

This chapter introduces the first three of the Judges of Israel: Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar. We are told *why* the Lord appoints these men – Israel cries out to Him in distress – but *how* does He decide whom to appoint?

Kings are determined by heredity. At the time of the judges, the Lord has not yet conceded to Israel's desire to have a king so he appoints temporary judges. But it may be significant that Othniel is a nephew of Caleb (and son-in-law but hey, Einstein married his cousin too). His name means lion of God. Othniel is of the tribe of Judah, also the first tribe to be called to battle in Judges 1:2. This may be significant in light of Jacob's prophecy in Gen. 49:9, "*The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet.*" The selection of Othniel looks forward to King David as deliverer of Israel, and then the Son of David, Savior of the world.

We like to think that today we choose leaders not by heredity, but by merit. Is this God's way? Acts 7:22 tell us that Moses was "mighty in word and deeds." But God's hand was on Moses as a newborn baby long before he had shown any ability. It does seem that God calls someone to a service, *then* gives him or her the abilities to accomplish it. There is one example of someone working their way up the ladder, as it were: Jeroboam in 1 Kings 11:28. His story does not end well.

It has been pointed out that each of these three judges has an apparent flaw as a leader: Othniel is the son of a younger brother, historically an inferior position. Ehud is left handed, viewed with suspicion in ancient times. And Shamgar has a pathetic lack of suitable weaponry. Yet they are chosen. Mr. Kelly points out that throughout the history of the church, many of the leaders who greatly advanced God's interests also demonstrated that they were earthen vessels with human weaknesses.

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong (1 Cor. 1:27).

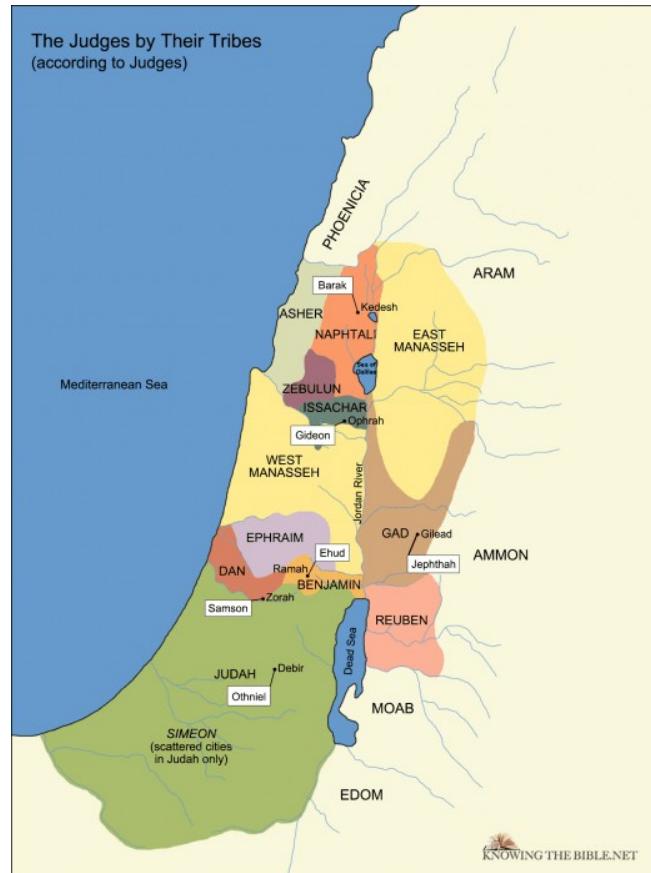
Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me (2 Cor. 12:9).

Notes:

3:7 Asherah was a female mother-goddess, often represented by a tree or pole. Not to be confused with Ashtoreth.

Questions:

1. What is the driving force behind Othniel's victories?



3:8 The name of this king means Cush or Cushite, man of double wickedness. He comes from northwest Mesopotamia or Aram, near Abram's resting place in Haran, now in Syria.

3:12 Moab is southeast of the Dead Sea. One would normally go from Moab to Israel by crossing the Jordan River. **Eglon** means "world ruler."

3:13 The City of Palms is probably Jericho.

3:19 The place where Ehud turned around could be translated *idols* or *quarry*.

3:28 By blocking the fords over the Jordan, the Israelites prevent the Moabites from retreating.

3:30 The intervals of peace like the 80 years mentioned here would add up to more years than the era of the judges lasted. We should read this a local peace while other conflicts may be occurring elsewhere in the land.

3:31 An oxgoad was a long pole with a sharp iron point at one end to spur oxen as they pulled plows or carts. **Shamgar** means *pilgrim* or *stranger*.

2. Forty years of peace follow Othniel's victory. What brings the peace to an end? How could that have been prevented?
3. How might Ehud's left handedness have helped him?
4. Does Ehud lie in verse 19?
5. Find some ways the Lord helps the human deliverers here.
6. What lessons are there for us in this portion?