued Jabin before the Israelites. The Israelites grew stronger and stronger against Jabin until they destroyed him.
- Chapter 5 is known as the Song of Deborah. It is a victory song that was accompanied by a joyous celebration. Deborah proclaims God's greatness by giving Him the credit for the victory.
- Deborah recounts the miracles that God performed. Her behavior is a model of gratitude for us. Deborah's courage and humility are models for us. She kept her focus on God and not on the circumstances around her.
- Deborah remained the judge of Israel and the land had peace for 40 years.

## **Conclusions:**

- The story of Deborah shows us that no matter our background, God will elevate people to where He wants them to be.
- Because Deborah trusted in God others saw this and wanted to be around her.
- When we do what God has commanded, anything is possible, even though the odds may be against us.

Deborah, the third Judge of Israel

### **Discussion Question #1(Two parts):**

- **Why do you believe Barak asked Deborah to go with him against the Canaanites even though she wasn't a military leader?**
- **How did Deborah command such respect from the people?**

**Discussion Question #2 (Three parts):**

- **Why do you believe Jael killed Sisera?**
- **Why did God use Jael to kill Sisera instead of Deborah?**
- **If the definition of a Judge in these times was a deliverer, why was Deborah elevated to the position of Judge and not Barak?**

# Who's The Tribal Leader?

## Week 5 – Gideon

After Deborah and Barak had died then people of Israel found themselves once again oppressed by the people of Midian. For 7 years the Midianites ruled over the children of Israel until a man named Gideon came along.

The story of Gideon takes up 3 chapters of the book of Judges, only Samson is equal to the amount written about him. Within this account of Gideon there are seven phases or situations that he is involved in and we see the hand of God in all of them.

**Discuss – Look at each section of Gideon's story and discuss the following:**

1. What did God tell Gideon to do?
2. How did Gideon react to God's instruction?
3. What was the consequence to Gideon's actions?

### **a. The Little of The Least – Judges 6:11-24**

One day the angel of God came to the place where Gideon was working for his father. The angel boldly stated that Gideon would be a mighty man of valor and would save the people from the hands of Midian. The angel tells Gideon that the Lord is with him and he will not die. Gideon is skeptical and tells the angel, if God is with us then where is he, where are his miracles and why hasn't he protected us from the Midianites. Then Gideon goes on to say, 'how can I save Israel, my family is the least in the tribe of Manasseh and I am the least of my father's house?'

The angel replied and said God is with you and you as one man shall defeat Midian. Gideon then realized this was God speaking and asked for a sign that it was God. So Gideon got a young goat and unleavened bread, chopped the meat up, boiled some broth and then put the meat and the bread on a rock and poured the broth on top and asked for a sign. The angel then took his staff and touched the stone, immediately the meat and bread caught on fire and consumed it. Then Gideon realized it was of God and built an altar there to God.

### **b. Destroying The Altar – Judges 6:25-35**

That same day, God told Gideon to take his fathers best bull, and another one of his bulls and use them to pull down the altar to Baal in his town. In its place build an altar to God. Then use the wood for the idols to make a fire and offer a sacrifice unto God with the second bull.

Gideon wanted to be obedient to God but was scared, so did it at night when everyone was asleep.

In the morning the men of the city saw what had happened and knew it was Gideon and sort to kill him. When they got to Gideon's father's house, Gideon's father (Joash) told the men if Baal is real, then he will bring judgment against Gideon, not men! Well nothing happened!

Then all Midian, and with them Amalek came up to fight against Israel, it was at this point that the spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, and Gideon gathered men to come and fight.

It was Gideon's obedience and his willingness to stand against the crowd in the face of idol worship that God honored. When we speak out for God his power comes upon us.

### **c. The Fleece – Judges 6:36-40**

Gideon still wasn't sure he was the main man, so he asked God for another sign. This time he put a dry fleece on the ground. He asked God overnight to put dew on the fleece but leave it dry everywhere else. So in the morning Gideon awoke to find that the fleece was soaked and the ground was dry. Gideon still a little unsure asked God to do it again, but this time make it so the fleece was dry and the ground was wet. God did it again, and this was the sign that made Gideon believe he was the one who would deliver the children of Israel that following day.

### **d. Drinking Like A Dog – Judges 7:1-8**

As Gideon and his army came up against the Midianites, God told Gideon he had too big an army. So God told Gideon to send home anyone who was fearful. Out of 32,000 soldiers, 22,000 were sent home. This left 10,000, but God said it was too big. So Gideon was instructed to go down to the river and ask the men to drink. Some drank straight from their hand almost like a dog, others knelt down to drink. Gideon separated the men, 300 drank like a dog, all the rest knelt. God kept the 300 and sent home the rest.

Could you imagine what went through these soldiers' minds as out of 32,000 only 300 were left?

### **e. The Enemy Confused – Judges 7:9-23**

That night God told Gideon to go down into the enemy's camp and hear what was being said. The enemy had had a dream, which was a dream of Gideon defeating the Midianites. The enemy got scared and Gideon started to worship

God. That same night he woke all his men up, divided them into 3 companies of 100 and gave them trumpets and empty pitchers.

When Gideon blew his trumpet, everyone blew their trumpet. Then after blowing the trumpets they smashed the pitchers then they held torches of fire in their hands. Then they ran and screamed as they ran. When this happened, the enemy was confused, and they started a game of friendly fire. They killed one another and fled. At this point Gideon gathered all the armies of Israel back again to pursue the Midianites.

## **f. Gideon Finishes Off The Job – Judges 8:1-21**

For Gideon winning the battle was not enough, God had called him to deliver his people and he knew he had to pursue and kill the kings of Midian. Gideon and his 300 men went over the Jordan river into Midian territory and men the people of the towns along the way. The people were hostile to Gideon so he threatened to kill them when he returned.

When he finally got to the place where the kings of Midian were, they had about 15,000 protecting them. When the camp of Midian was least expecting an attack, Gideon and his 300 men charged into the camp and the result was that the kings fled. Gideon pursued them. He went through some of the same towns that were hostile to him, this time he killed the men and tore down their idols. When he finally caught the kings he told his son to kill them, but he didn't want to so Gideon took a sword and killed them himself.

We see that before it was God who made the confusion and gave Gideon the victory, this time though Gideon knew God was with him and he went in with no fear. It is amazing how experience will increase our faith.

## **g. Gideon The Ruler – Judges 8:22-32**

After Gideon had finally defeated Midian the people asked him to become their ruler. However, Gideon reminded the people that it was God who was their ruler.

After this Gideon asked for people's gold to be brought and they built a statue to honor God. However, over time the people started to worship the statue as a God itself, this brought sadness to Gideon. However, for the rest of Gideon's live there was peace, he lived a long life, then he died.

Even though Gideon was a war time hero, he was all about worshipping and giving thanks to God. However, he did not teach this to his people as they would worship anything that brought them success. They worshipped idols, people and statues.

## **Who's The Tribal Leader Week 6 – Jephthah**

So far we have discovered men and one woman who have come from within the tribes of Israel to deliver God's people. These were just average people without title or prestige. However, as we move on we come to a man named Jephthah. Jephthah was a man who had a title, but his title was not what one would have wanted. He was also known throughout the people of Gilead, but not known for good things. He was an outsider, yet God used him and he became one of the greatest leaders Israel ever saw.

### **Who Was Jephthah? – Judges 11:1-11**

In Judges 11 we see a new hero come on the scene. However, this isn't a hero everyone in Israel would have been thrilled about; he was a hero of necessity. The people of Ammon had made war against the people of Israel. The tribe/people of Gilead were the primary recipients of the threats made by Ammon. They had no-one who could save them; there was no warrior who had the skill, knowledge or power to defeat the people of Ammon. So the leaders of this tribe sort out a man they knew, one who used to be one of their own to lead them to battle against Ammon. His name was Jephthah.

From verse one of chapter eleven the bible tells us that Jephthah was from Gilead and he was a mighty man of valor. Now that means he was a strong, brave and bold man who could fight and lead people in war. This sounds good so far! The problem was that Jephthah's mother was an outcast. His father was the father of the tribe, Gilead, but his mother was a harlot. As Jephthah grew up his step brothers drove him out of his father's home. He was deemed an outcast because his mother was a harlot.

When Jephthah became a teenager he fled from his father's home and went to live in the land of Tob. There other people who were outcasts and troublesome came to him and looked at him as their leader. These people then became bandits and raided villages and townships for food, money and possessions. They were outlaws.

Then Ammon came against Gilead; his brothers sort him out to see if he could help. He asked, why me? You hated me and expelled me so why do you want me? They responded because they were in distress. So Jephthah made a deal with them, that if he won, he would be their leader, so they agreed.

**Discuss – Why do you think God would use someone like Jephthah? Do you think God intended Jephthah to be an outcast and an outlaw?**

### **Jephthah Negotiates With Ammon – Judges 11:12-28**

The first thing Jephthah did after agreeing to deliver Gilead from Ammon was to send a message to Ammon and ask them why they wanted to go to war with Gilead. This was unusual as most warriors would have just gone to war. Jephthah wanted to know the reasons and respond to them. The leaders of Ammon said it was because Israel had taken their land when they came out of Egypt.

Jephthah then sends a message back to say the people of Israel did not take their land and explains the story of how they arrived at that point. He explained that Israel had merely asked to pass through the land of the Ammorites. When they were denied they did not enter the land. However, their king, Sihon went to war against Israel. It was at this point that God defeated the Ammorites and it was God who gave them that land. Jephthah explains that as God gave them that land, who are you (Ammon) to possess it back? Then he gives a killer sting; Jephthah said that the Ammorites should possess whatever their God, Chemosh gives them. He tells Ammon that as God dealt with Moab, so he will deal with them. Jephthah tells Ammon his people have not sinned against Ammon so please reconsider. However, they didn't and went up against Jephthah.

**Discuss – Why do you believe Jephthah tried to negotiate with Ammon? Knowing Jephthah's background, what was so interesting about his message to the Ammorites?**

## **Jephthah's Vow – Judges 11:29-40**

After Jephthah was ignored by Ammon the bible says the spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah. This once bandit was now a man of God. As he approached Ammon he made a vow to God. This man knew that for all his strength he couldn't do it without God, and if he had God on his side, as God had done previously, he would deliver his people.

The vow was this. If he won, he would sacrifice the first thing that came out of his home when we arrived. Of course God gave Jephthah the victory against Ammon, so he went home. As he approached his house his only child, a young girl came out dancing before him. Jephthah was horrified. He knew the vow he made to God and it was that his daughter would be made a burnt offering unto God.

The amazing thing about this story is that he told his daughter, and his daughter supported him. She must have known God, and this must have been a household that worshipped God. The girl though did have one last wish, this was to go and explore the mountains with her friends for two months. She kept herself from any man, and returned home, knowing what would happen. Jephthah kept his word to God, and offered his daughter as a burnt offering.

**Discuss – What does Jephthah’s vow tell us about his and his household’s relationship with God? Why do you believe God allowed such a heartbreaking story of faith?**

## **Jephthah’s Final Days**

Jephthah had suffered a tragic life. He was an outcast as a child, an outlaw as a young man and now he watched as God took his daughter. You would have thought that was enough for one life. However, this wasn’t the end to Jephthah’s problems. The tribe of Ephraim came up against him, all for one crazy reason; this was that he didn’t invite them to go to war against Ammon. These people were not happy with victory, they wanted the glory. Jephthah did not try to fight them, he reasoned with them. However, Ephraim did not listen, so Jephthah gathered the people of Gilead and defeated the tribe of Ephraim. Many of the Ephraimites scattered and tried to impersonate themselves as from Gilead. When this happened they asked these people to say a certain word. When they did not pronounce it right, they knew they were not from Gilead. From this over 42,000 Ephraimites died, and Jephthah became the ruler of Israel for six years before he died.

## **Lessons we can learn from Jephthah**

- Your background shapes what you can do for Christ.
- It does not matter where you have come from, it matters where you are going.
- Even if people have wronged you in the past, do not become resentful.
- Remember what God has done in the past, it will help you in the future.
- God will sometimes test you to the limit.
- Keep your promises to God and he will honor you.
- Not everyone will enjoy your success.
- Trust in God at all times and he will give you more than you expect.

# Who's The Tribal Leader?

## Week 7 – Shamgar

So far we have studied five different local heroes who have risen up out of the ranks of Jewish life to deliver the children of Israel from their enemies. Four have been men and one was a women. These are people who the bible very clearly states are anointed by God to do the work of delivering his people. Even the fifth character we studied, Jephthah who was an outcast and an outlaw, was still Jewish in his faith and through his blood.

In this chapter, we will look at a different type of hero. One who there is not much written about. His name is Shamgar, and we will discover that he isn't even an Israelite.

### Who is Shamgar? – Judges 3:31 & 5:6

All in all there is hardly anything we know about Shamgar. After some of the longer stories of characters we have studied it is quite unusually to meet a man who is considered a deliver, tribal leader and local hero of Israel, but only find one or two verses written about him.

Some people have discredited that Shamgar actually existed. The way he is mentioned in scripture is outside the writing style of the rest of the book of Judges. His account has a feeling that it was added at a later date. However we may look at it, this man made it into the bible, and even though there is only one verse about him, it is enough to see that this man was extraordinary.

### Timeline

We see in Judges 3:31 that the account of Shamgar happened directly after the situation with Ehud, when he delivered Israel from Eglon the fat king of Moab. In Judges 5:6 we see that this man Shamgar is mentioned in the song of Deborah. So he is most definitely a contemporary of these early settlers.

### The Son of Anath

The bible tells us in both places where Shamgar is mentioned, that he is the son of Anath. This is translated in the Hebrew as Ben Anath. This term Ben Anath did not refer to a father son relationship as we would know it, but it referred to many of the Haribu mercenaries, who were employed by the Egyptians to go to battle in certain areas outside the direct influence of Egypt.

This name Anath was taken from the Canaanite goddess of war. This Goddess was a consort of another pagan God, Baal. Remember it was the God of Baal that that Israelites kept on turning to when they rejected Jehovah God.

It is believed them from this that Shamgar was a man who did not worship the one true God, instead he was a man devoted to a false God, the Goddess Anath.

Furthermore, in the Hebrew language this mans name, Shamgar, leads us to believe he is one of the Hurrians, which were from the region which is modern day Palestine. This was not a Jewish man, yet he is marked down as one of the seven delivers of Israel.

**Discuss – Why would God use a man who was not an Israelite? What does this teach us about how God can use people in our lives today?**

## **One Stick 600 Men! – Judges 3:31**

This man really had a story to tell! All we know about him is that in one shot he killed six hundred men with an oxgoad.

We are told the men he killed were Philistines. We are unsure as to why he was fighting the philistines. However, from what we know about his name and the group he belonged to, he was probably fighting a battle as a contractor! He was a paid assassin!

There are many strong men in this world. Most strong men could take on and fight four or five men. If you are Bruce Lee or James Bond you could take on maybe 10-15 men. But how about 600 men! This is like one man against a large church of men! There is no way one man could do that. However, we are told this man did it. He didn't have a gun, a sword, a spear or a shield, all he had was an oxgoad.

An oxgoad was a stick that shepherds would carry to keep their livestock in order. If one got out of line they would hit them with an oxgoad. It was a tool to train, guide and direct sheep. It was normally wooden with an iron tip. This was a weapon to control and guide not to kill and destroy. Yet Shamgar used this tool to defeat and kill 600.

**Discuss – What does killing 600 men tell you about this man? What principles of faith can we learn from Shamgar using an Oxgoad instead of a sword?**

## **He Saved Israel– Judges 3:31**

The final statement we are left with concerning this incredible man is that he also saved Israel. This man was not an Israelite, he obviously (unlike Jephthah) was not fighting for Israel. He was probably paid to fight the Philistines by the Egyptians and he was an Idol worshipper. Yet God used this man to save a nation.

We are not told whether the Philistines were oppressing Israel, but from the text it is our assumption that they were. Whether Shamgar joined forces with Israel, to defeat the Philistines, that is unsure. However, all we know is that Shamgar's victory had a knock on effect onto the nation of Israel.

**Discuss – Shamgar saved Israel without fighting for Israel. What does tell you about how God is at work in your life today?**

## **Lessons We Can Learn From Shamgar**

God is at work in our lives. At times he uses us in way of great faith, when we pray through a situation, when we tackle a problem head on and at times go to battle against a problem or enemy. However, sometimes God is at work when we do not even know about it. Sometimes God is at work and we do not have to even lift one finger.

God will sometimes use others for our cause. Some of those people may not even be Christians, sometimes those people may even follow other religions and live lifestyles that are not pleasing to God, yet God can and will use them.

These are the lessons we can learn from Shamgar's life:

- **God will use anyone who is willing to fight**
- **Nothing and no-one can out number God**
- **God will sometimes use our enemies for our good**
- **Whatever tools, talents or gifts you have, present them to God and he will use them**
- **Even if you were not made for a certain task, God can still use you effectively in it**
- **Sometimes just sit back and watch how as God works for your advantage.**

# Who's The Tribal Leader?

## Week 8 – Samson

The period of the judges was “the dark age” of Hebrew history. The entire nation was characterized by a spirit of rebellion (cf. 21:25). Samson’s weaknesses mirrored the religious and moral climate of the people as a whole.

Samson is one of those characters in the Bible who seem to be bigger than life

- he kills a lion with his bare hands
- he carries off the gates of a city
- he catches foxes, ties their tails together, and puts torches in them to let loose in the fields of his enemies
- he ends his life by pulling down the temple of dagon on himself and a house full of Philistines

We need to remember that not only did he do things in the power of the Lord, things that we would have to call miracles, his whole life is a miracle

### Samson’s Background

The barren wife of Manoah, a Hebrew man of Zorah, was mysteriously visited by “the Messenger of Jehovah,” who appeared to her in the form of a man. The Messenger informed the dear woman that she would conceive a son.

- The child was to be raised a Nazirite (cf. Numbers 6)
- He began living his life as a Nazirite (someone set aside for special service to God)
- He is described as someone God chose to use to set Israel free from their oppressors

Given the circumstances of his birth along with the training he received as a boy, one expects the life of this Hebrew leader to shine brilliantly as a man of God

### Samson’s Weakness

And he grew to be a young man . . .

Samson became infatuated with a Philistine woman whom he eventually married. Because of the riddle that Samson made up regarding the lion and the honey she betrayed his confidence which led to a confrontation between the youth and these heathen people. As a result, Samson killed thirty Philistine men and left the woman at her father (Judges 14).

**Discuss - Looking at Judges 14:3 & 4. According to Judges 14:4, it is alluded to that the Lord was in on this marriage, but marriages between the Hebrews and pagans were prohibited. (Exodus 34:16; Deuteronomy 7:3) Did God cause Samson to violate divine law? What is the meaning of, “he sought an occasion against the Philistines”? Does the pronoun refer to God or to Samson?**

## **Samson’s Downfall**

Samson’s wife was given to another man. In retaliation, he loosed three hundred foxes (or jackals), with fire brands tied to their tails, among the ripe wheat and in the oliveyards. In response, the Philistines murdered his wife and father-in-law. And Samson took revenge and killed more Philistines. He then went and hid in a cave in Judah.

The Philistines came to Judah looking for Samson and the Israelites went to the cave to get Samson. He yielded to a plan of sorts, allowing himself to be bound. When confronted by the enemy, however, he broke the bands as if they were a rope of ashes; he seized the fresh (non brittle) jawbone of a donkey, and killed 1,000 of the enemy. God blessed this endeavor (Judges 15) by providing water to drink when Samson asked for it.

Samson journeyed to Gaza, one of the Philistine stronghold cities, and consorted with a harlot. The heathen citizens heard of his visit and surrounded the house wherein he lay, determining to capture him at day break. Somehow, Samson slipped through their guard, pulled up the doors of the city gate, and carried them to a place near Hebron, some forty miles away. This was a sharp insult to Gaza (Judges 16:1-3).

Samson then fell in love with a Philistine woman named Delilah. From the commencement of this relationship Delilah was filled with treachery. The Philistines made her a lucrative “deal.” Discover the secret of Samson’s strength, reveal it to us, and we will reward you with much silver. After a series of maneuvers, wherein Samson played the “cat-and-mouse” game with her (ending up as the “mouse”), she extracted the secret. Samson was shorn of his long hair and, more significantly, “Jehovah departed from him” and he became as weak physically as he was spiritually (16:20). The Philistines captured him, put out his eyes, and cast him into prison (Judges 16:4-27).

## **One Last Prayer**

Presently, during a religious celebration, wherein the pagan god Dagon was exalted above Jehovah, and Samson had been brought out to be shown off. Samson prayed to God for the restoration of his former strength. His prayer was answered. He pushed over two mighty pillars of the heathen temple, causing the roof to collapse. Thousands were killed (3,000 were on the roof), and Samson

himself surrendered his life in this final “battle” between God’s judge and the *godless* Philistines.

In this concluding contest, Samson had slain more than in all his earlier efforts combined (Judges 16:23-31). Thus ended Samson’s twenty-year period of judgment in Israel.

**Discuss - Samson was captured and totally degraded and humiliated. How must these humiliations have felt to a man who was used to receive strength through God’s power?**

**Would these humiliations have moved Samson toward repentance or revenge? Why?**

## **Lessons From Samson**

There are possible parallels between Samson and Jesus. Just as Joseph is a type of Christ, so too is Samson. However, there is a difference between Joseph and Samson. Joseph is portrayed as a person who is faultless. Even though no one except Jesus ever lived a sinless life, there are no sins recorded in the Bible about Joseph.

Not so with Samson! Samson had a personality that was out of control. He wouldn’t take advice from people who knew more about life; he had a hot temper that got him into trouble with the Philistines more than once; he was attracted to women because of their physical beauty rather than because of their righteousness; he ended up in unmarried and unholy relationships with Philistine women because of his desire; and finally he was so weak that he couldn’t keep a secret from these women even when he knew he should keep his mouth shut.

How could God ever use a person who was so influenced by the lusts of the flesh and emotional extremes? The Bible doesn’t cover up any of these faults in Samson, and yet it tells us that God was behind many of the decisions that Samson made. God wanted Samson to infiltrate the Philistines, and He evidently used Samson’s weaknesses for women to accomplish His ends.

**Discuss - Think about Samson’s personality characteristics? Was he patient? Was he kind? What were his weaknesses? His strengths? His commendable traits? List two of each. Why does God choose to work through us despite our sins?**

Some times we all make mistakes, and some times they are such big mistakes in our own eyes that we think we have disqualified ourselves for future service for God. Imagine, if you will, that Samson came to your church or to a mission board and asked to become part of the ministry staff. I can hear the objections now—

"You married a non-Christian?" "You've been divorced?" "You killed several of your enemies in a fit of anger?" "You have used the services of prostitutes?" "You are presently living with a non-Christian woman without being married?" We all know that Samson would not get very far, and I think we're right to say that someone with his record shouldn't be given a position of leadership and service in the Church.

This book is a wonderful example of how Almighty God can work a divine plan, using even the most tarnished of characters.

# **Who's The Tribal Leader?**

## **Week 9 – A Lawless Time**

Over the past eight weeks we have studied some incredible men and women. People who were local and national heroes. People who rose up out of no-where to save Israel from their enemies. We have studied stories that show victory, celebration, heartache, comedy and strength. However, we have seen the same pattern time and time again. This was the pattern of Israel doing evil in the sight of God, which resulted in the enemies of Israel defeating the children of God. When they repented God used an unlikely individual to bring deliverance to his people.

### **The Ultimate Problem – Judges 17:6, 18:1, 19:1 & 21:25**

The last five chapters of the book of Judges illustrate what the problem was in the land of Israel during this time. Four times we see the statement, 'In those days there was no King in Israel, everyone did what was right in his own eyes'.

If we go back to our introduction into the book of Judges we can see that God told them not to appoint a King because he was their King. However, a King is only effective if the people follow him. For Israel they made a choice not to follow God as their King. This meant a whole lot of problems.

At the end of this book we see a story emerge out of this 'everyone do their own thing' culture that results in children stealing from their parents, self made priests, the making of idol worship, priests not following the call of God but who pays the best. We see women seducing men and men giving in to their seduction; we see rape, sodomy, death, civil war, heartache, mourning, jealousy and a nation in turmoil all because it did not have a leader.

**Discuss – Why is it so important to have a good leader? At what point do you believe the children of Israel rejected God as their King?**

### **The Man and his Concubine – Judges 19**

There is a story in Judges 19 that show us the state of the people in this nation at this time in their history. This is a story of a man from the tribe of Levi (a Levite) who lived in the hill country of Ephraim. He had met a woman from Judah who was a harlot and took her home to live with him. Now they were not married, just living together partners.

However, she never stayed faithful to this man and had 'relations' with other men. Finally she ran away back to her father's home in Judah. After four months of her being away the Levite man wanted her back. So her left his home and went to Judah to get her. When he arrived the girl's father was pleased to see

him and got him drunk, and gave his daughter back to him. The father kept tricking the guy to make him stay, until after five days he decided to leave. It was late and getting dark but still left. When they came to the village of Gibeah, which was a foreign village to him; they went into the town square to stay the night. A man who lived there also from Ephraim saw them and invited them into his house to stay the night as he begged them not to stay the night outside. Later that night men from Gibeah came to the house looking for the men in order to rape them. The owner of the house begged them not to and gave his own daughter and the Levites concubine instead. They refused the daughter but took the concubine, raped her and left her for dead. The next day when the Levite arose to find her dead, he cut her into 12 pieces and sent one piece to every tribe in Israel to show what had been done.

This was a society out of control. However, even in a society that is out of control, there are still steps that this Levite could have taken to avoid this result. The problem was that he was also swept up in the cultural as well.

**Discuss – Looking at the Levite story in Judges 19. List five errors the Levite made that ultimately resulted in the concubine’s death?**

## **Lessons We Can Learn From Judges**

The book of Judges is an example to us what can happen when God’s people turn their backs on God. Remember these people were not foreigners or the enemies of Israel. These were God’s chosen people! However, they turned away from God and acted just like everyone around them. Below is a list of lessons that we can learn from this book so that we can learn not to fall into the same crisis as these people did.

These are the lessons we can learn from Judges:

- **God is our King, Leader and Father. God must be first and nothing else**
- **When we do not put God first, we become open to attack**
- **God will use the unlikely for his purposes**
- **Those who trust in God will do the impossible**
- **If God’s people are not available he will use someone else**
- **If we do not teach our kids to trust in God, they will turn away from God**
- **Our leaders must be Godly people**
- **Even in an evil world, God still uses people to shine his light**