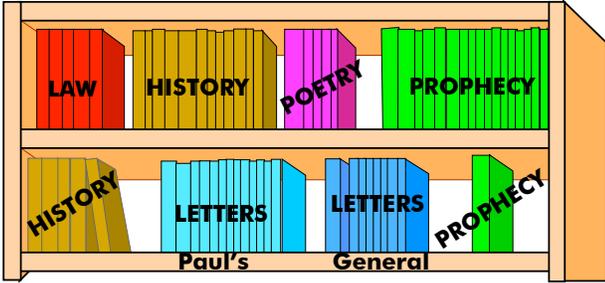


Before starting this lesson, read at least Judges 2, 3:1-4; chapters 6, 7, 13, 14, 15, 16.

If possible read the whole book. You may find it helpful to read just the minimum chapters, go thru the lesson and then read the whole book. You will discover what works best for you.

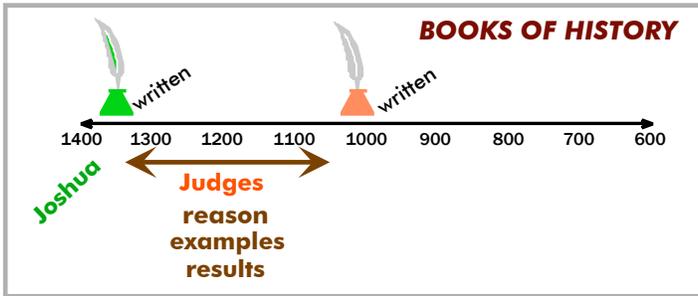
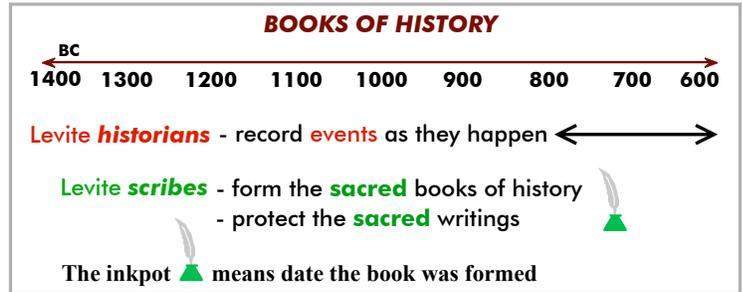
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The previous lesson explained about the *Books of History*.

From the days of Joshua and continuing thru the Old Testament, one family clan of Levites became the Jewish **historians**. They wrote events as they happened, creating historical documents. They also stored and protected all the historical records. Over the generations this Levite clan continued the ministry to which God had called them.

Another family of Levites became **scribes**. They wrote or edited, stored, protected and made copies of the Jewish sacred records, the books we call Scripture. They started out by storing and protecting the 5 books of Moses. Then over the years, as the Holy Spirit guided them, they chose parts of the historical records that were relevant and created more sacred writings.



For example, 50 years after Joshua died, scribes went thru historical documents of that period and guided by the Holy Spirit, took parts of them to create our book of **Joshua**.

Over the next 300 years - from 1325 to 1050 BC, Levite **historians** continued to write down major events in Jewish life and carefully preserved them. At the end of this time, 1050 BC, the Holy Spirit guided Levite **scribes** to go thru these historical documents.

Thinking of the past 300 years as a unit, they realized it had been a time of failure.

So first they looked for the **reason** of the failure.

Then they searched the documents for specific **examples**.

They went thru the documents a third time, looking for **results** of the failure.

Taking this information they created the Old Testament book of **Judges**.

So Levite **scribes** were the editors, putting it together around 1030 BC, during the time of King Saul. This means the book of Judges is written 300 years after the book of Joshua, with Samuel being the final editor of both.

Judges is one of the most tragic books in the Bible.

It begins with **fulfillment**.

At long last the Jewish nation is in the land God promised them.

The people are starting out with His blessings and promises.

They have unlimited potential and possibilities.

Yet the book ends with **chaos** and **failure**.

Failure is the **THEME** of the book - *300 years of failure*.

There are 3 topics which form the **OUTLINE**:

Reason for failure	1:1 - 3:6
Examples of failure	3:7 - 16:31
Result of failure	17 - 21

Each topic covers the same 300-year period.

It is written in **JEWISH STYLE** with repetition and arranged by topic, so it is **not** in chronological order.

Even the information within a topic is not in chronological order. For example...

Chapter 1 is a summary of events, **after** Joshua dies.

Chapter 2 is a separate summary that stands by itself.

It goes back to Joshua's last words of challenge and continues to the end of the 300 years. Think of chapter 2 as a unit in parenthesis.

Chapter 3 then picks up where chapter 1 left off.

The mini-summary of chapter 2 is probably inserted for teaching purposes. When the Jews needed to teach about this part of their history, in one brief chapter, they could cover from the end of Joshua's life to the beginning time of their kings.

Judges is a book about failure. God is not interested in exact dates and time for each event. He wants the bigger picture.

This means we are not sure how long the time of the Judges lasted – if it was 2 or 300 years. We know the date of King David. So we always start with his date and use the numbers in the Bible to count backwards for earlier dates. But when we get to the Judges, we do not know whether to count the time as 2 or 300 years. So as we continue backwards to the time of Joshua or Moses, there is a difference of 100 years. It is why we put Moses' date at either 1400 or 1300 BC.

For the time of the judges, I am using 300 years, which is in agreement with the majority of conservative scholars.

Judges is another book that requires explanation, so once again, most of the lesson will be background.

Let's start with the meaning of the word **judge**.

In our culture, a *judge* is a person in black robe, sitting in a courtroom, gavel in hand, listening to a case.

But Old Testament **judges are leaders who rescue the people thru warfare.**

They begin a new pattern of leadership in Jewish history.

Just before Moses died, Joshua was appointed to be the next leader. He took over immediately. But when Joshua dies, no one is appointed, because the Jews are now in the land and **God** is their leader. Judges or military leaders are only given when they are needed or asked for. They lead the people in victory over the enemy and eventually die. Then 20 or more years go by before another judge is asked for. So the judges do not automatically come one right after the other.

Their leadership is occasional.

Their leadership is also regional.

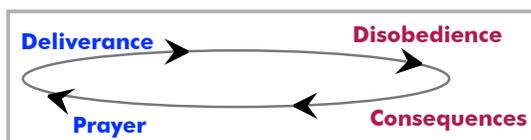
Moses and Joshua were national leaders over all of the Jews - all 12 clans or tribes. But once the people settled in the areas assigned to them, each tribe becomes self-governing much like our individual states. For 300 years, a judge is only a leader in his or her local region.

This means there can be contemporaries - more than 1 judge at a time.

For example, Samson is a judge mentioned in this book. Samuel is mentioned in a later book. While it is not obvious, Samson and Samuel are contemporaries, leaders at the same time, but in 2 different parts of the country.



It is easy to remember this book if you think of it as a series of cycles: **disobedience, consequences, prayer and deliverance.**



Judges 2 - the mini- summary chapter - describes this cycle

It begins with **disobedience**.

They forsook Yahweh, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshipped various gods of the peoples around them. They provoked Yahweh to respond because they forsook Him and served Baal and the Ashteroths. 2:12

The scribes make it very clear: the reason for failure was disobedience. Six times they use the phrase, *God's people did evil in the eyes of Yahweh*. Four times they state, *the Jews forsook Yahweh*. Twice they say, *everyone did as he saw fit* or *everyone did what was right in his own eyes*.

When God's people disobeyed His commands, God responded.

Verse 14 begins *in His anger*. God's **anger** means **God's response to disobedience**. His response is 2-fold.

Because He is holy, He must separate Himself from the unholiness.

And then He must send consequences. In other words, disobedience leads to **consequences**.

In His response to Israel's disobedience, Yahweh handed them over to raiders who plundered them. He sold them to their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist. Whenever Israel went out to fight, the hand of Yahweh was against them to defeat them, just as He had sworn to them. They were in great distress. 2:14

Notice that if you read verse 14, *in His **anger** God was against them to defeat them*, you get a picture of a god who is lashing out at His own people. It gives you a false and negative concept of God.

If you read it, *in His response to their **disobedience**, God was against them to defeat them*, you have a very different picture. God had told them that defeat would be the consequence of disobedience and now He is following thru.

As you read, I encourage you to change the phrase *God's **anger*** - to **God's response to disobedience**. This will give you a much more accurate picture of God.

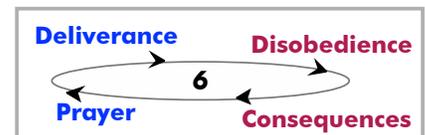
The people disobey so they can have freedom and live as they want. But the consequences bring defeat and oppression from their enemies. They have *no* freedom and *cannot* do anything they want. After 20 or more years of misery, the people finally decide they need God. They **pray** for His help. When they admit their disobedience and repent, in mercy He forgives and sends them a judge, a new leader. Thru battle, they are **freed** from the oppression and they follow God during the lifetime of that judge.

Whenever Yahweh raised up a judge for them, He was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for Yahweh had compassion on them as they groaned under those who oppressed and afflicted them. 2:18

After the Jews were delivered by one of the judges, we would like the text to say, *they followed God from that point on, so every generation enjoyed God and the blessings He gave them*. But rather than learning from the past, human nature repeats the past. After the death of that judge, the next generation repeats the cycle by going back into disobedience to do as they want.

But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their fathers, following other gods and serving and worshipping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways. 2:19

The book of Judges is a series of 6 complete cycles - disobedience that brings consequences, which eventually leads to desperation prayer, which brings deliverance thru another judge.



The **PURPOSE** of the book of Judges. God wanted this book as part of Scripture...

- ❖ To have a permanent record that explains **why** there were 300 years of failure in Israel.
- ❖ To show them and us that anytime in any period of history:
 - ...when God's people disobey, there are always consequences.
 - ...disobedience leads to foolish choices that bring chaos to their lives
 - ...but when God's people repent, in His mercy He will forgive and restore them.
- ❖ To show why the Canaanites **had** to be destroyed
 - God had given them 800 years of information and opportunity to respond. If they had wanted to follow Him and become part of the Jewish community, they would have been fully accepted and included like Rahab. But the majority of Canaanites rejected the knowledge. Because of their extreme corruption God commanded they were to be killed in battle.

After Joshua's death, the various tribes looked at the situation from a human viewpoint. They did not think they could drive out the enemy and they did not think they needed to. There was room for everyone. So 9 times in Judges, chapter one, it says, *they did not drive out the enemy*. For example, *they were unable to drive the people from the plains*. 1:19 This does not mean it was impossible with God, but rather, the *Jews* decided it was impossible. The same phrase is repeated 8 more times in chapter one.

The consequences of not driving out the Canaanites is given in 1:32

*And because of this, the people of Asher **lived among** the Canaanite inhabitants of the land*. In other words, they made treaties and agreements with them. Earlier in the chapter it said the Canaanites lived among the Jews. Now it says the Jews live among the Canaanites. It means the Jews are living **like** the Canaanites.

For the Jews this seemed more compassionate and tolerant. What could possibly be wrong with living among them?

The Jews took the Canaanite daughters in marriage and gave their own daughters to the Canaanite sons and served their gods. The Israelites did evil in the eyes of Yahweh; they forgot Yahweh their God and served the Baals and the Asherahs. 3:6-7

The names of the pagan gods are used for the first time in the book of Judges because for the first time the Jews are not only living *among* the Canaanites, but also living *like* them. God wanted us to know the extent of their failure by referring to the pagan worship of the Canaanites. All their religion centered on fertility and sex.

Baal or Ba-al, refers to the male god of fertility.

He is represented by the figure of a bull. In the Canaanite religions, he is the giver of life; he gives fertility to the womb and rain to the ground. Every town had their own Baal - their god of fertility.

Ashteroth is the *wife* of Baal. So Baal and Ashteroth are the **god** and **goddess** of fertility.

Asherah, the singular form, is the *mother* of Baal.

Asherahs - used in the plural - means *grove of trees*. This was the place where Baal was worshipped thru religious prostitution. The asherah **pole** was a sex symbol to encourage prostitution.

In our culture the words *religious* and *prostitution* do not fit together. Yet it is a part of the Jewish story thruout the Old Testament. But to understand Jewish beliefs and thinking, we first have to understand the reasoning of the Canaanites in their religion.

When the Canaanites wanted a baby, wanted a good harvest or wanted their animals to reproduce, they went to Baal and Ashteroth, the fertility gods. Their religion said until the fertility god and goddess had a sexual relationship with each other, they could not give fertility to the people. So the people went to the grove of trees to worship these 2 gods thru prostitution. There were male and female prostitutes set aside for that purpose. The people called them priests and priestesses or "holy ones". They called their action with them, *religious prostitution*. They believed their prostitution with these "holy ones" was the only way their *gods* would be encouraged to have a relationship with each other and then would give them fertility for their land, animals or family. This was the emphasis and focus of the Canaanite religion.

With this background, chapter 3:7 takes on new meaning. **The Israelites**... *served the Baals and the Asherahs*. Not just the Canaanites, but now God's people are going to the grove of trees to get fertility thru religious prostitution. They are turning to Baal as the giver of life instead of turning to Yahweh God.

God had told the Jews that when they took control of their inheritance, they were to destroy all the remaining Canaanites. He knew that to live **with** the Canaanites would be to live **like** the Canaanites. God wanted to replace the Canaanites and their practices with the Jews and their worship of Him.

Instead the Jews leave the Canaanites in the land, copy them and join them in their sins. Rather than raising the Canaanites up to the standards of Yahweh God, the Canaanites pull Israel down to their level. In fact, it becomes such a part of Jewish culture, even their judges, priests and Levites are guilty of these practices. It is this complete disobedience that brings failure and chaos to the nation of Israel for 300 years.

There are 12 leaders or judges mentioned in the book. We will look at just 2 of them, **Gideon** and then **Samson**.

In the life of **GIDEON** -

We first learn about his *preparation*.

In 6:11 God comes to him while he is busy *threshing wheat*. The verse mentions he is doing this in a wine press or wine vat, a large circular area enclosed by stone walls. He is in the wine vat, because he is hiding from the enemy. If they see him with the wheat, they will come and steal it.

But what I really want us to notice is that God calls Gideon to be a leader while he is doing the ordinary and mundane. As he is getting food for his family, God gives him direction.

I mention this because so often we think that we have to be doing something spiritual to get God's guidance – we have to be reading the Bible, praying or in church. But this is not true. God will direct and guide us as we are doing what needs to be done – as we are doing the most ordinary things.

Gideon is given preparation and guidance so he can lead God's people.

He then is *separated* from his family's idolatry.

That same night Yahweh said to him, take the second bull from your father's herd, the one 7 years old. Tear down your father's altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. Then build a proper kind of altar to Yahweh your God on the top of this bluff. Using the wood of the Asherah pole that you cut down, offer the second bull as a burnt offering. 6:25

Gideon is an adult, living at home with his parents. This means he is identified with all that his parents do. His father has an altar to Baal and an asherah pole. Your translation may refer to a wooden idol, but the word means *asherah pole*. In other words, Gideon's backyard is the place where the town comes to worship Baal and to practice religious prostitution.

Altho the altar is used by the whole town, it belongs to Gideon's father. God commands Gideon to identify himself with Yahweh God. He is to tear down his father's altar, cut down the pole, build a new altar and use the wood from the asherah pole to sacrifice his father's animal.

The next day, when the town's people complain, his father defends Gideon. He knows he is wrong and his son is right. Because his family was breaking God's laws, Gideon could not obey nor honor his parents. Unless he separated himself from them, he would have no message to give to the people.

God has called and *prepared* Gideon to be the next leader. He has *separated* Gideon from his family's idolatry.

Now God *assures* him thru the fleece.

Gideon is a farmer. He has never led an army. He has not been to boot camp nor to military training. Yet now he will be responsible for thousands of lives. Gideon needs assurance this is really God's idea and not his own emotion or personal desire. To get this assurance, Gideon uses a fleece.

He tells God, *I will put a fleece or piece of sheep's wool outside overnight. If the wool is soaking wet in the morning and all the ground around it is dry, I will know You have called me to be Israel's leader.*

In the morning he goes out and he is able to wring a bowl full of water out of the fleece and the ground is dry. But as he thinks about it, he realizes this could be explained by nature. The wool would absorb the heavy dew of the morning, but perhaps it was not enough to get the ground wet.

So Gideon asks for a 2nd sign. This time he will put out the fleece and in the morning, he wants the wool to be dry, but the ground to be soaked. God answers his prayer.

The Bible never says Gideon was wrong to do this. It never says that he lacked faith. He needed evidence that God had called him to this ministry. In fact the New Testament in Hebrews 11, says Gideon was a hero of faith.

Gideon is prepared. Now the army needs to be prepared.

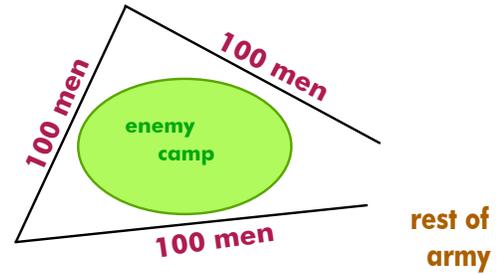
There are 32,000 in the army and God says, *Gideon, that is too many. When they win the battle, they will think it is **their** effort that produced the victory.* To reduce the number, Gideon tells the army that any soldier who is fearful can return home. Two thirds leave and Gideon now has 10,000 men.

God tells him, *Gideon, you still have too many. Take them down to the river and have everyone get a drink of water. Put all of those who kneel down and stick their face in the water to one side. Those that kneel and scoop up the water to their mouth with their hand, put in a separate group.*

God then says He wants to use those that scooped up the water with their hand. Altho we are not given the reason, I think God chooses them because they are more cautious and watchful. They remain on guard even while getting a drink. There are only 300 of these cautious, careful soldiers.

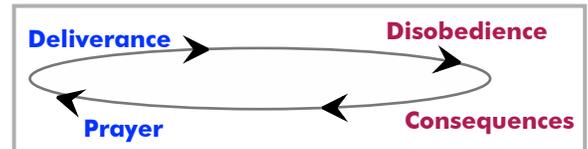
Gideon had agreed to this ministry. He assumed that when he obeyed, things would be easier. Instead, they are becoming more difficult. But the moment he has a doubt or question, he can immediately look back and say, *I know God has called me to do this. I have the evidence of the fleece.* That fleece was an important and necessary part of his preparation.

These 300 soldiers are divided into 3 groups. They are to take a trumpet and a lighted torch and then cover the torch with an empty pottery jar that has the bottom knocked out of it. When it is time for the light of the torch to be seen, the soldiers will swing their arm downward and the pottery jar will fly off and go crashing to the ground, breaking in pieces. That night each group of 100 is to go to a side of the enemy's camp, forming a triangle around it. They are to leave one passageway of escape. At a given signal they are to blow one blast on the trumpet, throw down the pottery jars against the rocky ground, lift the torch and start shouting.

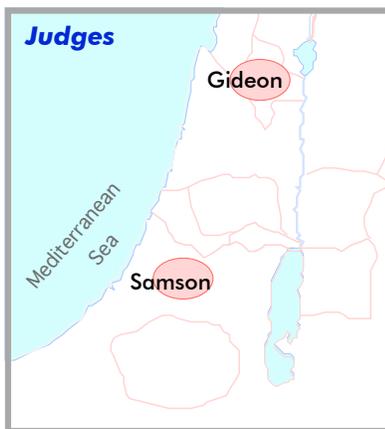


Around 10 o'clock, the 300 soldiers do exactly as they are told. When they do, the noise and the lights so panic the enemy that they start killing each other. Then they notice the lights are only on 3 sides. They can escape on the 4th side. But Gideon had put the rest of the 10,000 soldiers in position to pursue and kill those that escape.

Think about the hands of the 300 men who surrounded the camp. They had a trumpet in their right hand and a torch in the left. They did not have a free hand to hold a sword. God kept their hands occupied, so only He was doing the initial fighting. God used the regular army afterwards, but when it was over, they all knew it was God who had given them the victory.



With this, the Jews are free from the enemy. Gideon continues to live among the people and eventually dies. After his death, there are more cycles of disobedience, consequences, desperation prayer and deliverance. Some 100 years go by.



God now prepares a new leader. His name is **SAMSON**.

At his birth, he is set apart and dedicated to God. The outward signs of this dedication are:

- that he is not to drink or eat any form of the grape
- that he is not to cut his hair
- that he is not to touch any dead carcass or body.

Anyone who is dedicated to God in this way is called a **Nazirite**. It can be life-long or temporary. For Samson, it is a life-long dedication.

During his youth God gives Samson a special gift of super-human strength. He is able to kill a young lion with his bare hands; he carries away city gates.

Samson not only has strength; he also has a violent, destructive temper that is out of control. God never told or even wanted Samson to tie foxes together and put a torch

between them in order to burn the enemy's crops.

He also has a weakness for women. I think we all know the story of Samson and Delilah. She joins with the enemy to find out the secret of his strength. After much begging and false answers, Samson finally reveals his secret to her. Delilah tells the enemy and they come to hide in the house. When Samson goes to sleep, she cuts his hair and calls the enemy. They take Samson prisoner and put out his eyes. There is a reason why God allows this loss.

Even as God's spiritual leader, Samson persisted in doing what was right in his own **eyes**. When his parents corrected him on the choice of his first wife, he had answered, *She is right in MY eyes*. It was his physical eyes that consistently got him into trouble. Now near the end of his life, God allows his physical eyesight to be taken from him.

While enslaved by the enemy, Samson has time to think. Knowing how much he has disobeyed God's laws, he renews his dedication. During this time his hair begins to grow. Probably a year later, to honor their pagan god and celebrate their victory over Samson, the enemy meets in their temple. They decide to bring Samson there in order to make fun of him.

The leaders are on the first floor of the temple. All the important people of the city are in an upper balcony. It is supported by one pillar on either side as well as 2 pillars that are close together in the center.

As Samson is taken into the temple, he asks his guide to take him to the center pillars, so he can lean against them. When he gets there, he prays and asks God to once again restore his strength. God grants his request. Samson pushes the pillars outward and he dies with the enemy as the balcony collapses on him and all the leaders. He kills more in his death than he did in his entire lifetime. With the death of so many enemy leaders, Israel is once again free from their oppression.

One of the finest summaries of Samson's life was written by an early church leader, St. Ambrose, around 375 AD.

Samson, when strong and brave, strangled a lion; but he could not strangle his own love. He burst the fetters of his foes, but not the cords of his own lusts. He burned up the crops of others and lost the fruit of his own virtue when burning with the flame enkindled by a single woman.

The Canaanite culture had so permeated the society of God's people, that even Samson, chosen by God to be one of the judges, wasted most of his life. How different his life could have been if he had been willing to follow God completely.

The final chapters of Judges show the result of Israel's failure. There is **chaos**. Examples are taken from the entire 300-year period.

The very last verse in the book tells us why it happens.

In those days there was no king in Israel and everyone did as he saw fit. The actual Hebrew says, everyone did what was right in his own eyes. 21:25

God's people were unwilling to follow God and to live by His commands. So God sent judgment. He let them have what they wanted along with the result of their choices. They had political, religious and moral chaos.

God's relationship and dealings with the Jewish nation was unique. But thruout history, He has used basic principles in dealing with all nations.

When the majority within a **nation** does only what it wants and chooses leaders who give them what they want, God will send judgment. It comes in 3 stages.

- ❖ God begins by sending problems to awaken everyone's conscience - to show people they need Him. It is God's way to draw a nation back to Him. But if the majority do not listen...
- ❖ God sends the 2nd stage of judgment. He lets a nation do what it wants. Rom. 1
God steps aside and takes His hands off of society. His judgment is to let people have the result of their choices. He gives a nation what it deserves. The nation will have political, religious and moral chaos. If the majority in a nation still do not respond...
- ❖ God sends the final stage of judgment. He makes the nation insignificant and irrelevant. It continues to exist but has no purpose. God no longer uses it for good in relation to other nations.

We as a nation are in the 2nd stage of God's judgment. He is letting our country have freedom from His influence and values.

The result will be chaos in **politics** with division, corruption, brutality and betrayal.

There will be chaos in **morals** with new laws completely changing the standards of right and wrong.

There will be chaos in **religion** with faith becoming compromised, distorted and blasphemous.

This will bring suffering and misery. When the misery becomes unbearable, some people will finally turn to God in desperation prayer.

We are living in a world of chaos already. As individuals, we cannot change our government or society in general. But there is something we **can** do. We can let God change **us**. We can be committed to follow God and His ways. Paul said, *Where sin increases, grace increases all the more.* Rom. 5:20 In history, we have seen that when darkness is the greatest, God's light is all the brighter.

We are living in serious times, but always remember, God is in control. While He has taken His hands off of society, He still has His hands on individuals. He is still actively working in the lives of individuals. The important question is, Are we letting Him work in **our** life?

DEFINITIONS

Judge: a leader who delivers the people thru warfare

These judges were occasional leaders God raised up after Joshua, in order to rescue the Jews from their enemies.

They did not automatically succeed each other or rule nationally; some ruled at the same time but in different areas.

Baal was the male god of fertility; he gave fertility to the womb and rain to the ground; represented by a bull.

Asherahs were a grove of trees where Baal was worshipped thru prostitution.

Asherah pole was a sex symbol to encourage the people in prostitution.

Asherah was the goddess mother of Baal.

Ashteroth was the goddess wife of Baal; the fertility goddess.