

Judges

Lesson 11

We have studied three of Israel's six cycles of sin against the LORD. Three remain. Before we begin our study of the fourth cycle, let us take a moment to discover the number of years that have passed since the death of Joshua.

CYCLE ONE

Joshua died, then Israel's unknown years of the sin of worshiping Canaanite idols	?
Israel under the oppression under Cushan for eight years	8
Othniel judge of free Israel for forty years	40

CYCLE TWO

Israel's unknown years of the sin of worshiping Canaanite idols	?
Israel under the oppression of Eglon of Moab for eighteen years	18
Ehud judge of free Israel for eighty years	80

CYCLE THREE

Israel's unknown years of the sin of worshiping Canaanite idols	?
Israel under the oppression of Jabin for twenty years	20
Deborah judge of free Israel for eighty years	40

Total of oppression and freedom (not including years of sin)	206
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Why is this important? Some commentaries of the past attempt to shorten the judges' time with the excuse that some of the cycles of sin coincided in different parts of the Promised Land at the same time. With the study of these first three cycles, it seems impossible for these cycles to overlap in any way. How can we determine that?

In the first cycle, the oppressor was from Aram, northeast of the Promised Land. Yet, the judge who conquered the King of Aram was from the furthest southern portion of the Promised Land. In short, the whole Nation of Israel was involved in ridding the nation of the oppressor.

In the second cycle, the oppressor was from Moab, Ammon, and Amalek, and the base camp was at Jericho in Benjamin's territory. The judge was from Ephraim's tribe, and he was assisted by much of the nation to rid the nation of the oppressor.

In the third cycle, the oppressor was again in the far north portion of the Promised Land, yet, the judge lived in Ephraim in the central portion of the Promised Land. The story tells of all the tribes of Israel who helped rid the nation of the oppressor. It also tells us of the tribes that did not help and chastised them for not helping. This chastisement confirms that when oppressors were in the Promised Land, all the tribes were expected to help rid the nation of the oppressors.

As we will see in the fourth cycle, the tribes who were not invited to help rid the nation of the new oppressor will complain. This complaint helps to bolster the truth that these cycles of sin were nationwide, and that is the reason the LORD allowed an oppressor to control the whole nation of Israel. As such, when the entire nation cried out to the LORD, the LORD provided a judge to rescue the entire nation. In addition, the whole nation must have helped with representatives in the fight to rid the nation of the oppressor.

As we turn to the fourth cycle of sin, at least two hundred and six years have passed. We do not know how quickly the nation fell into sin after the judge's death, but at least in the second cycle where Shamgar is mentioned, it did not take long. How long did it take? It only took as long as was needed for a generation to come into view who did not experience or see the mighty works of the LORD. For that, it only took long enough for children to become young adults – less than a decade. Therefore, it seems safe to say that the people worshipped false gods for a decade or less in each cycle before the LORD allowed the oppressor to take the whole nation.

Chapter 6

4. Cycle Four – The Midianite Takeover

a) Enter Midian - Seven Years

(1) The Struggle of Israel (6:1)

With the beginning of chapter 6 in the book of Judges, cycle four – the Midianite takeover begins. Enter Midian for seven years. The story starts with the struggle of Israel. Chapter 6, verse 1. *“Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD gave them into the hands of Midian seven years.”* (6:1)

How long did Israel sin? More than likely less than a decade. What was the sin of Israel? It was the same as before. Israel had forgotten the covenant and commandments of the LORD and worshipped Canaanite gods. The sin is always the same. It is the reason the LORD wanted the Canaanites destroyed. Because of their sin, the LORD allowed the Midianites to oppress the Nation of Israel for seven years.

Who were the Midianites? Midian, the original father of the tribes of Midian, was the son of Abraham with his wife Keturah (Genesis 25:1). Before Abraham's death and bequeath of all he owned to his son Isaac, Abraham gave a gift to each of his sons and sent them away to the east to establish their own tribes and nations. Midian did so and was successful. His descendants were numerous. His land stretched from east of Esau's land, called Edom, all the way south into what we know today as Saudi Arabia. It was on the east side of the Sea of Aqaba and the Red Sea. Mount Sinai sits in the central portion of the Midianite territory.

Midian's ancestors had many sub-tribes. For instance, we have already met the Kenites, a Midianite tribe. Moses' father-in-law and wife were Midianites through the Kenite line.

Thus, these Midianites that the LORD used to oppress and test Israel were close cousins, just as were the Moabites and Ammonites of the second cycle.

(a) What Israel Did – When the Midians Prevailed (6:2)

With the struggle, the writer tells us what Israel did when the Midians prevailed. Verse 2. *“The power of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of Midian the sons of Israel made for themselves the dens which were in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds.”* (6:2)

We have yet to discover how the Midianites oppressed the Israelites, but that will come soon in the text. Our writer is preparing us for the revelation of the Midianite kind of oppression by telling us what the people of Israel did to protect themselves from the Midianites. The writer says, *“... the sons of Israel made for themselves the dens which were in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds.”* Dens, caves, and strongholds.

Dens were numerous in the Promised Land. The land is covered with limestone mountains. Limestone is a calcium carbonate that dissolves in water. When water trickled through the mountain's crevices after rains and melting snow, the calcium carbonate would melt away, forming fissures, clefts, and holes in the mountains of all sizes. These holes were called “dens” because animals would use them for temporary and permanent homes. We have all heard the term *lion's den*

or a *den of wolves*. These animals are examples of how creatures used these natural forming limestone holes as homes. Caves were the natural caverns in the mountains, not formed by dissolving limestone but by the shifting and moving of the rocks or the flow of water to remove the dirt. Strongholds were different from dens and caves. Strongholds were fortified locations. The fortification could be wood or brick walls. They could even be water around a city or village with draw bridges. The poor would find safety in the dens and caves. It would not take much to convert a den or a cave for habitation. Getting to the den or cave safely might have been the biggest problem. As for the rich, they would find their safety in the strongholds.

(b) When Israel Moved – When the Crops Plundered (6:3-5)

We now come to discover the reason Israel hid in dens, caves, and strongholds under the Midianite oppression. Here we learn of how Israel was oppressed and why Israel moved when the crops were plundered. Verse 3. *“For it was when Israel had sown, that the Midianites would come up with the Amalekites and the sons of the east and go against them. ⁴ So they would camp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel as well as no sheep, ox, or donkey. ⁵ For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, they would come in like locusts for number, both they and their camels were innumerable; and they came into the land to devastate it.”* (6:3-5)

What the writer is telling us in this passage is not a one-time experience of the Israelites. More than likely, the first year that the LORD allowed the Midianites to chastise Israel, it was a surprise. The crops were sown, and it was the time of harvest. From the east, the Midianites arrived with their allies. The yield was destroyed, and the Israelites were left to starve. The herds and flocks were stolen and driven back to the land of the Midianites and their allies. But more than that, besides stealing the livestock of the Israelites, the Midianites and their allies brought their livestock to consume the grains of Israel and carry back what was left. How many came? *“... they came like locust for number....”* All over Israel, at harvest time, the tents of the Midianites and their allies would cover the country. Soon we will learn that the Midianites will cross the Jordan River and camp first in the valley of Jezreel before moving across the Promised Land to plunder. They and *“their camels were innumerable.”* Israel could do nothing about it.

That was the case for Israel every year for seven years. No doubt the first year was a surprise for all of Israel. Perhaps the second year was a disappointment, and the Israelites were not expecting the Midianites and their allies to return, but they did. Nevertheless, some of the Israelites may have been worried that second year and took to the dens, caves, and strongholds for safety, hiding there their family, livestock, and grain harvests. By the third year and thereafter, all of Israel ran to the hills to hide all they could in the dens, caves, and strongholds.

Who were the allies of Midian? The writer tells of the Amalekites. As we have stated in previous lessons, the Amalekites are the constant enemy of Israel. They attacked Israel at Rephidim just before the nation arrived at Mount Sinai. They attacked Israel while they were camped at Kadesh-barnea after the twelve spies had returned. They attacked Israel with the king of Moab in cycle two. They are here again and will continue to be enemies of Israel for many years to come.

The writer tells us that the Midianites were accompanied by the *“sons of the east.”* If you will remember, the father of the Midianites was Midian, the son of Abraham, who, before his death, gave Midian and his brothers a gift and sent them to the east to live (Genesis 25:1-6). The Midianites were sons of the east, and so were the descendants of Midian’s brothers. In addition, the descendants of Ishmael were also considered the sons of the east because when Abraham sent Ishmael and his mother Hagar away, they traveled to the east to establish his tribe. Furthermore, when Abraham sought a wife for Isaac, he sent his servant to the east to find Rebekah. With all of that in mind, it seems that any group of people living east of the Jordan River, east of the Promise Land area on the east side of the Jordan River, would be considered *“sons of the east.”* That would

include all the people who lived from the Euphrates River in the north to the Midianites in the South, all Arabs of some sort and lineage.

Before moving on from this passage, we must address the extent of the plunder of the Midianites and their allies. The writer says they plundered *“as far as Gaza.”* Consider this. If the Midianites and their allies approached Israel from their homeland in the southeast, crossed the Edomite land, and plundered the fields and livestock all the way to Gaza, the path from Midian to Gaza was not that far. It did not affect the majority of the Promised Land. It would only affect the tribes of Judah and Simeon. But that was not the path of the Midianites. In this chapter, in verse 33, we will learn that the Midianites and their allies entered the Promised Land and camped in the Valley of Jezreel. That point of fact changes everything. The allies of Midian entered the Promised Land in the central portion of the land. From there, Midian and his allies marched north and south and did not stop until they had reached the shores of the Mediterranean near Gaza. Past Gaza was the sandy shores not fit for crops as such.

(c) When Israel Cried – When the Hopes Plummeted (6:6)

At the end of the seven years, we hear about when Israel cried and when the hopes had plummeted. Verse 6. *“So Israel was brought very low because of Midian, and the sons of Israel cried to the LORD.”* (6:6)

That was all they needed to do. It is all you need to do when hopes seem gone. Cry to the LORD. He will hear.