

....Evil Again

<<< *Judges 3:12 – 4:24*

~ Our Spiritual Safari enters a new Biblical era in this report, leaving the days of Joshua behind, and entering the period of judges in the nation Israel. We will see two unusual men and one unusual woman in this section of Scripture. Most people perceive the Bible as being largely silent on women and womanhood; but we'll see that God raised an outstanding and remarkable woman to deliver His chosen people roughly four thousand years before Christ came to this world. She was raised up for one reason and one reason only: to deliver the people of the nation Israel. Deborah assumed a position men typically occupy and performed her assignment very well. The modern-day women's rights movement could learn something regarding what it means to be a woman that the Lord can use in this section of Scripture. This is a woman in politics, by the way. Not only was she a great politician, but she was also an accomplished song writer.

As our safari pushes forward, Scripture will confirm to your heart these were all totally insignificant men and women in the overall scheme of things. All of the judges we are going to meet were outright odd characters, too; and that was the reason that caused God to use them, you may be sure. We met Othniel in our previous report, and we learned about his appointment and the reason he occupied his office as a judge. Othniel came from a good family, the fine family of Caleb – one of the best around – because we could line Caleb right up alongside Moses and Joshua. We saw the Lord call Othniel, and we saw the Spirit of the Lord come upon him. After that, Othniel judged Israel. Although Othniel had a lot going for him, he wasn't a glamorous man seeking the limelight. Nothing truly spectacular happened in the background of his life. His only claim to fame was being a member of the family of Caleb. In fact, all we are told about Othniel is family nepotism. Even so, because of him, the land had rest forty years. After that, Othniel died - and there is nothing more said about him again.

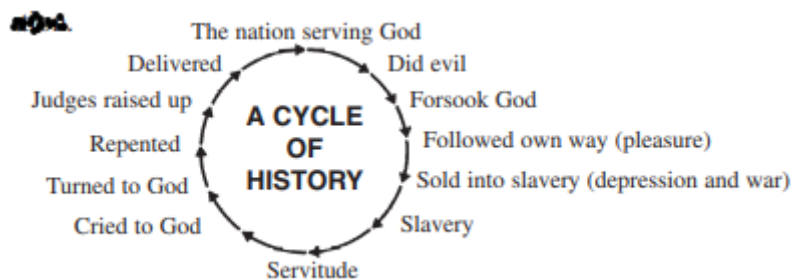
There have been several biographies written about Christian leaders of the past; and most of them have troubling difficulties. The primary challenge is to keep the first page of the book from rubbing against the last page of the

book. There's really not much to say about the most outstanding of outstanding men. Their birth and death are usually separated by a dash between dates on their tombstones. There may be a sentence or two - but - that's it. William Kerry was a cobbler; Dwight L. Moody had no formal education. Dr. G Campbell Morgan was initially turned down by the committee where he preached his first sermon. That committee actually told Morgan he could never be a preacher. Honestly, that's the simple story of all of our lives; from the president of the United States to the garbage man. Unqualified. Interestingly, God came upon the simple life of Othniel - and that made it very much a worthwhile blessing to God's people....

III

12 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD.

~ We considered the "hoop of history" in our last report, which was the first report from Judges. If you have not read that report, I highly suggest you go back and do so now. Our safari philosophy of human history rolls on again now with a new judge. Israel had been serving God – then they did evil again – they forsook God – God delivered them into the hands of their enemy – they were bound up in servitude – they cried unto the Lord – God raised a deliverer in this judge; a left-handed man this time, a regular southpaw; and that's all he had going for him – and the children of Israel are going to be delivered by him. Ehud might have made a good baseball pitcher today, but he never made it that far.



The following is an absolutely brutal story that unfolds; and because God makes no apologies, I offer no explanation for it. "Ehud" means red hair so

we have a left-handed red head; I'm sure he had quite a temper and was a force to be reckoned with. Remember, King David was a red headed man and David had a bad temper. Well, the act Ehud performs lacks any semblance of heroic magnitude, it is not romantic, and we would not find a modern-day hero with the same qualities – or inequalities – that we find in this account. His story is about a left-handed man taking a little gift to the king of Moab – and that's about it....

13 And he gathered unto him the children of Ammon and Amalek, and went and smote Israel, and possessed the city of palm trees.

14 So the children of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years.

15 But when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised them up a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man lefthanded: and by him the children of Israel sent a present unto Eglon the king of Moab.

16 But Ehud made him a dagger which had two edges, of a cubit length; and he did gird it under his raiment upon his right thigh.

17 And he brought the present unto Eglon king of Moab: and Eglon was a very fat man.

18 And when he had made an end to offer the present, he sent away the people that bare the present.

19 But he himself turned again from the quarries that were by Gilgal, and said, I have a secret errand unto thee, O king: who said, Keep silence. And all that stood by him went out from him.

20 And Ehud came unto him; and he was sitting in a summer parlour, which he had for himself alone. And Ehud said, I have a message from God unto thee. And he arose out of his seat.

~ So, Ehud doubles back from the delegation he was traveling with and tells the king he has top secret information to share. Well, this perverted

king couldn't resist that type of enticement. So, the king clears the room and Ehud acts as if this thing is so secret he needs to whisper it in the ear of the king. Eglon was enthralled that God had a message for him and he just had to know what this was all about....

21 And Ehud put forth his left hand, and took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly:

22 And the haft also went in after the blade; and the fat closed upon the blade, so that he could not draw the dagger out of his belly; and the dirt came out.

~ Well, that wasn't a pretty picture. I can almost see Eglon's surprised face and reaction as his life circles the toilet and goes on down. It was a calculated act of courage by Ehud; but I don't really see it as the heroic effort of the century. It did, however, accomplish the plan and purpose of the Lord. Eglon was stuck like a pig – because that's what Eglon was. I think most people would have attempted this assassination some other way; but not old Ehud – and I think that's exactly why God used this man at this time. Ehud didn't have all that much ability; but God gave Ehud the opportunity to rid the land of the man that was oppressing His people. Many times, God uses the same method to cut out the cancer of sin to save the body of a people. Maybe you're just left-handed; and that may be the reason God can use you. Thousands of Jewish lives were saved as a result of this assassination.

Our civilized and advanced contemporary society would likely condemn Ehud's method of operation. Many people probably think this was a terrible way to handle any situation. Well, America dropped a couple of atomic bombs in Japan several decades ago. Women and children were all killed, to be sure – and many were horribly disfigured – but the war ended that day. War isn't pretty – it's awful and terrible. God isn't concerned with that when it saves multitudes of His people. Jesus prayed to the Father, "... I pray not for the world but for those in the world whom Thou hast given Me." Friends, God isn't making any apologies for this account. If you don't care for it – that's just too bad – for YOU! Of course, as we read on, we can

understand the king's servants didn't just barge in on a king in a private meeting unless they were called....

23 Then Ehud went forth through the porch, and shut the doors of the parlour upon him, and locked them.

24 When he was gone out, his servants came; and when they saw that, behold, the doors of the parlour were locked, they said, Surely he covereth his feet in his summer chamber.

25 And they tarried till they were ashamed: and, behold, he opened not the doors of the parlour; therefore they took a key, and opened them: and, behold, their lord was fallen down dead on the earth.

26 And Ehud escaped while they tarried, and passed beyond the quarries, and escaped unto Seirath.

27 And it came to pass, when he was come, that he blew a trumpet in the mountain of Ephraim, and the children of Israel went down with him from the mount, and he before them.

28 And he said unto them, Follow after me: for the LORD hath delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand. And they went down after him, and took the fords of Jordan toward Moab, and suffered not a man to pass over.

29 And they slew of Moab at that time about ten thousand men, all lusty, and all men of valour; and there escaped not a man.

30 So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest fourscore years.

31 And after him was Shamgar the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox goad: and he also delivered Israel.

~ So, moving along again, Shamgar has zero details about his life given – only the method he used to deliver Israel is mentioned in this single verse

tributary. Can you imagine killing hundreds of men with the crudest of all available weapons – an ox goad? I think the modern-day equivalent might be a hickory stick or a baseball bat. At this time in Israel's history, old man Shamgar didn't have access to sharpened iron instruments; so, he improvised – and he knew how to use the ox goad. Once again, this isn't a pretty picture. This judge used what he had available and – one more time – the children of Israel were delivered.

In our modern day, I agree we should use the best methods we have; but, friends, what about the message? It may be nice to fly first class – but what happens when you get there? Are YOU giving out the Word of God with YOUR method? I think we need to carefully consider the spiritual message at this point in our continuing safari philosophy of history. I can communicate instantly with a person on the other side of the world – but what is my message? Does my message mean anything? Our electronic age of connectivity is nothing but a prostitute on the street corner – and I know that's not nice – but the messages that circulate are a whole lot worse. Apparently, an ox goad, placed in the right hands, can be an instrument for God. If we place what we have in His Hands He will use it. All we really have are three little men – PLUS God delivering Israel several times. That is a great encouragement to my heart at this point in my life, too, my beloved....

IV

1 And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, when Ehud was dead.

2 And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host was Sisera, which dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles.

3 And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD: for he had nine hundred chariots of iron; and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel.

4 And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time.

5 And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.

6 And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedeshnaphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the LORD God of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun?

7 And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand.

~ Now we have the account of a mother in Israel – Deborah. Instead of Deborah being the wife of Lapidoth, I think, more accurately, Lapidoth was the husband of Deborah. Apparently, it was HER palm tree that was dwelt under. Either way, here is a woman who would be the judge of God's people and deliver them. Well, as we read on, we find general Barak was nothing but a sissy. I can't find a bigger coward in all of Scripture than him. Barak should have definitely been leading the battle from Jump Street. Instead, we find him cowering down under the skirt of this woman. He isn't about to fight unless Deborah is holding his hand – what a tragedy.

I suppose it's reasonable to conclude God had no choice but to use Deborah. Deborah was, obviously, forthright and sincerely wanted deliverance for her people; so, she's going to go out there and fight, too. As we read on, the host is gathered, and they go out against the enemy; and they are given the victory. As the story unfolds, we find ANOTHER woman doing the extreme dirty work. Jael takes a tent pin and let's old man Sisera have it. That's the way the last of them were extinguished. Two outstanding women dominate this chapter....

8 And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go.

9 And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh.

10 And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and he went up with ten thousand men at his feet: and Deborah went up with him.

11 Now Heber the Kenite, which was of the children of Hobab the father in law of Moses, had severed himself from the Kenites, and pitched his tent unto the plain of Zaanaim, which is by Kedesh.

12 And they shewed Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam was gone up to mount Tabor.

13 And Sisera gathered together all his chariots, even nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people that were with him, from Harosheth of the Gentiles unto the river of Kishon.

14 And Deborah said unto Barak, Up; for this is the day in which the LORD hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the LORD gone out before thee? So Barak went down from mount Tabor, and ten thousand men after him.

15 And the LORD discomfited Sisera, and all his chariots, and all his host, with the edge of the sword before Barak; so that Sisera lighted down off his chariot, and fled away on his feet.

16 But Barak pursued after the chariots, and after the host, unto Harosheth of the Gentiles: and all the host of Sisera fell upon the edge of the sword; and there was not a man left.

17 Howbeit Sisera fled away on his feet to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite: for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite.

18 And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said unto him, Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not. And when he had turned in unto her into the tent, she covered him with a mantle.

19 And he said unto her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water to drink; for I am thirsty. And she opened a bottle of milk, and gave him drink, and covered him.

20 Again he said unto her, Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be, when any man doth come and enquire of thee, and say, Is there any man here? that thou shalt say, No.

21 Then Jael Heber's wife took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died.

22 And, behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said unto him, Come, and I will shew thee the man whom thou seekest. And when he came into her tent, behold, Sisera lay dead, and the nail was in his temples.

23 So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel.

24 And the hand of the children of Israel prospered, and prevailed against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.

~ In the next leg of our Spiritual Safari expedition through the entire Word of God we're going to sing a song. You can rejoice that I can only write to you because you don't want to hear me sing – I promise you that. One of the great songs of the Bible will explain a lot of things to us. These times of the judges is marked by sin and apostasy. Remember, every man is doing

what was right in his own eyes in the historical period we are studying. Each man had his own moral code of conduct he governed himself by. Even so, there were times of miraculous deliverance and great praise – and we'll see more of that as we move along now ~

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