



NEWSCAST 7. JUDGES

The period of the Judges is characterized by the emergence of popular leaders who arose in times of crisis. For much of the two centuries between Joshua's death and the reign of King Saul, Israel was repeatedly subject to foreign domination. One judge, Ehud, ended Moabite occupation by assassinating their king; Deborah was victorious over the Northern Canaanites at Mount Tabor and Gideon defeated Midian.

But these were not the only Judges. One of the most tragic stories in the Book of Judges relates how a leader called Jephthah made an oath before God that if he defeated the Ammonites he would sacrifice the first person he encountered on returning home. The Ammonites were duly defeated and Jephthah came home in triumph. But Israel's victory cost Jephthah his daughter – who was the first to greet him and was sacrificed according to his oath.

Of course, the most persistent threat to Israel's stability was the Philistines, now well entrenched along the Mediterranean coast. The Book of Judges presents the case that Israel's weaknesses were the result of the people's failure to faithfully adhere to the Law of Moses. The temptations were great. The Canaanite religion offered the attractions of fertility cults, sacred prostitution, idol worship and a generally low standard of morality – which was anathema to Israel's religious sensibilities.

Moreover, the Judges epoch seems to have been one in which tribal allegiance was more important than national identity. The Judges were regional rulers without national aspirations and

religion was the only common factor in the loose confederation of twelve tribes. Israel was not yet ready for a king.

Biblical references: Judges, Chapters 3 – 12

